

XXIX. Render unto Caesar

February 14/15/16, 2017

Romans 13:1-7

Aim: To respect and submit to human governments, even when those governments are not perfect, because they have been established by God for our benefit.

In this lesson, we will cover some ‘sticky wickets’ in the relationship between Christians and civil government, including: 1) the relationship of the Christian to the civil government; 2) the issues of capital punishment and just war; and the question of whether it is every appropriate to engage in civil disobedience, and if so, when.

A. Overview on Human Governments (Romans 13:1-7)

1. Moo

In contrast to the loosely connect series of exhortations in 12:9-21, we find in 13:1-7 a coherent and well-organized argument about a single topic: the need for submission to governing authorities. This argument comes on the scene quite abruptly, and with no explicit syntactical connection with what has come before it – and not much evidence of any connection in subject matter either. Not only does it interrupt Paul’s elaboration of the nature and centrality of love, but it seems to give an unqualified endorsement to an institution that belongs to an age that is ‘passing away’ (13:11-14) and to which we are not to be conformed (12:2).

But Paul’s teaching about the transitory nature of this world might be precisely why he includes 13:1-7. His purpose may be to stifle the kind of extremism that would pervert his emphasis on the coming of a new era and on the ‘new creation’ into a rejection of every human and societal convention. One can well imagine Christians arguing: ‘The old age has passed away; we are a “new creation in Christ” and belong to the transcendent, spiritual realm. Surely we, who are even now reigning with Christ in His kingdom, need pay no attention to the secular authorities of this defunct age.’ If Romans 13:1-7 is directed to just such an attitude, Paul may have inserted it here as a guard against those who might draw the wrong conclusions from his concern that Christians avoid conformity to ‘this age.’ To the degree that this age is dominated by Satan and sin, Christians must resolutely refuse to adopt its values. But the world in which Christians continue to live out their bodily existence (see 12:1) has not been wholly abandoned by God. As a manifestation of His common grace, God has established in this world certain institutions, such as marriage and government, that have a positive role to play even after the inauguration of the new age.

Recognizing how Paul’s teaching about the need for Christians to respect governing authorities in 13:1-7 fits into his overall theology of the Christian’s life in this world helps explain its presence at this point in Paul’s exhortations. Submission to government is another aspect of that ‘good’ which the Christian, seeking to ‘approve’ the will of God, will exemplify (cp. 12:2). The specific contextual trigger for Paul’s teaching about government and its role in this world may have been 12:19. Forbidding the Christian from taking vengeance and allowing God to exercise this right in the last judgment might lead one to think that God was letting evildoers have their way in this world. Not so, says Paul in 13:1-7: for God, through governing authorities, is even now inflicting wrath on evildoers (vv. 3-4).

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2. Hughes

‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ (Mt. 22:21). With this single sentence our Lord established the validity of human government, while at the same time setting its limits. Caesar had his image on certain things, and they rightly belonged to him. There is a proper domain and function for human government. However, God has stamped His own image on man (the intellect, the will, and the soul bear the divine stamp). Thus, man may give outward things to Caesar, but the inner man belongs to God. Jesus was saying, ‘The coin is from the mint of the Roman Empire, but you are from God’s mint. The coin’s use is determined by its likeness, and your use is determined by the likeness you bear.’ Jesus’ single sentence is certainly the most important political statement ever made!

Romans 13:1-7 is Paul’s exposition of Jesus’ remarkable saying. In fact, verse 7 bears some resemblance to it: ‘pay to all what is owed to them.’ Paul tells us how the citizens of Heaven are to relate to human government, how we can be the kind of citizens God wants us to be.

We must keep several things in mind as we move through this passage. First, the political situation in Rome was explosive for the early Church. Claudius had earlier expelled the Jews because of a dispute involving a certain ‘Chrestus’ (i.e., Christ), and though the Jews had returned, the political situation was volatile. Moreover, Paul was afraid some of the revolutionary attitudes of Jerusalem’s Zealots might influence the Church. So Paul wrote to instruct the Church on how to behave properly toward the state. What he writes is not ivory-tower theory, but practical directions on how to live under an unfriendly government.

Secondly, we must realize what the passage does not tell us. It does not directly say what we ought to do when a government departs from the role God has given it. It does not specifically explain what to do when our government is committing a moral wrong. Neither are we told what to do in the midst of revolution. It also does not show us which form of government is best—it does not even commend democracy!

Lastly, we must keep in mind that understanding and living by what is taught here will not relieve the tension Jesus gave us when He said, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ (Mt. 22:21). Paul begins by giving the basic rationale for a Christian’s subjection to the state.

3. Barnett

The previous section and the present one must be read together. There (12:14, 17-21), the emphasis is on the end-time judgment of God insisting that Christians do not pre-empt the judgment of God by wreaking vengeance for unjust treatment. Here (13:1-7), the emphasis is on the role of the state to govern God’s world in the interim period and for believers and others to be respectful of and subject to that governance since it is the instrument of God.

4. Sproul

When we are injured, we are never to become vigilantes for revenge. Revenge does not belong to us. “‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’” says the Lord’ (12:19). Vengeance is not inherently evil; it is a legitimate enterprise when carried out justly, which only God can do. That is a precursor for Paul’s treatment of civil government. God keeps for Himself the prerogative of vengeance, and He establishes an order on earth—the civil magistrate—for justice to be carried out in His name and under His authority. The civil magistrate did not come into being through

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the machinations of man; rather civil government is an institution established by God. God has established the church with its redemptive mission and the government for the well-being of everyone. Government might well be called a common-grace ministry. The church dispenses the elements of special grace, that which has to do with our salvation, whereas civil government attends to the common good of the human race, not only for Christians but for all people.

Both church and state are established and governed by God, which we need to understand in light of the contemporary outcry for separation of church and state. Such separation originally meant a division of labor between the institution of the church and that of human government. Today it has come to mean the separation of the state *from* God. The state declares its independence from God and seeks autonomous rule apart from Him. When the government does that—whether the United States, Russia, or any other nation—it becomes demonized and exists as an agent of opposition to God Himself. Such nations become truly godless. We face that clear and present danger every moment in our nation, and we must be aware of it.

5. MacArthur

These seven verses contain the clearest and most specific New Testament teaching on the Christian's responsibility to civil authority. Every Christian, no matter what form of government he lives under, is under command from the Lord to maintain proper and useful submission to that government for the sake of leading a peaceful life and having an effective witness. This recurring theme of submission to society's controlling power is nowhere more forcefully dealt with than here.

What is the Christian's responsibility to society, and to government in particular, if we are to remain 'aliens and strangers' in this world (1 Pe. 2:11) who have a platform to call people to salvation? How are we to live in the world but not be of it (John 17:11, 16)? In the present text, Paul presents two basic principles that answer those questions. First: Be subject to government (v. 1); and second: Pay taxes (v. 6). Those commands summarize the Christian's civic duty. It is through fulfilling these two obligations that we 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' (Mt. 22:21).

B. Submission to Human Governments (Romans 13:1-7)

1. The Priority of Submitting to Government (13:1-2)

a) *Axiom (13:1a)*

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.

Paul gets right to the point: 'Every soul is to be submissive to the governing authorities.' In typical OT and Jewish fashion, Paul uses 'soul' (*psychē*) to denote not one 'part' of a human being (soul in distinction from body or spirit) but the whole person. The translation 'every person' or 'everyone' is therefore entirely justified. Submission to governing authorities is especially incumbent on Christians who recognize that the God they serve stands behind those authorities, but it is required even for those who do not know this.

In the broadest sense, 'every person' applies to every human being, because the principle stated here reflects God's universal plan for mankind. But Paul is speaking specifically to Christians, declaring, in effect, that Christianity and good citizenship should go together. And, as he will continue to explain, 'subjection to the governing authorities' includes much more than simply

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obeying civil laws. It also includes genuine honor and respect for government officials as God's agents for maintaining order and justice in human society.

'Be in subjection to' translates *hypotassō*, which was often used as a military term referring to soldiers who were ranked under and subject to the absolute authority of a superior officer. The verb here is a passive imperative, meaning first of all that the principle is a command, not an option, and second that the Christian is to willingly place himself under all 'governing authorities,' whoever they may be. Paul gives no qualification or condition. Every civil authority is to be submitted to willingly and prayed for without exception (see 1 Tim. 2:1-2). Paul does not make exceptions related to the rulers' competence or incompetence, morality or immorality, cruelty or kindness, or even godliness or ungodliness (cp. also Titus 3:1-2; 1 Th. 4:11-12).

It is the duty of every Christian, indeed of every person, to be subject to the authorities: We struggle over this. In our sinful corruption we kick against the authorities placed over us. We are called to submit to authorities at every stage of life. During our youth we are under the authority of our parents. While in school we are under the authority of our teachers and principal. After obtaining a driver's license we are under the authority of the police department as they patrol the highways. All our lives we are under the authority of state and federal government. The universal call to submit to authority touches the root of our corruption. Everyone is a sinner, and every sin is an act of revolt against authority. If we respected the authority of God perfectly, we would never sin. Sin is a refusal to submit to the governing authority of God Himself, and God knows that about us. It is the duty of every Christian to be in subjection to the authorities.

'Governing authorities' translates a phrase that is central to the interpretation of the paragraph. Like our 'authority,' *exousia* (ἐξουσία) denotes a sphere over which authority is exercised (e.g., a 'dominion'; cp. Luke 23:7) or the being who exercises authority. The latter is clearly how the word is used in Romans 13:1. The NT refers to two different kinds of 'beings' who exercise authority: a person in government (a 'ruler') and spiritual 'powers.' As parallel terms in this context suggest (cp. 'rulers' [*archontes*] in v. 3), the 'authorities' occupy positions in secular government. Paul qualifies them as 'governing' in order to indicate that they are in positions of superiority over the believers he is addressing.

Paul calls on believers to 'submit' (*υποτασσω*, *hypotasso*) to governing authorities rather than to 'obey' them; and Paul's choice of words may be important to our interpretation and application of Paul's exhortation. To submit is to recognize one's subordinate place in a hierarchy, to acknowledge as a general rule that certain people or institutions have 'authority' over us. In addition to governing authorities (cp. also Tit. 3:1), Paul urges Christians to submit to their spiritual leaders (1 Cor. 16:16) and to 'one another' (Eph. 5:21); and he calls on Christian slaves to submit to their masters (Tit. 2:9), Christian prophets to submit to other prophets (1 Cor. 14:32, and Christian wives to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5). It is this general posture toward government that Paul demands here of Christians. And such a posture will usually demand that we obey what the governing authorities tell us to do. But perhaps our submission to government is compatible with disobedience to government in certain exceptional circumstances. For heading the hierarchy of relations in which Christians find themselves is God; and all subordinate 'submissions' must always be measured in relationship to our all-embracing submission to Him.

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b) Authority (13:1b-2)

(1) Submit to God's Authority (13:1b)

For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Verse 1b gives the reason why we are to submit to governing authorities. In light of *exousiai* in v. 1a, 'authority' will refer to the individual human ruler. Paul's insistence that no ruler wields power except through God's appointment reflects standard OT and Jewish teaching (cp. Dan. 4:17). Paul's dependence on this tradition and his all-inclusive language ('there is no authority except') make clear that he is asserting a universally applicable truth about the ultimate origin of rulers. From a human perspective, rulers come to power through force or heredity or popular choice. But the 'transformed mind' recognizes behind every such process the hand of God. Paul brings home this general principle in the last clause of the verse. The believers in Rome are to recognize that the specific government officials with whom they have dealings – 'the ones that now exist,' as Paul puts it – are 'appointed,' or 'ordained,' by God.

Paul then gives the theological grounds for the ethic in v. 1b. Ultimately, the only one who possesses inherent authority is God Himself, and the authority that God possesses is the eternal right to impose obligations upon His creatures. God has the inherent authority to command our obedience and submission to Him (cp. Ps. 100:3). God's authority rests in his authorship and ownership of the entire world. All other authority we experience is not intrinsic but extrinsic. It has been delegated by God.

First, Paul says, human government is ordained by God for the benefit of society. In whatever of the many forms it exists, civil authority derives directly from God. Like marriage, it is a universal institution of God, and, like marriage, it is valid regardless of place, circumstance, or any other consideration. No matter what form it takes, no human government at any time in history, at any place on earth, among any people on earth, at any level of society, has ever existed or will ever exist apart from the sovereign authority of God, because all 'power belongs to God' (Ps. 62:11). How well or how poorly that power is used is another matter. Paul's point here is that this power has only *one source*—God. This is the primary reason we are to submit to human government: it is instituted by the decree of God and is an integral part of His divine plan for fallen mankind.

The president of the United States could not exercise his office for five minutes apart from the will of the King of kings. It is the God of providence who raises kingdoms and brings them down. Every king in the history of the world rules and has ruled only by the providential will of God. God casts the final ballot in every election. Every authority is established, in the final analysis, not by referendum or democratic vote but by the single appointment of the supreme ruler of heaven and earth; every authority is appointed by God. Paul is making clear that God appointed the Roman authorities.

The keyword is the repeated word 'authority' (*exousia*), which means 'delegated' authority. This was a political term applied to a Roman governor, such as Pontius Pilate, who ruled Judea in place of the Emperor and by his 'authority.' Paul is teaching that the emperor and his governors and other rulers exercised their 'authority' by God's appointment. Remember Jesus' words to Pilate, 'You would have no power (*exousia*) over me unless it had been *given* you from above' (John 19:11). Jesus did not subvert Pilate's God-given 'authority,' rather He subjected

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Himself to it despite the injustice of the charge against Him. Paul's admonition is similar, doubtless influenced by Jesus' 'render to Caesar' teaching and His example before Pilate.

The apostle gives us what we might call 'the divine right of the state' in the last half of verse 1. To be sure, men will abuse and misuse the institution of the State just as man because of sin has abused and misused every other institution in history, including the Church of Jesus Christ, but this does not mean that the institution is bad or that it should be forsaken. It simply means that men are sinners and rebels in God's world, and this is the way they behave with good institutions. As a matter of fact, it is because of this very sin that there must be human government to maintain order in history until the final and ultimate rule of Jesus Christ is established. Human government is better than anarchy, and the Christian must recognize the 'divine right' of the State.

Despite the fact that almost every time we pick up a newspaper we read of corruption in government, we must still recognize the state as an essentially divine and moral institution. The Scriptures testify that it is God who sets up governments—even the bad ones—and He takes them down as well (cp. Dan. 2:20-21a; 5:21b). God is the originator of government, and to ignore it is to dishonor Him. Christians ought to be the best citizens.

(2) Do Not Resist God's Authority (13:2)

²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

In v. 1a Paul has stated a positive consequence of God's appointment of human rulers: we are to submit to them. Now he asserts two related negative consequences of the same theological truth. Since God has appointed human rulers, the person who opposes them is opposing, is 'in a state of rebellion against,' the 'ordinance' of God. And such opposition will ultimately lead to eternal condemnation. As submission denotes a recognition of government's position over the Christian by God's appointment, so resistance is the refusal to acknowledge the authority of government. It denotes the attitude of one who will not admit that government has a legitimate right to exercise authority over him or her. Those who take up this attitude 'will bring judgment on themselves.' 'Bringing judgment' could refer to the action of the secular ruler, with the implication (spelled out in v. 4b) that God's own judgment is present in the punishment meted out by the ruler. But Paul's argument has not advanced this far. It is better to understand the judgment here to be the eschatological judgment of God: those who persistently oppose secular rulers, and hence the will of God, will suffer condemnation for that opposition.

The logical ramification is simple. Because civil government is an institution of God, to rebel against government is to rebel against the God who has established it. Paul is doubtless not speaking about God's direct judgment on those who have opposed civil authority but rather condemnation men suffer from the government itself as punishment for crime.

The other major teaching of the first two verses is that believers are called to a profound obedience to secular government. In the opening command (v. 1a), 'every' is emphatic: *every believer*. So strong is the thought that verse 2 concludes, 'Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.' Resisting governmental authority is resisting God! Taken by itself, without any other Scriptural illumination, this statement can be wrongly interpreted to teach blind devotion to the state regardless of what it commands. However, as we

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consider Christ's statement and parallel Scriptures, we see that the Christian's obedience to the state is always conditional, and sometimes disobedience is a duty.

In the eighteenth century, Christians struggled over whether to pick up arms against the British government and declare their independence. One of the most heated discussions in Christian history occurred over how to understand Romans 13 in the light of the War of Independence. The colonists were fighting for the maintenance of their governmental system, which the parliament of England wanted to change. The colonists decided that British common law gave them the right to resist. That was a very complicated situation, which Christian scholars debate to this day, and the reason for the debate is this text in Romans 13. Whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, 'and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.' That is a sober warning. If we resist the authorities that God has appointed, we might be regarded as heroes by some, but we can expect only the visitation of God's judgment.

Many evangelicals strongly believe that the American Revolution was wholly justified, not only politically but biblically. They believe that the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness not only are divinely endowed but that their attainment and defense somehow is Christian and thereby justified at whatever cost, including that of armed rebellion when necessary. Obviously, such action is forbidden by God, and judged in light of our present text, it is equally obvious that the United States was born out of violation of Scripture. That does not mean that, in His grace, God has not bestowed great blessings on America, which He unquestionably has. It does mean, however, that His blessings have been in spite of the disobedience to His Word which was involved in the revolution bringing the nation into being.

2. The Purpose of Submitting to Government (13:3-4)

a) *Restraint (13:3a)*

³*For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.*

If the judgment of v. 2b is God's final judgment, then we must view vv. 3-4 as a second reason why Christians are to submit to governing authorities. Not only has God appointed them (v. 1b), but He has also entrusted to them an important role in maintaining order in society. By punishing those who do wrong and rewarding those who do good, secular rulers are carrying out God's purposes in the world. Christians, therefore, are to submit to the secular rulers. For 'rulers,' Paul explains, are not a 'cause of fear' to those who are persistent in doing good but only to those who do evil.

We are to submit to civil authority because God has ordained it as a means of restraining evil. Paul was obviously speaking in general terms here in v. 3a. He had himself suffered a great deal at the hands of rulers who abused him for no other reason than his godly 'good behavior.' But in that day, as throughout history, even the most wicked regimes were a deterrent to murder, theft, and many other crimes of the populace. Through God's natural revelation in conscience and reason and under His universal common grace, even unregenerate rulers instinctively know right from wrong and consequently know that part of their duty is to punish evil behavior and to promote 'good behavior.' Civil authorities also realize that basic morality is essential to a workable society. No society can long survive wanton murder, theft, dishonest, sexual immorality, and violence. 'Good behavior' is essential for any nation's self-preservation. Without it, society self-destructs.

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b) Servant (13:3b-4)

The essential role of government is encapsulated in the designation it is twice given in verse 4: God's servant. This is an apt expression of its function because the word for 'servant' is *diakonos*, or 'deacon.' Government is the deacon of God, and as with any deacon, its job is to humbly serve. The teaching here, then, is that government either wittingly or unwittingly serves God. Think how it would be if those in places of political authority understood and believed this.

Rulers hold their 'authority' under God and are 'ministers' of God'; God's 'deacons' (*diakonoi*) we might say. Their chief role is to punish those who do evil and reward those who do good. Since Peter teaches the same (1 Pe. 2:14), we conclude this to be an apostolic teaching most likely derived from Jesus Himself. Reference to 'bearing the sword' is metaphorical. It means the ruler has the means of punishing the wrongdoer. The point is that Paul regarded such 'authorities' as 'ministers of God' administering justice in the world for Him as His 'deputies,' in the interim period ahead of the Last Day when God Himself will finally punish wrongdoers and reward the righteous.

(1) For Your Good (13:3b-4a)

Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good.

Verse 4 is framed by two assertions in which Paul characterizes the ruler as a 'servant of God.' The first elaborates the positive function of the ruler – praising those who do good – which Paul has described in v. 3b. The second explains the negative function of the ruler – punishing evil – which Paul touched on in v. 3 and explains in more detail in v. 4b. In both these functions, the secular ruler is carrying out God's purposes, as His *diakonos* (*διακονος*). Paul usually uses this word to refer to a Christian in his capacity as a willing 'servant,' or 'minister,' of the Lord and of other Christians. But people can also 'serve' God, His purposes, and His people unconsciously. So it is with secular rulers (cp. Cyrus in Is. 45:1ff.), who, appointed by God (v. 1b), 'administer' justice in keeping with divine standards of right and wrong. On the positive side, rulers, by bestowing praise (v. 3b), encourage Christians to do what is good (v. 4a).

Notice that the servant function of government is to *do good*—'God's servant for your good' (v. 4a)—and that is what government does, even the worst government. God intends for civil government to promote public good. Generally speaking, peaceful and law-abiding citizens have been favorably treated by their governments throughout history. With notable exceptions, such people have 'no fear of authority.' As long as they 'do what is good,' they not only will not be mistreated but 'will have praise from' the government. It is not wrong for Christians to look to their governments for protection of life and property. Paul took advantage of the government's role in promoting what is good when he used his Roman citizenship to secure justice by appealing to Caesar (Acts 25:11). The apostle also experienced the protection of Roman law while he was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (cp. Acts 19:38-39). Because he represents the God-ordained institution of civil government, a civil official is actually a 'minister of God,' regardless of his personal beliefs about or relation to God. He is doing the Lord's work whether he realizes it or not, by promoting peace and safety among men.

This is a proverbial point of wisdom. It is true in the main, but not true absolutely. Nobody did more good in the Roman Empire than the apostle Paul, yet he did not, in the final analysis,

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receive praise from the civil magistrate. Instead, it gave him his death sentence. In general, even under corrupt governments, those who receive the harshest treatment are criminals, people involved in the worst forms of corruption. The whole point of civil government is to restrain evil, by force if necessary. In simple terms, Paul is saying that although the government we have to live under may be corrupt, the worst government is still better than anarchy, when evil goes forth without any restraint whatsoever.

(2) For Punishment (13:4b)

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Paul now turns again to the negative role of the ruler, showing why he is a 'cause of fear' to those who do evil (cp. v. 3a). It is because the ruler 'does not bear the sword in vain.' Paul uses the phrase to refer generally to the right of the government to punish those who violate its laws. For the purpose of his argument at this point, Paul is assuming that the laws of the state embody those general moral principles that are taught in the word of God. The 'evil' that the civil authorities punish, therefore, is evil in the absolute sense: those acts that God Himself condemns as evil. Only if this is so can we explain how Paul can see the government's use of the sword as a manifestation of its role as 'God's servant.' At the same time, this suggests that the 'wrath' that the governing authority inflicts on wrongdoers is God's wrath. When the civil authority punishes wrongdoers, the authority, acting as God's servant, is 'an instrument of vengeance' (*εκδικος, ekdikos*) through whom God is executing His wrath on human sin. For as Romans 1:18 shows, the final eschatological outpouring of God's wrath on sin is even now, in the course of human history, finding expression. The 'vengeance' that is prohibited to individual Christians (12:19) is executed by God's chosen servants, the secular authorities.

At the end of verse 4 the apostle is most explicit about government's beneficial function. The state is given the responsibility of vengeance, a responsibility that is explicitly forbidden to the individual Christian (12:19). The state renders 'evil for evil,' which the individual Christian must never do (12:17). God's way of dealing with evil is not by personal vengeance, but through justice dispensed by the state. Through the state comes an anticipatory display of God's wrath against sin. And as the state is faithful to its function, it does 'good' to us (v. 4a). We should be thankful that it 'does not bear the sword in vain,' even though it bears it imperfectly.

In order to promote and protect the good in society, human government must punish the evil. Consequently, those who 'do what is evil' have reason to be afraid. Because the 'sword' is an instrument of death, the weapon here symbolizes the right of civil government to inflict punishment, including the ultimate penalty of death for crimes that deserve it. In the earliest period of human existence, the Lord instituted capital punishment (Gen. 9:6).

Romans 13:4b is one of the most important verses in Scripture in terms of the development of historic, classic Christian ethics, especially with respect to two monumentally important issues. The first is capital punishment and the second is warfare and whether Christians can, in good conscience, engage in war. We see here that God Himself has given to the civil magistrate the power of the sword. 'The power of the sword' is an idiomatic expression referring to capital punishment. God has given the civil magistrate the power to use a weapon to bring death in order to enforce the law.

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(a) Capital Punishment

The idea of the sword's being used to enforce the law of God was established exceedingly early in the Biblical record (Gen. 3:22-24). When Adam and Eve sinned, the curse for sin came upon them, the earth, and all things in it. Then God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden, and they were forced to live east of Eden, outside the presence of the paradise in which they had been placed by their Creator. Human beings were forbidden to enter again into the garden, and God established a sentinel to block the way back in. He put angels at the gateway to the garden armed with a flaming sword. We see here the first establishment of physical force as a governing restraint upon sinful people. The image of that sword is used throughout Scripture to indicate the authority given to those responsible for enforcing the law of God.

In Genesis 9, we find another important text for understanding the power of the sword. (vv. 1-6). We find there the biblical institution of capital punishment for murder. The way in which the text is expressed can be easily misunderstood. 'Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed.' We could misinterpret that to mean 'he who lives by the sword dies by the sword,' a sort of cryptic prophecy of the consequences of living a violent life, but the original text indicates not a prophetic prediction but an imperative: God is requiring the death penalty for murder. In the law code of the Old Testament, the offense of murder is carefully explained. Distinctions are made in the Old Testament that correspond to our distinctions between first- and second-degree murder, or murder and manslaughter. Some believe capital punishment is unbiblical because the Bible says, 'You shall not murder' (Ex. 20:13). But just a few pages further in the Old Testament, the civil laws clearly demonstrate that God requires the death penalty for murder.

Many Christians have been strongly misinformed about this biblical position. When capital punishment was instituted by God, it was part of a renewal of the covenant of creation. After the creation covenant was established, sin spread throughout the world so rapidly that God decided to virtually wipe out the human race. In His subsequent salvation of Noah through the flood, the Noahic covenant was established. In that covenant we see the restitution and repetition of the ordinances and laws of the creation covenant (see Genesis 7-8).

The point is this: the law of capital punishment for murder is not restricted to the law code and civil penalties of Israel in the Old Testament, nor is it a portion of the jurisprudence of the New Testament; it is a law rooted and grounded in creation. So long as creation lasts, the principle of capital punishment is in effect in cases of first-degree murder.

The Christian community is not inconsistent when it protests against abortion on demand while arguing in favor of capital punishment. There is a strong point of consistency behind both the church's opposition to abortion and its support of capital punishment—the sanctity of human life. The principle that resounds on virtually every page of Scripture is that human life is so sacred that we must never take it with malice aforethought or for personal convenience.

Human life is sacred not because of some inherent value in humans that is lacking in whales, eagles, and turtles. Human life is so significant because of this: 'Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man' (Gen. 9:6). That is what makes us different from chickens and kangaroos; we have been stamped with the image of God. That is why, if somebody rises up as Cain did and kills his brother with malice aforethought, God sees it as an attack on Himself.

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Human life is so sacred that if you rise up without just cause and kill your neighbor, you forfeit all rights and privileges to your own life. God gives the forfeited life not to the victim's relative for vengeance but the civil authorities. God has given the government the sword, and government is to see to it that punishment is carried out. We hold to this in order to communicate to the world that we will not tolerate the murder of human beings. That is the biblical rationale. When God gives the power of the sword, He does not give it merely to see it rattled. The power of the sword is given to be used to enforce law and justice.

(b) Just War

This same verse, Romans 13:4, also serves the *locus classicus* in historical Christian ethics concerning the just-war theory. The fundamental principle of the just-war theory is this: if a nation or a people aggressively invades or attacks another nation, the attacked nation is the victim of external aggression, so it has the right and responsibility to protect itself from the invading aggressor. The just-war theory has a long history, from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas. Augustine said that not all involvement in war is evil and Aquinas seconded the motion, and in his moral theology he worked out the details of what is involved in a just war.

The sanctity of life principle lies behind the just-war theory. Human life is so sacred that the civil magistrate has been given the sword to protect the innocent from the evildoer. When the civil magistrate uses reasonable force to restrain the evildoer, he serves not only the community but also God. In terms of just war, those principles are simply elevated to the larger domain of national security. The New Testament and the Christian church do not encourage a bellicose national posture or a militaristic style that exists by the threat of intimidation. The church has historically encouraged nations to be good neighbors to other nations and to use the sword as the last resort—when the defense of the people becomes a clear and present necessity.

It is silly to assume that a government can be trusted to engage in only just military activity. I do not know of any nation in history that has not, at one point or another, used its power and authority in an unjust manner. That is why we have to be so vigilant. When the nation is involved in the just defense of its borders, and the civil magistrate calls us to pick up the sword, it is our duty to use the sword. However, if the nation conscripts us to engage in an unjust aggression or invasion of an innocent nation, I am equally obligated to say no.

(c) Civil Magistrate Duties

According to Paul, the civil magistrate has been appointed by God to execute God's wrath on those who practice evil. Paul's words provide the biblical basis for the establishment of force given to civil magistrates. If the civil magistrate uses the sword to promote evil, then the civil magistrate will be judged by God. It is the Lord who raises up nations, and it is the Lord who brings them down. The Christians who received this letter from the apostle Paul knew all about the corruption of the Roman system, and yet they listened to their apostle defending the authority that God had given to the Roman Empire.

When we object to capital punishment or warfare in principle, we object to what God Himself has instituted and established. The sword is necessary because there is sin in the world, and the sword is given to work against and to restrain evildoers in order to protect the lives of the innocent. The primary responsibility of any civil government, whether in China, Russia, the United States, or Iran, is to protect, defend, and maintain human life. When any government

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turns its back on that primary responsibility, it is acting in utter defiance of the law of God and is exposing itself and the nation it governs to the judgment of God.

3. The Principle of Submitting to Government (13:5)

⁵*Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.*

Paul sums up his argument in vv. 1-4. The two ‘because of’ phrases summarize the reasons for submission that Paul has developed in vv. 1b-4. ‘Because of wrath’ encapsulates Paul’s reminder in vv. 3-4 about the punitive function of secular rulers. It is the Christian’s recognition of this function, and the consequent fear of suffering wrath at the hands of the secular official, that should motivate submission. But this is only the minor reason for Christian submission, as Paul’s ‘not only...but also’ sequence indicates. ‘Conscience’ (*συνειδήσις, syneidēsis*) refers here to the believer’s knowledge of God’s will and purposes. Christians know what Paul has just taught: that secular rulers are appointed by God (v. 1b) and that they function therefore as His servants (v. 4). The ‘necessity’ for Christians to submit to government is therefore not a mere practical expedient, a means of avoiding punishment; it arises ultimately from insight into God’s providential ordering of human history. Such submission is part of that ‘good, well-pleasing, and perfect’ will of God discovered by the renewed mind (cp. also 1 Peter 2:13, where the believer is to submit to ‘every human institution’ ‘because of the Lord’). ‘Not being conformed to this world’ does not require Christians to renounce every institution now in place in society. For some of them – such as government and marriage – reflect God’s providential ordering of the world for our good and for His glory.

Submission to rulers is not an option but ‘a necessity’ (*anagkē*) and that for two reasons. Failure to do so would incur their wrath against you. As a wrongdoer you will face punishment. The ruler does not carry a sword for no reason! More important by far is ‘your conscience.’ This is not so much an innate sense of right and wrong with accompanying feelings of guilt or relief. Rather, ‘conscience’ is one’s theological understanding, what one has been taught from the gospel. In this case, ‘conscience’ means knowing that the state and its rulers are ‘ministers of God’ and appointed ‘by God’ to govern in His place ahead of the coming age of the kingdom of God. ‘Conscience’ knows that to reject these authorities is to reject the means God has ordained for His good government of the world.

We are not to submit simply because we are afraid of the law enforcement agencies of our nation. Rather, we have a responsibility to be submissive to the civil magistrates as a matter of conscience. If magistrates are oppressive, if we disagree radically with them, we are still to render obedience because our consciences are held captive by the Word of God. Since God authorizes our rulers and places them over us, we are to render obedience as a matter of principle unless they require us to do something God forbids or forbid us from doing something God commands. Living by principle lies at the heart of Christian ethics and the Christian life. We are not to live doing whatever our hearts desire; we are to be, in the main, submissive people—submissive ultimately to the law of God and to every other authority that God places over us.

‘Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution,’ Peter declares, ‘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 silence the ignorance of foolish men’ (1 Pe. 2:13-15). As God’s own children, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we should realize with spiritual instinctiveness that disobedience of and disrespect

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for government is wrong, whether or not those sins are punished, and that obedience of and respect for it are right, whether we are personally protected by it or not.

Verse 5 indicates the depth of obedience that is required of us. We are to be in subjection not just because we are afraid of being punished, but because, unlike the world, we understand that the state is divinely instituted and that rulers are wittingly or unwittingly God's ministers. Christians are able to see the big picture, and thus through their informed consciences they are able to live in profound subjection.

4. The Practice of Submitting to Government (13:6-7)

We do not need to posit a situation in Rome to explain Paul's exhortation to pay taxes. The paying of taxes was then, as now, the most pervasive and universal expression of subservience to the state. More important, Paul is probably in this paragraph continuing his allusions to the teachings of Jesus. And it was, of course, the paying of taxes that formed the basis for Jesus' famous pronouncement about 'rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's' (Mark 12:13-17). Paul's teaching also has a number of striking similarities to 1 Peter 2:13-17. This suggests that Jesus' teaching about the relationship of the disciple to the state was the basis for a widespread early Christian tradition, which Paul here takes up and adapts. Paul certainly casts this tradition in language drawn from Greco-Roman government: and submission to government was certainly encouraged in many Greco-Roman circles. But, as is usually the case, the concepts Paul teaches here have their roots in the OT and Judaism.

a) *Pay Taxes (13:6)*

(1) Taxes (13:6a)

For because of this you also pay taxes...

'Because of this' picks up the immediately preceding phrase: 'because of conscience' 'you are paying taxes.' Paul is suggesting that the Roman Christians should acknowledge in their own habit of paying taxes to the government an implicit recognition of the authority that the government possesses over them.

'For because of this' refers, of course, to the previous five verses, in which Paul has set forth the Christian's obligation to submit to human authority. The 'also' indicates that paying taxes is part of that general obligation. *Phoros* ('taxes') most commonly was used of taxes paid by individuals, especially those paid by citizens of a subjugated nation to their foreign rulers. This levy probably was a combination income and property tax. The context, however, indicates that Paul used the term to represent taxes of all kinds, all of which the Christian is to pay.

This is where the rubber meets the road for modern American Christians. And it was the same for the Romans. Taxes were exorbitant then too and were sometimes misspent. But the Roman Christians were to pay their taxes, understanding that government authorities are God's servants. That is, they were to pay them with a good attitude.

The Roman government was, in terms of taxation and tribute policies, an oppressive government. The people who received Paul's admonition had been crushed by the burden of Roman taxation. Nevertheless, Paul said, they were to pay their taxes. Taxes might be unfair and oppressive, but God has given to the civil magistrate the right to levy taxes. The civil magistrate has to have his reign and rule financed; thus the government is allowed by God's decree to collect such taxes by the sword if necessary. It is the government's right to levy taxes, and it is our responsibility to

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pay them. There is a caveat, however. The government, to which God gives the right to levy taxes, has also received from God the responsibility to levy just and righteous taxes. Every magistrate is called to levy taxes in a just and righteous manner.

In verse 6 Paul also calls them ‘servants of God’ whose role is the collection of various kinds of taxes, both direct and indirect. Presumably this included the expenditure of taxes on public works and services. These activities were well organized in the cities and towns of the empire. In short, Paul is endorsing the principle of the structures of government from the leader of the nation to the humblest clerk.

The founders of America failed to protect the individual’s rights against unjust taxation. Unjust taxation occurs through a progressive, unequal tax system. When God placed His tax upon the people of Israel, He imposed a tithe. Not everybody paid the same amount. Rich people paid more than poor people, but everybody paid the same percentage. America has politicized economics; we do not have a flat percentage system. Some are required to pay a higher percentage than others. We call that social justice, but it is, in fact, manifest injustice. It is evil and destructive because it gives people the right to vote for taxes on other people that they are not voting to impose on themselves. It creates a politics of envy in which one group is set against another. We ought not to use the power of the ballot to pick others’ pockets. We must pay our taxes as a matter of conscience while at the same time being scrupulous in supporting righteousness and justice in whatever system of government we live under.

(2) Ministers (13:6b)

...for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

In the second part of the verse Paul reiterates the fact that this authority stems ultimately from God and that paying taxes is therefore a matter of ‘conscience.’ Paul again calls secular rulers, ‘servants of God’ (see v. 4), but not he uses a different term, *leitourgos* (λειτουργος). This word was used frequently in the LXX to refer to people who served in the temple, and in the NT it always refers to those who are ‘ministering’ for the sake of the Lord. The cognate *leitourgia* (leitourgia), from which we get the word ‘liturgy,’ denotes cultic service in Luke 1:23; Heb. 8:6; 9:21; and ‘ministry’ generally in 2 Cor. 9:12; Phil. 2:17; 2:30. Paul may therefore choose to use this word to indicate that secular rulers, even if unknowingly, are performing a religious function. This may, however, build too much on the use of the word *leitourgos* since it was used widely in Greek at the time to denote public officials of various kinds (cp. our ‘public servant’). In any case, as in the case of *diakonos* in v. 4, the addition ‘of God’ makes clear the ultimately sacred nature of the ‘secular’ ruler’s ‘service.’ Therefore the payment of taxes becomes a responsibility that the Christian owes to God Himself.

Paul’s word for ‘servant’ (*leitourgos*) was used in the Old Testament for those who served in the Temple (Ezra 7:24). By speaking of these secular officers as ‘ministers of God’ and ‘servants of God,’ Paul is bestowing great honor on such people. Thus he calls for ‘respect’ and honor’ to be shown to those who hold such ‘offices’ (see v. 7; cp. 1 Pe. 2:13-17).

Government authorities, here referred to collectively as ‘rulers,’ have a much greater responsibility than they and the rest of the unbelieving world realize. Regardless of their political rank, personal qualification, or even their morality, spirituality, or personal awareness, officials who collect taxes are ‘servants of God.’ ‘Servants’ does not translate *doulos*, the most common New Testament term for servant, but *leitourgos*, which originally was used of a person

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who served in a public office at his own expense, and it was later used of all officials, much in the same sense that the term ‘public servant’ is used today. Elsewhere in the New Testament, however, this word is sometimes rendered ‘minister’ (cp. Heb. 1:7, 14; Rom. 15:16; Heb. 8:2). It is doubtless because *leitourgos* was used in the New Testament and in the early church to represent a religious ‘servant,’ a minister of God, that it eventually came into the English language as ‘liturgy,’ which refers to a prescribed religious service.

Paul’s point in the present text, therefore, is that, because their authority is from God, all *civil* servants—from the least to the greatest, from the best to the worst—also are ‘servants of God.’ Despite the fact that the great majority of civil leaders would reject the idea that they are ‘devoting themselves’ to God’s service, Paul makes clear that they nevertheless represent a divine institution as well as a human mission. As ‘servants of God,’ civil authorities not only should realize that they serve by God’s sovereign permission but that they are therefore held accountable by Him for serving responsibly on behalf of society.

b) Pay Respect (13:7)

⁷*Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*

Verse 7 has no explicit link to the context, but its call for the discharge of one’s obligations is probably intended to bring the general call for submission to rulers in vv. 1-6 to a practical conclusion. This makes it likely that the ‘everyone’ to whom we are to ‘pay back’ our obligations is limited by the context to secular officials and rulers. By using the language of the discharge of a debt, Paul suggests that the ‘service’ that government renders to us places us under obligation to the various authorities. Paul spells out four kinds of ‘obligations’ that we may owe to the authorities: ‘direct’ taxes, ‘indirect’ taxes, ‘respect,’ and ‘honor.’ Paul’s call to ‘give back’ taxes to the secular rulers is reminiscent of Jesus’s demand that His disciples ‘give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s (Mark 12:17).

It is no coincidence that Paul’s word ‘render’ or ‘pay’ (*apodote*) is the very word used in Mark 12:17, which records the teaching of Jesus. Civil obedience as taught by the apostles Paul and Peter (1 Pe. 2:13-17) flows directly from the teaching of Jesus and the example of Jesus.

Apodidōmi (‘render’) carries the idea of paying back something that is owed, and that meaning is reinforced by the phrase ‘what is due to them.’ Taxes are not voluntary or optional offerings given for the support of government, and paying them is the unqualified obligation of every citizen. Christians not only have a moral but a spiritual responsibility to pay taxes, because they know, or should know, that God requires it of them. Cheating on taxes is a crime against government and a sin against God. This ‘tax’ (*phoros*) is the same term mentioned in verse 6, probably referring to a combination income and property tax paid by individuals to their foreign rulers, which made its payment particularly onerous. Yet the command is clear: Christians are to pay tax to everyone ‘to whom tax is due.’ The ‘custom’ (*telos*) was a form of toll or goods tax, paid directly to Roman governors or procurators or to their vassals, such as King Herod. Assessments such as those are also to be paid unbegrudgingly to whom they are legally due.

The next two obligations mentioned in this verse do not relate to paying taxes but to a Christian’s attitude toward public officials. First, Paul says, we are to render ‘fear to whom fear’ is due. ‘Fear’ (*phobos*) was used to refer to everything from awe to abject terror. In this context, it probably means having sincere respect for civil authorities who collect taxes. Second, we are to render honor to whom honor is due. *Timē* (‘honor’) refers to high esteem that is genuine, not

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feigned or merely pretended. The ‘honor’ we render to those in authority, including those who collect taxes from us, should itself be honorable.

The idea of justice is deeply imbedded in Paul’s words of verse 7. Paul is telling the Roman Christians that we are obligated to pay our taxes. We must give the state what is due the state. Justice and righteousness require that we submit to taxation. Honor is due the king. Even if the king is not honorable, he is to be honored. It is his due. We are to honor our father and mother even if they do not deserve it, because honor is due our parents. We cannot reduce Christian justice and righteousness to the simple formula of merit and demerit. People might not earn honor, but by God’s decree it is their due, and I am to give honor to whom honor is due.

As Christians we may deplore the politics of a particular person in office. We may be repelled by his scandalous conduct. But that does not disallow us from respecting the office. The person is just a human, but the office exists at the discretion of God. Even in our dissent we must always be Christian gentlemen and gentlewomen.

Three points of application emerge from this passage. First, consistent with this, we must pray for those who rule and govern, as we are called upon to do in 1 Timothy 2:1-2. Second, Christians need to remind ‘secular’ governors that, whether they know it or not, they are ‘ministers of God’ and ‘servants of God’ who hold their ‘authority’ ‘under God,’ that is by His permission. This carries onerous responsibility for hard work, honesty, justice, and even-handedness. Third, Christians with abilities appropriate to the tasks should consider ‘public service’ in democratic societies as service of God for the good government of His world in this interim period before the coming of the kingdom.

C. Resistance Against Human Governments?

1. Moo

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the history of the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 is the history of attempts to avoid what seems to be its plain meaning. At first glance, and taken on its own, this passage seems to require that Christians always, in whatever situation, obey whatever their governmental leaders tell them to do. Almost all Christians recoil from this conclusion. Our own sad experience of situations like the Holocaust during World War II suggests that genuine Christian devotion to God must sometimes require *disobedience* of the government. Moreover, this sense finds support within the NT itself. The classic text is Acts 5:29, in which Peter and John respond to the Jewish leaders’ order to stop teaching in Jesus’ name: ‘We must obey God rather than men’ (see also Acts 4:18-20). Equally important is the book of Revelation, in which keeping the commandments of God in the face of governmental pressure to the contrary is the central demand placed on loyal believers.

Clearly a willingness to resist the demands of secular rulers, when those conflict with the demand of the God we serve, is part of that ‘transformation’ of life’ which Paul speaks about in these chapters. But how, then, can Paul apparently speak so absolutely about our need to ‘be submissive to the authorities’? Theologians and exegetes who have wrestled with this question have come up with several answers, with the most likely being summarized here.

Paul demands a ‘submission’ to government; not strict and universal obedience. ‘Submission’ denotes a recognition of the place that God has given government in the ordering of the world. The Christian submits to government by acknowledging this divinely ordained status of

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government and its consequent right to demand the believer's allegiance. In most cases, then, Christian submission to government will involve obeying what government tells the Christian to do. But government does not have absolute rights over the believer, for government, like every human institution, is subordinate to God Himself. The ultimate claim of God, who stands at the peak of the hierarchy of relationships in which the Christian is placed, is always assumed. This means, then, that the Christian may continue to 'submit' to a particular government (acknowledging their subordination to it generally) even as they, in obedience to a 'higher' authority, refuse to do, in a given instance, what that government requires. In a similar way, the Christian wife, called on to 'submit' to her husband, may well have to disobey a particular request of her husband if it conflicts with her allegiance to God.

Balance is needed. On the one hand, we must not obscure the teaching of Romans 13:1-7 in a flood of qualifications. Paul makes clear that government is ordained by God – indeed, that every particular governmental authority is ordained by God – and that the Christian must recognize and respond to this fact with an attitude of 'submission.' Government is more than a nuisance to be put up with; it is an institution established by God to accomplish some of His purposes on earth (cp. vv. 3-4). On the other hand, we must not read Romans 13:1-7 out of its broad NT context and put government in a position relative to the Christian that only God can hold. Christians should give thanks for government as an institution of God; we should pray regularly for our leaders (cp. 1 Tim. 2:1-2); and we should be prepared to follow the orders of our government. But we should also refuse to give government any absolute rights and should evaluate all its demands in the light of the gospel.

2. Hughes

There are at least three areas in which a Christian should resist authority. First, if he is asked to violate a command of God. The classic example is found in Acts 4, 5 (cp. Acts 5:28-29). The command of God always takes precedence over the command of government. There are no exceptions.

Secondly, Christians must resist when asked to do an immoral act. The sexual applications are obvious, but this also extends to ethical areas in which many are constantly asked to compromise—for example, falsifying records for 'security reasons,' perjury for the sake of the department, covering for subordinates by means of falsehoods. Christians must never think it is okay to commit immoral or unethical acts simply because the state has requested it.

Thirdly, believers must never go against their Christian conscience in order to obey the government. This involves such diverse things as participation in licentious entertainment, or working in institutions that perform wholesale abortions, or working or not working on nuclear weapons. Believers must never sin against their conscience. Our conclusion is this: a Christian must disobey his government when it asks him to: 1) violate a commandment of God; 2) commit an immoral or unethical act; or 3) go against his Christian conscience (a conscience that is informed by Scripture and is in submission to the Spirit of God).

In conclusion, it is the Christian's duty to obey those in political authority because: 1) government is divinely appointed; 2) it is a deacon to meet our needs; and 3) we see it for what it is. The question is, is it possible to obey in this way? 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's (Mt. 22:21). This is a divine calling.

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3. Sproul

From a theological perspective, the principle Paul describes in this passage is that of civil obedience. Christians are called to be extraordinary models of civil obedience. But must we always obey the civil magistrate? Conflicts arise when the civil magistrate commands or forbids something that conflicts with the commandments of God. In such cases, not only may you disobey the civil magistrate, but you must disobey (cp. Acts 5:29). We are always and everywhere to obey the authorities over us—boss, police, governor, whatever the authority may be—unless that authority commands us to do something that God forbids, or forbids us from doing something God commands. Sometimes we must disobey. If the civil magistrate calls us to sin, we must say no. History is replete with examples of governments that have commanded the citizens to do evil. It can happen in any country, even our own.

No one ever said that living the Christian life is simple or that making ethical decisions is an easy matter. The principle is easy: we are always to obey the authorities over us unless those authorities command us to do something God forbids, or forbids us from doing something God commands. We cannot disobey the civil magistrate because it inconveniences us or burdens us with heavy taxation or because we disagree with its wisdom. Those are not just excuses for civil disobedience. At the same time, we are not to render slavish obedience to any authority, because authorities can work against the Word of God. We have to be careful to ensure that our decisions are motivated by an earnest desire to obey God in all He commands.

For next time: Read Romans 13:8-14.