



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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Though all of us should understand obedience to the laws of man, it is good from time to time to ask, "Should we obey the governments of man over us?" Should we obey it if we consider it an "illegal" government?

The apostle Paul had to address this subject two thousand years ago in Romans 13. Albert Barnes in his *Barnes' Notes* suggests what prompted Paul to write this to the Roman church:

In the seven first verses of this chapter, the apostle discusses the subject of the duty which Christians owe to civil government. . . . There is no doubt that he had express reference to the peculiar situation of the Christians at Rome; but the subject was of so much importance that he gives it a *general* bearing, and states the great principles on which all Christians are to act. The circumstances which made this discussion proper and important were the

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following: (1.) The Christian religion was designed to extend throughout [the world](#). . . . Christians professed supreme allegiance to the Lord [Jesus Christ](#); he was their lawgiver, their sovereign, their judge. It became, therefore, a question of great importance and difficulty, *what kind* of allegiance they were to render to earthly magistrates. (2.) The kingdoms of the world were then *pagan* kingdoms. The laws were made by pagans, and were adapted to the prevalence of heathenism. Those kingdoms had been generally founded in conquest, blood, and oppression. Many of the monarchs were bloodstained warriors; were unprincipled men; and were polluted in private, and oppressive in their public character. Whether Christians were to acknowledge the laws of such kingdoms and of such men, was a serious question. . . . Soon the hands of these magistrates were to be raised against Christians in the fiery scenes of [persecution](#); and the duty and extent of submission to them became a matter of very serious inquiry. ("Romans," p. 284.)

The phrase "let every soul be subject" is a military term implying subordination. It is a willingness to occupy our proper place, to yield to the authority over us. That these governing authorities are "appointed by [God](#)" stems from another military term denoting the order or organization found in a military unit. Not only should we be subject, but we should submit in the knowledge that God Himself has had a hand in allowing them to exist!

Paul's conclusion flows naturally from this. Those who resist, or rebel against, man's governments also resist the ordinance of God! What God has ordained we should obey! This means we are to regard man's governments as instituted by God and agreeable to His will. This is a hard pill to swallow for those who consider themselves sovereign!

Paul continues with his instruction with a warning that, if we break the law, we will be punished by the civil government as lawbreakers. Those in authority generally do not punish people for doing good, but they have God-given authority to punish those who do not accept their rule and laws. The apostle says we should be afraid to break man's laws because his government administrators are really "God's ministers"! They are servants of God! Thus, we should be subject, not just for fear of punishment, but also for conscience' sake.

He concludes the section with specific instruction concerning taxes, custom, obedience, and respect. He says, "Pay your taxes and your fines. Obey the laws and respect government officials." Sovereign citizens directly disobey this explicit command of God's Word on each count!

Many who complain about the government over us fail to remember the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. He and His apostles lived under an "illegal" government for years; they were subject to Roman conquerors who levied stiff taxes and brutally oppressed freedoms. But what was Jesus' instruction, specifically regarding taxes?

[The Pharisees asked,] "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" ([Matthew 22:17-21](#))

Thus, Jesus advises us to pay our taxes, as He also paid them. [Matthew 17:24-27](#) shows that He paid the Temple tax as well.

Some, considering this world to be Babylon, refuse to come under its laws. Though this world is truly Babylon the Great (Revelation 18), these people also forget the examples of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. These men not only lived in literal Babylon, but also served in Nebuchadnezzar's government, giving great honor and loyalty to the king. When Babylon's laws conflicted with God's laws, as in the case of [idolatry](#) (Daniel 3), they stood rock solid for God's way, willing to take whatever punishment the civil government gave them. This is the principle we should always follow ([Acts 5:29](#)).

God has appointed authority over men to bring order to our society, and in bringing order, He has given each of us an opportunity to learn the lesson of how to submit to government. This is a lesson we all **must** learn, for even Christ is subject to the Father ([1 Corinthians 15:23-28](#))!

— John O. Reid

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