



Romans 13:1-7

(1) Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. (2) Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. (3) For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. (4) For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. (5) Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. (6) This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. (7) Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

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Once we understand God's sovereignty over the nations, it is not difficult to understand where Paul bases his instructions in these verses. Thus we can understand why Moses so quickly and surely considers the actions of Korah and his group as rebellion against [God](#) rather than merely against himself (Numbers 16). When Israel rejects Samuel as judge over them because they want a king, God reveals to the prophet that the people are really rejecting the rule of God Himself ([1 Samuel 8:7](#)). It does not matter whether a Christian considers his nation's government to be unlawful. What matters is whether God permits it. If He permits it, this One, who is aware of even sparrows falling, has allowed it or has directly brought it to pass because of the purpose He is working out. That is all that matters. God is ruling His creation, and this is what we are here to learn and trust.

Jesus lived His entire life under an unlawful civil government. The Roman government ruled over Judea as a result of military conquest. Moreover, at times even the

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ecclesiastical government was not in the proper hands because corrupt Roman officials discovered that just-as-corrupt Jews were willing to pay bribes to "buy" the high priesthood. But the Scriptures repeatedly show Jesus subject to them, though He called both, especially the ecclesiastical one, into account. [Matthew 17:24-27](#) is a clear example:

When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" Peter said to Him, "From strangers." Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

The Temple tax was one-half shekel per year for every Jew over 20. Since [Jesus Christ](#) was Lord and Owner of the Temple, He and His "children" should have been free of taxation. Jesus orders Peter to pay it anyway for both of them to avoid a bitter and offensive debate on the merits of His claim. By doing this, Jesus sets the right example looking by [faith](#) beyond a legal technicality to the True Ruler, the Father. God likely brought this episode to pass for our instruction.

Perhaps a brief statement of Solomonic wisdom will summarize Christian understanding of God's sovereignty over the governments of men: "There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the LORD. The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD" ([Proverbs 21:30-31](#)). His meaning becomes clearer in other translations. *The Living Bible* renders it, "No one, regardless of how shrewd or well-advised he is, can stand against the Lord. Go ahead and prepare for the conflict, but victory comes from God." *The Revised English Bible* translates it as, "Face to face with the Lord, wisdom, understanding, counsel avail nothing. A horse may be made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord."

It may seem a remote possibility, even strange, that we would fight against the Lord, yet because human nature remains in us, we do. The apostle Paul complains in [Romans 7:14-23](#) that what he did not want to do he did anyway because a law of enmity against God worked within him. [Proverbs 21:30-31](#) tells us that human wisdom, insight, and counsel must be in conformity with God's will to be successful. God's children must understand His sovereignty over everything and conduct their lives knowing that nothing

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avails against God and nothing without Him.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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