Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why Christians Submit to the Government
Scripture: Romans 13:2-5
Code: 80-364

Romans 13 is the text that we are looking at under this heading of the Christian and government. We'll get to the tax part a little later. We're starting in the first verse and working our way through this really important text. Romans chapter 13.

The opening statement of verse 1 is what we considered last time. It took us the whole time to just kind of get that in place. Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. That is an unqualified statement. It doesn't qualify who those governing authorities are and it doesn't qualify what subjection might mean. Therefore we can conclude that we have an unqualified, unmitigated command to be subjected to the governing authorities, whatever they are.

This is from the Apostle Paul and Peter, you remember, gave us similar instruction, 1 Peter 2:12, "Keep your behavior honest, or excellent among the Gentiles so that in the things in which they slander you as evildoers they may because of your good deeds as they observe them glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silent the ignorance of foolish men."

So both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter make it clear that our responsibility is to submit to the governing authorities. We looked into that rather carefully last time.

Now Paul then begins in verse 1 to give us seven reasons why we are to do this, or seven motivations. That's just the way I've kind of broken them down so we can take them in segments. This is a very compelling argument. It would be enough for the Lord to say, "Do this,' without an explanation. But in giving us an explanation, He defines the responsibilities, the God-given responsibilities of government. They are clearly given here. Government, as we know it, has far exceeded the divine mandate for its function, not only in our society but in societies around the world and throughout history. But here are the things that government is ordained by God to do, and we see that that lies behind our responsibility to submit ourselves to the governing powers.

Now first of all, Paul says government is by divine decree...government is by divine decree. Go back to verse 1, "There is no authority except from God, there is no authority except from God." And those which exist, those authorities, plural, wherever they are and whatever they are established by God.

Civil authority, governmental authority comes directly from God. There are two other institutions that God has placed into society for the well-being of society, one is marriage and the other is the church. God ordained societal units, societal elements that are for the well-being of man...the government, the church and marriage.

A healthy marriage stems evil, a healthy church stems evil, a healthy government does the very same thing. There is no authority except from God. No civil government exists apart from God having instituted it. Psalm 62:11 says, “Power belongs to God and the power to establish governments belongs to God.” Acts 17 tells us that the nations’ times are determined by God. He determines the beginning and the ending of nations.

In Daniel chapter 4 and verse 17, a familiar setting. "The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, He bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men." Government and the men who wield the power in it are chosen by God. The gift of having governmental power and governmental authority is a divine gift. We can conclude that no tyrant ever seized power without God allowing him to take power. Government as an institution is ordained by God, but individual governments are not operating apart from the sovereign purpose of God. There is really no maverick government that runs amuck against the purpose of God. No matter what the theory of government is, no matter what the form of government, there is no government apart from the purpose of God.

And I might hasten to add. The Bible doesn’t give us a theory of government. The Bible doesn’t uphold divine right monarchy such as ruled in Europe for centuries. Nor does the Bible uphold democracy. You can’t find a democratic social civil structure in the Bible. You will not find a republic in the Bible, nor will you find authorization from God for any kind of monarchy.

How ever rulers come to power, whether by dynastic descent inherited, aristocratic family connection, whether it’s by plutocratic material resources, or whether it’s by military might, or whether it’s by democratic election, there is no governing power outside the purpose of God. No authority except from God. He has given authority to the authorities that exist.

What about the cruel ones? What about the unjust ones? Well, first of all, cruel abuses in government are no reflection on God’s nature, any more than cruel abuses in marriage or the defection of people in the church taints God’s purity. Divorce rips marriage to shreds and apostasy tears the church apart and abuses in government destroy the good that government can do. But abuses do not, in any sense, diminish the truth that these institutions are ordained by God. Men abuse all of God’s gifts...all of them. And wicked rulers are, interestingly enough, part of God’s plan to accomplish His purpose. Wicked rulers are part of God’s plan to punish wicked nations and to allow evil to run its course toward destruction.

But in the beginning, God ordained government to protect and preserve man for the protection of life and property, for the repression of evil and crime, and for the rewarding of virtue and good. That's the God-ordained designed. The powers that be are ordained of God. They are not ordained by opinions of the governed, the will of the majority, or the will of one man. They're ordained by God.

An interesting look at that in another context would be Revelation chapter 13 because I know what you're thinking in your mind. Why would God ordain wicked governments? This is a picture of the coming Tribulation, the dragon...Satan stands on the sand of the seashore, picturing Satan's influence on the world, a beast comes up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads. And on his horns were ten diadems and on his heads were blasphemous names. This is a picture of Antichrist. He's like a leopard and a bear and a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority, I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain and his fatal wound was healed and the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast, the Antichrist. They worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast. They worshiped the beast saying, "Who is like the beast and who is able to wage war with him?" The world in the time of the Tribulation in the future will worship both the Antichrist and Satan behind him.

Then this in verse 5, "There was given him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies and authority to act for 42 months was given to him." By whom? By whom? By God...by God. "And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle," that is those who dwell in heaven. "And it was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him,."

Does that sound strange to you? Why would God give authority to Satan to do that? Why would God give authority to the Antichrist to do that, to wreak havoc horror and evil in the world? Because it suited His purpose? It was part...it will be part of divine judgment..divine judgment.

According to the book of Daniel, demons are imbedded in governments. Demons are imbedded in governments. Yet this principle still stands. Government in any form is appointed by God.

So here then is reason number one, for submission to the government. It is for the time and the place and the purpose of God what He has ordained. If you were an Israelite living in Egypt and you had suffered like a slave under Pharaoh, you might wonder if God had forgotten you and somehow Pharaoh had slipped into power outside of God's purpose. But that would not be consistent with Exodus. "For this reason I have allowed you to remain in Egypt under this series of plagues and under this mistreatment, to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth." God has His purposes, even in the most wicked forms of government.

You can't second guess that. I'll give you a practical illustration. It seems as though the administration of the United States government is having a very difficult time making a statement about what is

going on in Egypt. They're afraid to say anything. They're afraid to say anything negative Mubarak because they've been giving him billions of dollars and because he is an ally in the Middle East for the United States and we need such an ally. They're afraid to say anything against the people who are riding in the streets because they're afraid of the populace' repercussions and they know that there have been abuses at the hands of this dictator.

What should they say? It ought to come out immediately and it ought to come out crystal-clear...this is criminal behavior...regardless of what that government is, any government is far better than murder in the streets, any government is far better than an anarchy. If biblical thinking was in the mind of the leaders of this nation, they would rise up and say, "This is criminal behavior. This is punishable behavior." They have no right to take to the streets and commit crimes no matter what their civil, political, social goals are. And the government has every right to repress them with force to the degree that they shut down the rebellion. That's a practical illustration of the principle, isn't it? But nobody is asking me...or God.

First of all, government is by divine decree. That's why we submit to it. Secondly, resistance to government is rebellion against God. Resistance to government is rebellion against God. Verse 2, "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, the *diatage*, the institution, the establishment of God...what has been laid down by God. Whoever resists the government is rebelling against God.

Robert Haldane, a wonderful commentator, writing back in 1839 said, "The people of God then should consider resistance to the government under which they live as a very awful crime, even as resistance to God Himself."

You say, "Well I don't like what's going on in our country."

Guess what...neither does God and He will determine the form of government that suits His purposes for a country that has turned its back on Him. Whoever resists authority...the word "resist" here is *antitasso*. It means, *tasso* has the idea of lining up. It means to line up against, to permanently line up against God. You've arranged yourself with the opposition. Exodus 22:28 says, "Do not curse a ruler." And Paul said to Timothy, "Pray for all those who are your authorities, pray for their salvation."

It really wasn't consequential whether the Roman Emperor was elected by the people, appointed by the senate, or placed there by a military coup. It was not consequential whether the ascertain of an imperial authority by Caesar was just or unjust. It really wasn't essential whether the Caesar was a homosexual, a pedophile, a mother murderer, or a good man. The law is the same. There is no place for rebellion and resistance because to do so is to resist God.

You can see an illustration of it, just watch it play out. It will play out in Egypt the way it played out in Iran. And what comes will be far worse than what they have. Neither Paul nor Daniel, nor Christ ever wavered in respect to the government, no matter what. God operates His will and His purpose through the governments that exist. The President, the governor, the police who are the ones who yield the sword, they have a delegated authority from God to do what they do for the good of society.

Do you remember the horror of David at the thought of doing harm to Saul? The Old Testament, by the way, prescribed the death penalty for disobedient children. That shows how important the principle of submission is to authority. And by the way, delinquent children who aren't taught to obey their parents will never obey the government, and that itself will destroy society.

So the government is divinely decreed and to resist it is to resist God. Let me add another point. Those who do resist will be punished...those who do resist will be punished. That's playing out right now as well. I don't know how many people have been wounded and killed in the insurrection in Egypt but it is inevitable...it is inevitable.

Go back to verse 2, "They who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves, or judgment." The consequence of rebellion is judgment. The word there, *krima*, is used in 1 Corinthians 11:29 to refer to the judgment of God. But here it really has...it really has the idea of punishment from the people in power. You cannot do this without being punished. Government has the power to punish, it is given by God. You can go through the Old Testament, through the book of Exodus, through the book of Deuteronomy, through the book of Numbers, see all of this. The Law called eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, *lex talionus*, equal punishment for the crime.

Punishment had some purposes. Number one, it declared what was right. In other words, it had a justice factor. Two, punishment was to be swift and immediate because it would act as a deterrent. Three, punishment was to hold a threat that restrained evil. Four, punishment was seen as a means of rehabilitation. And five, punishment by the government was to prevent private vengeance.

By the way, there were no prisons in Old Testament Judaism. And even in the New Testament, the Jews operated no prisons. The Gentiles had prisons, as we know. Paul was in a lot of them. The Jews operated no prisons. They were a part of the Roman social order because the prison didn't exist in the Old Testament. Oh a makeshift sort of holding place is spoken of in the thirty-seventh chapter of Jeremiah verses 15 & 16, but it was a temporary place to hold someone in a cistern.

Prisons in early America, even the Puritans had another form of punishment, physical punishment followed by restitution for the crime through labor for lesser offenses and banishment and even execution for the more severe ones. They had some places that we would call jails but they were only for temporarily holding the offender until he could be corporeally punished, until he could do labor to bring restitution which was a way he could gain back his dignity...or in severe cases, he was either

banished or executed.

It was the Quakers who changed all of that. It was the Quakers who introduced prisons in Pennsylvania. And the first prison in America was the Walnut Street Jail, and by 1790 the law established imprisonment. They called them penitentiaries because they thought if you locked them up there, they would become penitent.

Today we've learned it doesn't work, a really bad idea. We have the most prisoners in the world and the highest crime rate. Prisons are effective in creating more crime, more immorality. As one writer says, "The American prison system is unbiblical, inhumane, ineffective, inefficient and idiotic.

The last statistic I heard is that we punish about 25 out of every 500 people who commit a crime. And in prisons, there's no way to restitution. In the Old Testament, Exodus 21 and 22, a thief could work to give back what he had stolen. Deuteronomy 25, someone who committed a crime would receive 40 lashes and he would go from there. That's just a footnote. God ordains government to punish, but also to provide a path of restitution.

There is a right for the government to punish. When human authority punishes violators of law, God approves of that punishment, for God Himself will additionally deal with a violator. The instruments then of punishment are human, human authorities, but the source of punishment is divine.

When you see this breakdown, evil goes unpunished, criminals get away with things, when there's no path to restitution and a recovery of dignity, add that to marriages collapsing and the church going apostate, all God's institutes being violated, violently violated, it spells really the end of a society. And you're watching it. Politicizing won't change that, only the gospel can change people and changed people can change a society.

Government is from God. To rebel is to resist God. To resist God brings punishment. Let me give you a fourth motivation behind our submission, government serves to restrain evil...government serves to restrain evil. Government serves to restrain evil. Verse 3, following his argument, "Rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior but for evil." This connects closely with the last verse, obviously, "Rulers are not a cause of terror," *phobos* from which we get phobia. They're not to terrify us. They don't cause terror for good behavior, but for evil. Government serves to restrain evil. And government is not a cause for those who behave well to fear, but only to the evil.

Rulers...key word there...*archontes*, we have nothing to fear from our rulers if we keep the law.

You say, "Well, is the law that universal that everybody knows what is good and what is evil?" Yes. Yes, but not everybody believes the Bible, not everybody has the Bible? Yes, but according to Romans 2:14 and 15, "They have the law of God written...where?...in their hearts and a conscience

that either accuses or excuses them." It is human to have a basic sense of morality...it is human. And it shows up in the universal laws all across the planet. Everyone, even non-believers, of course, understand basic morality by natural revelation, reason, common grace. Rulers everywhere enforce a basic morality that is God-ordained, which society everywhere comprehends as right. If a person obeys those laws in his country, does what is good, he has absolutely no reason to fear. People who riot, people who terrorize society, would do what these people in Egypt are doing, they have every reason to be afraid. If you disobey the law, if you take the law into your own hands, you ought to be afraid because what makes the power to restrain evil work is swift punishment ...swift punishment.

The Old Testament tells us how that punishment is to come. According to Deuteronomy 19, a section from verse 13 to 20, it is to be without pity...it is to be without pity. According to Deuteronomy 13 verses 6 to 11, it is to be without partiality. And according to Deuteronomy 25 verse 2, it is to be immediate...without pity, without partiality, and without waiting. That kind of punishment will deter crime. That kind of punishment will put fear in the hearts of evil doers, not the kind of punishment that comes three years later, four years later, ten years later, fifteen years later, or never. But if you obey the law, you have nothing to fear.

So what does a Christian do in a society like ours? We obey, we submit and we have nothing to fear from the authorities.

By the way, the man who wrote this had been treated badly by the authorities. He had been unjustly jailed. He had been unjustly beaten. He had been unjustly whipped, he had been treated very badly. But the principle still stands. And when persecution comes, we don't retaliate with arms, we don't retaliate with criminal conduct. Peter says, "You commit your soul to a faithful creator and you accept what comes." There will be persecuting governments. Ours is not there this time, but even when it comes, we don't take up arms against the government.

Number five in this little list of motivations for submission to government, and there's a lot that I'm skipping as I kind of edit as I go, but this is enough to give you the picture. Government serves...let's take the positive side. We said it is for the purpose of restraining evil, but here's a positive one, government serves to promote good. Go back to verse 3. Do you want to have no fear of authority? "Do what is good and you will have praise from the same, for it is a minister of God to you for good."

You want to be unafraid? Do what's right. Do good. This again is what is in the heart of the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2, "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men for kings and all who are in authority that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."

The government's role is to restrain evil. That's its primary role. That's the biblically-given, mandated role of government, to restrain evil. But there's a positive as well. Do what is good, *agathon*,

intrinsically good, and you'll have praise of the same. That's what Peter said when I read it earlier, 1 Peter 2:14. You'll silence the critics when you do what is right.

You know, I'm afraid that quote/unquote "evangelical Christianity" lives on the edge of forfeiting that witness. Oh we haven't started a revolution yet in the streets, but there is coming from evangelical Christians, and there has been for a long time, an endless abusive harangue at the government...at the President...at the Congress, the Senate, at leaders of state and even local leaders. They provide for us protection. They provide for us safety when we do well. And our responsibility, no matter what the nature of the government, is to live a quiet and peaceful life which will gain for us, Paul says, a good reputation and Peter says it will silence the mouths of those who criticize us.

So when we don't live a quiet, tranquil, peaceful life with a submissive attitude toward those over us, and pray for their salvation, we forfeit that testimony. We forfeit that testimony. The worst possible thing that could happen to believing Christians is for the government authorities is to perceive them as their enemies.

Let me tell you something. The people who are leading our government are not the enemy, they are the mission field. What would you do with that mission field? The last thing you want to do is to turn them against you. In fact, this will shake you up, the people in authority are identified in verse 4 as a minister of God. A minister of God? That's exactly right because they function within a divine institution...government. They may not know God but they function in a delegated way for God to provide a common grace of well-being and civil tranquility.

I'll tell you one thing. That shows you how far the Muslim world is from God. They have an agenda, and that is to terrorize the entire world, to disrupt and destroy. We know where that comes from, that's Satan's agenda.

So we do all we can to keep peace, to support the government, to be model citizens, to do good. Again, Robert Huldane, "The institution of civil government is a dispensation of mercy and its existence is so indispensable that the moment it ceases under one form, it reestablishes itself in another." If you ever wanted to ask yourself how depraved man is, just look at behavior that is unrestrained. How long would it take if we had no police and no government for deadly chaos to disrupt the life of this city? That's the human heart.

Huldane says, "The world ever since the Fall when the dominion of one part of the human race over another was immediately introduced has been in such a state of corruption and depravity that without the powerful obstacle presented by civil government to the selfish and malignant passions of men, it would be better to live among the beasts of the forest than inhuman society. As soon as its restraints are removed, man shows himself in his real character." Then Haldane says, "When there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes, we see in the last three chapters of

the book of Judges there were dreadful consequences."

So Paul is building his case. We submit to the government because God is the source of government. To rebel is to resist God. To resist God is to bring judgment. And government serves to restrain evil and it serves to promote good.

Two more. Number six, rulers are empowered by God to inflict severe punishment. Rulers are empowered by God to inflict severe punishment. If you do what is evil, back to verse 4, be afraid, for it...meaning government, the authority, the rulers, the institution of government... "It does not bear the sword for nothing, for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."

Listen, civil government is not just a pageant. It's not just a symbol. It's not just a verbal threat. Government has the power to take life. It must have that power. It must have the ultimate restraining power and Genesis 9 says "That whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Capital punishment, Genesis 9, for murder. Jesus said in Matthew 26:52, "If you live by the sword, you will die by the sword." And thus did he affirm capital punishment. And Paul affirmed it in Acts 25:11 when he talked about committing things worthy of death. Paul affirms what Jesus said, Jesus affirms the revelation of God way back in Genesis.

This institution of government, this ruler, this one who wields the authority of the government is the minister of God and he is avenging by bringing wrath on the one who practices evil. Capital punishment is the will of God and the executioner is the servant of God.

"As unpleasant," writes Robert Culver, "as is the task of the jailor, and the use of the whip, the cell, the noose, the guillotine, these things stand behind the stability of civilized society and they stand there necessarily for God has declared it so in harmony with reality rather than with apostate, sociological opinion." Government with its coercive powers is a social necessity but one determined by the Creator, not by the statistical tables of some university, social, research staff. And when a society loses touch with the realities of the wretchedness of man and pulls back from punishment, it contributes to its own death.

The context now of Romans 12 and 13 shows that the vengeance which is forbidden to the individual, remember the end of 12? Vengeance is forbidden to the individual, it is, however, given to the government as a minister of God.

We can thank God for the institution of government. Though the worst of it may disappoint us or even persecute us, without government we would slaughter each other. And when this is not done, this kind of punishment, there is blood guiltiness. You remember after Cain killed Abel, Scripture says in Genesis 4 that Abel's blood cried out from the ground. Many texts in the scriptures indicate that. God

required the death penalty for the preservation of life.

In Numbers 35:33, it says, “So you shall not pollute the land in which you are for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it except by the blood of him who shed it.” A nation of murderers has unrequited blood that can only be mitigated by the death of the ones who shed blood.

The implications of this in the criminal world are vast as tens of thousands of people sit on death row, even more. The implications are almost incalculable for those who have slaughtered unborn infants. Nothing shows more clearly the moral bankruptcy of our society than the breakdown in concern for the sanctity of life and for the swiftness of the death penalty on those who take a life.

And by the way, isn’t it odd that the people who are against the death penalty are the same ones who promote abortion and want to save the whales and the lab rats? Passivism will receive no encouragement from the New Testament. Harlots are commanded to go and sin no more but soldiers are not asked to resign from the army when they come to Christ...neither are policemen.

There’s a final...seventh...reason that we submit to the government, verse 5, “Therefore it’s necessary to be in subjection..." for all the reasons I’ve just given you and let’s add one more, "...not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake.”

You know, at the end of the day the reason you do right is because God tells you to do right, but the benefit of doing right is a clear...what?...conscience.

I was driving in a neighborhood today with Patricia, we went to visit a lady who is dying, after church this morning. And we couldn’t find the house. And there was a policeman sitting there in his car on this little side street. We drove past him, turned around, drove past him again. We actually turned around and drove past him and I saw him...was I terrified? No. I would have been happy to talk to him and shake his hand and thank him for what he does. I’ve nothing to fear.

You know, you can live joyfully that way, can’t you? That’s part of the peace that comes to an obedient believer.

Well, do you get the picture? I’ve got one more thing to say to you but I’m going to give you a couple of weeks while I’m gone and then I’m going to come back and tell you why you have to pay your taxes, cause that’s verses 6 and 7.

Lord, thank You for the day You’ve given us, always we thank You. We can’t stop thanking You. Thank You for the richness and the wonder of Your Word which always takes us places we were never suspecting and opens up to us in ways we have never thought of before. It’s just sanctified fun

to do this. It’s just a blessing upon blessing. There’s nothing as important as this, as wondrous as this, the discovery of Your truth bursting upon our understanding and captivating our hearts and our consciences. We want to be the kind of citizens that bring honor to Christ. We trust You. What’s happening is in Your perfect, sovereign plan and we want to live the way the Scripture calls us to live. At the same time, we want to confront evil in the culture. We want to use our freedoms to promote the gospel. We want to do everything we can because we live in a democracy, to bring about the best conditions that our people in this society may enjoy, the best of common grace, the goodness of life.

But mostly, we want to live for the gospel, whatever conditions and certainly there are many, many people in many places in the world who have it so much worse than we do and live triumphantly in Christ and joyfully under persecution. May we be obedient and silence the critics by our peaceful, tranquil and submissive lives. Thank You for giving us that opportunity to open the door to the gospel. Thank You for our time today together, it has enriched us more than we could ever express. You are constantly good to us and that goodness pours out through Your Word and through the joys of fellowship. Bless now even our fellowship together in Christ’s name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).