

Title: Live as Good Citizens
Series: *Living Free*
Text: Romans 13:1-7

Introduction: This weekend we observe Memorial Day. **John 15:13** is fitting "*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends*".

Freedom isn't free. Thousands of servicemen and women have given their lives for our nation to be free and Jesus has given his life for us that we might be free as well.

Christians have their allegiance first and foremost to Christ. He is Lord of Lord and Kings of Kings. **As God's elect, chosen by God to be His people, and free from the Law - how are understand our relationship with government and law?**

In Romans chapter 12 Paul told believers to submit to God and he followed that command by giving them practical expressions of that submission. They were to

- serve the church by using their gifts and abilities,
- love one another,
- bless those who persecuted them,
- Overcome evil with good.

In each case they were to give ourselves in obedience and submission to the Lord. In chapter 13 Paul continues this discussion. We shows that submission extends to our role as citizens under government.

Text. Romans 13:1-7

1. Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

2. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

4. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

5. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

6. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

7. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

This portion of Romans focuses again on the **theme of good and evil** of Romans 12.

Romans 13:1-7 explains why we can return good for evil to our enemies rather than seeking to retaliate – civil government punishes evil.

Background and Context

A. Rome under the Nero. In AD 67, Nero ordered the burning of Rome. The fire lasted for nine days and when the blame turned to Nero, Nero blamed the Christians. Nero came at the Christians with a powerful vengeance - he had some sewed up in skins of wild beasts,

and then they were attacked by dogs until they expired; and others dressed in shirts made stiff with wax and set on fire in his gardens, in order to illuminate them. This persecution was general throughout the whole Roman Empire. In the course of it, St. Paul and St. Peter were martyred

B. Rome was not a democracy. You could not run for political office to change bad laws, you could not protest against the government or its laws, and the vast majority were not citizen with no rights at all..

C. Paul's theme: Political Quietism and Political Realism. The Apostle Paul is not addressing the place for civil disobedience or resistance to civil government nor is he emphasizing the same issues that he would in a different context.. He was speaking specifically to a small group of Christians who could easily have been crushed by Rome if they acted unwisely.

- **I Thessalonians 4:11** *that you aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we have commanded you*

Paul may have also been concerned about the possible influence of a group of Jews known as **zealots** who held a revolutionary attitude toward the government of Rome – which ultimately led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

D. Different applications of Romans 13 in history

1. **Luther.** Luther used the first two verses like a sledgehammer in urging the German peasants during the Peasants War to put down their arms and obey their tyrannical rulers. He said, "*No matter how intolerably they (the rulers) may tax, they are to be obeyed...Therefore, if the government takes your possessions, your life and limb, and whatever you have, you say: I gladly give it to you. I recognize you as my master. I shall gladly obey you*
2. **American Revolution.** The American Colonial Christians read the same passage of Scripture and revolted against George III's taxation and his excessive enforcement of those taxes. Totally opposite interpretations of Roman 13
 - "...no government is God's ordinance but that which is for the good of mankind."
Samuel Webster (1777)

I. God sets authority in place

1. *For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.*
2. *Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.*

Authority and governance are blessings given by God.

A. There is not authority except from God. All legitimate earthly authority is derived from God's authority. He in essence grants His *exousia* to human institutions as His **delegated authority**.

Authority is given by God not taken by man

B. Three spheres of authority ordained by God.

God places us in situations every day that teach us how to bend our will to another. If we don't learn proper submission to parents, teachers, coaches, employers, and governing officials our supposed submission to God may be only an illusion.

1. The realm of the family
2. The realm of the church
3. The realm of the civil government

Rome – even though pagan – built the roads, provided the security, unified language and instituted rule by law (*Lex Rex*). It was because of these blessings the gospel was able to quickly expand throughout the western world.

We should be the **best workers** and the **best citizens** even if we do not like the person who is position of authority all for the glory of God.

Whatever makes people good Christians makes them good citizens **Daniel Webster**

C. Anarchy is evil – If any of these three spheres do not have authority there is anarchy and anarchy is never a blessing. No government leads to the total breakdown of the rule of law.

- Have you ever been in a third world country and see law and order break down? All you want to do is get on a plane and get home?
- **II Thessalonians 2:6** *And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed at the last time*

D. 'Authority' is never tyranny. Authority can become unjust and thus disqualified. Governance loses its endorsement by God when it becomes **tyranny**

II. We are to be subject to authority

V 1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities

V 5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

A. Definition. Subject = GK *hupostasso* - a Greek military term meaning "to arrange in a military fashion under the command of a leader". In non-military use, it was "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden

- It is used of people to God, demons to the name of Jesus, wives to husbands, and slaves to masters

I Peter 2:13-15 *13. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14. or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. 15. For this is the will of God...*

Obey the Law. *“Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work...” (Titus 3:1)*

Much wisdom is needed. Much can influence our judgment. Civil Rights movement. American Revolution, Civil War, abortion, etc... we often are quite selective in our understanding.

B. Am I a rebel? What Paul is after, I believe, is not a treatise on the form of government rather he wants to encourage God’s people to be people of peace and good citizens. He is speaking to those who have freedom in Christ and makes it clear that that does not mean you need not follow the ‘speed limits’ in your city!

Freedom in Christ does **not mean freedom from but freedom to**. When in Christ, you are not free from being a citizen, a wife, an employee, etc.

III. God places limits on authority

V 5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

A. Because of wrath and conscience. We are subject to government because of two counts: 1) the punishment that we are to rightly receive and 2) our conscience that pricks us when we rebel.

B. Obedience is always conditional. Submission is an attitude of the heart while obedience is a response to the will. You never have to do things that are in **direct opposition to the Word of God** – nothing immoral, unethical or unlawful. This would apply to: Marriage, Ministry, Military, etc

1. Illustration of Peter. *We strictly charged you not to teach in his name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. To which Peter replied, We must obey God rather than men.* Acts 5:28,29
2. Daniel praying three times daily
3. Jewish midwives in Egypt saving the new born males

Marriage and church has limits too

IV. Government officials are *ministers of God*

4. For he is God's minister to you for good

A. Definition of ‘minister’. It is the same word for deacon. Paul elevates the role of the magistrate to the level of clergy.

- He/She is a minister *to you* and *for good*

V. The fundamental role of government is to promote good and restrain evil

3. *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.*

4. *For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.*

A. Support good. *Do what is good and you have praise from the same...*

- *Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a disgrace to any people Pr 14:34*

B. Punish evil. *Bear the sword... Avenger to those who practice evil.*

- This is not necessarily endorsing any kind of punishment but rather it is saying they are empowered to enforce the law.

When these are abrogated we do something. E.g. Civil rights, children labor laws, slavery,

VI. Our attitude towards civil government

How does submission work out in our daily lives?

A. Seek God for our government I Timothy 2:1,2 *Pray and give thanks to God..., for kings and all those in authority*

We pray *for* and not *against*. Until we have interceded we have little to say since the burden of our heart has not been refined by the love of God.

A general attitude of **thankfulness** for policemen, politicians, and public servants of all kinds is appropriate.

- This speaks of all spheres of authority

B. Support our government Romans 13:7 *Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*

1. Taxes. Rome raised money through taxation through a sophisticated system for the army, the Imperial household, for roads, public works and grain for the Romans masses. Locals were hired by Rome to do the dirty work of collecting the taxes and these often enriched themselves in the process. They were called *pulicani* - where we get the NT word *publicans*. They were hated by all.

- Jesus attitude toward taxation. *The Pharisees asked Christ, "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Christ replied, "Show me the coin used for paying the tax." And when the Pharisees showed it to him, he said, "Whose portrait is this?" "Caesar's", the Pharisees replied. Christ, then, said to them, "Give, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God, the things that are God's". (Matthew 22:17-21)*

2. Give custom, respect (fear) and honor. I Peter 2:17 *"...honor the king"*

- E.g. recently I paid for the breakfast of two police officers who were kind of shocked
- I have been embarrassed of things said by Christians in current and past administrations. We are to be honorable people.

C. Select our government *Do good, as much as it depends on you* Romans 12:21

- *Overcome evil with good*

- *Love good and abhor evil*

1. Be involved. If there is something unjust we are to do everything possible to 'do good' in the matter. But be one of a different spirit than the shout down, mocking, irreverent one that is in the world today. **No rancor partisanship just biblical citizenship.**

2. Vote – Three foundational reference points the Bible encourages you to us in all our decisions in matters such as these.

- Freedom – freedom is the greatest blessing the Lord can give the church or a country
- Life – respecting all people as being made in the image of God
- Justice – defending the poor, the orphan, the powerless

3. Serve the public by running for office

Closing

Let us be outstanding citizens to the glory of God. Let the gospel work in us a great love for all people – love for our country, our president, our state officials, military, law enforcement, etc.

Let us pray