

**Romans 13:1–7 CSB**

<sup>1</sup> Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God.

<sup>2</sup> So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves.

<sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval.

<sup>4</sup> For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience.

<sup>6</sup> And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks.

<sup>7</sup> Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.

*A tough passage.*

A. But it illustrates one of the reasons why I preach through books; because it forces us to hear the whole counsel of God.

1. I am consistently amazed by how timely each passage is.
2. It's tax season, and Americans are upset.

3. Some are upset at Trump.
4. Some are upset with Gov. Kehoe.
5. I know people who are still mad at Reagan and Jimmy Carter.

B. We fuss, protest, and complain for lots of reasons.

1. We complain because it's April.
2. We complain because April is almost over, and we don't know where half the month went.
3. Complaining is American and Human.

B. Americans complain because we have the freedom to.

1. Very few people in the world have ever had the chance to complain like we do.
2. I like this story I read the other day:

*After seventy years of communist oppression and seven hours of flying, Boris, a burly immigrant from Moscow steps off the plane in a free land to begin his new life in his new home, Israel. Standing at the Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, a young and enthusiastic Israeli reporter plunges a microphone in front of him with a level of excitement that is only seen when an inside scoop is about to be caught. The reporter asks with focus: "Tell me, what was life back in Russia like?"*

*To which the Russian immigrant replies: "I couldn't complain.*

*An obviously unexpected answer, the young reporter continues to probe: "Well how were your living quarters there?" To which the Russian responds "I couldn't complain."*

*Not expecting this answer either, the reporter decides to hit him with a question that is bound to get the answer he is looking for: "What about your standard of living?" To which the Russian replies again: "I couldn't complain.*

*At this point, the reporter's frustration with the new immigrant's answers reaches a crescendo, and so in a derogatory tone the reporter yells out, "Well, if everything was so wonderful back in Russia, then why did you even bother to come here?"*

*To which the new immigrant replies with gusto: "Oh, here I can complain!"[1]*

C. Very few countries in the world provide the freedom we have.

1. Unlike the vast majority of African nations, the Middle East, Europe, or the increasingly the U.K, we have the opportunity to vote, complain, and voice our opinion and live with relative confidence we won't have reprisals.
2. This Republic is a blessing, if, in the words of Benjamin Franklin, we can keep it.

- D. One danger we have reading this passage is we read it like an American.
- a. Before we can apply this to Americans, we have to understand what it meant back then.
  - b. But let's put this passage in its 1st Century Context to begin with.

### Context

A. The Apostle Paul is writing to a different people in a different world.

1. It's the year 57 or 58 A.D.
2. Rome is relatively peaceful under the young Roman Emperor Nero, who has been serving for about 4 years and has recently celebrated his 21st birthday.
3. The Jews and Christians in Rome aren't liked, but they aren't hated at this point.
4. But, in four years, all of this will change.
  - a. Rome catches fire, and the damage is catastrophic.
  - b. Nero blames the Christians, and the persecution is horrific.
  - c. Some Christians are set on fire and made into human torches to light the entrance to Nero's pleasure gardens.
  - d. Others are crucified or fed to wild animals.
  - e. Peter and Paul will both be martyred: Peter by crucifixion upside down and Paul by beheading.
  - d. The difference in execution is simple: Peter was not a Roman citizen, Paul was.

B. Knowing what we know, it's hard to grasp the Apostles' words here.

*Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. 2 So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves.*

1. Consider our American story!
2. 250 years ago, our country was founded because we revolted against the English.
3. What we call the Revolutionary War, the English called a Civil War.
4. I'm not sure if you have ever traced your genealogy, but my family through my Grandma Richardson are members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, So my family fought the British.

C. Consider further that all of us here are protestants.

1. 500 years ago, our spiritual fathers and mothers protested against the State Church.
2. Some were burned at the stake, many were jailed, and eventually some crossed the ocean to found colonies where they might worship freely and according to their conscience.
3. We are literally a people founded upon a freedom to protest and revolt.

D. What do we do with [Romans 13](#)?

1. We can't simply dismiss it.
2. We also don't want to water it down and excuse it to the point where it is meaningless.
3. How do we read this, not as Americans, but as Citizens of Heaven?
4. This is the challenge before us today.

1. Authority is God's idea.

A. I wanted to discover a secular definition and a theological definition of the word authority.

1. An online definition of Authority:
2. "Authority is the legitimate, official power or right to give commands, make decisions, and enforce obedience.
3. One of my theological dictionaries had this to say about authority.

The two basic forms of authority are intrinsic authority (belonging to one's essential nature) and derived authority (given to one from another source). Since "there is no authority except from God" ([Rom. 13:1](#)), every kind of authority other than that of God Himself is derived and therefore secondary to God's power ([John 19:11](#)).[2]

4. God has all authority because of who He is.
  - a. We don't give Him authority; He already has it.
  - b. We don't give Him permission to rule; He gives us permission to rule.
5. Human leaders and governments have authority only because God has given it to them.

B. Authority has also been marred by sin.

1. It's hard to see God's perfect intentions in the imperfect structures we have built. But it's there.
2. It's much like marriage.

a. Marriage is a divine mystery, designed to point the world to the image of Jesus' love for the Church.

b. But we keep messing that image up.

c. But that doesn't mean there is no value to marriage, but that we are in desperate need of God to redeem the mess.

d. When we think of authority and government, the image or evidence of God is still there; we just need Him to redeem the mess.

3. It's probably safe to say that everything humans touch, we mess up.

a. And government, authority, and leadership are included.

b. With our government in such a mess, how are we supposed to live, obey, or support a system that is so messed up by sin?

## 2. Be Citizens of Love

A. I can't help but see how Paul has bracketed this teaching about government.

1. The previous section lists almost 30 ways to love people.

2. The next pericope or section says:

### **Romans 13:8–10 CSB**

<sup>8</sup> Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

<sup>9</sup> The commandments, **Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet;** and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

<sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.

3. Sandwiched here in the middle is the believer's attitude and submission to authority and government.

B. How are we supposed to live under the authority and oversight of rulers who, too often, are not Christians or don't live righteous lives?

1. We let love be our ultimate motivation.

2. We are called to love people, even when Nero is Emperor...or Diocletian.

3. We are called to love people, even when King Henry VIII is the ruler.
4. We love people, regardless if the President has a donkey or an elephant by his name.
5. Our love is not dependent upon who is in office.

C. How could Paul say this?

1. Notice what he told the church in Philippi!
2. [Philippians 3:20](#)

**Philippians 3:20 CSB**

<sup>20</sup> Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

D. Paul understood that he was living with two citizenships.

1. He was a Roman citizen, with Roman rights and responsibilities.
2. He was also a citizen of a heavenly kingdom, whose King is Jesus.
3. Sometimes these citizenships were at odds with each other.
4. Often, they conflicted.

E. It was clear which citizenship was worth the most to Paul.

1. He was proud to be a Roman citizen and used that privilege throughout his life.
2. But it did not compare to the rights and responsibilities that were given to Him by Jesus.
3. As American Christians, we cannot forget that our allegiance is to Jesus.
4. So what do we do when our allegiances clash?

[When our citizenships clash!](#)

We push back when:

A. First, we are asked to violate the clear teaching of Scripture.[3]

1. If, or when, the government or any authority orders us to violate a clear command of God, we are to resist.
  - a. This is especially challenging if you don't know what the clear teaching of Scripture is.

- b. How can you obey God if you don't know what He has said?
2. A clear example of this for me and this church would be if the government required us to host same-sex weddings.
    - a. It is the clear teaching of Scripture that this is not something we can do.
    - b. There may come a day when this is a pressure put upon us by our government.
    - c. But there is no way I can or will perform such a ceremony.
  3. Many other professions already face rules and regulations that we find unscriptural.
    - a. A nurse required to participate in an elective abortion.
    - b. A teacher required to lie to boost test scores.
    - c. A construction worker whose supervisor orders you to take shortcuts that will result in a defective and dangerous product.
    - d. These are all real life situations that cause us to violate the clear teaching of Scripture.
  4. Even patriotic Americans must remember that our allegiance is to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.
    - a. And when we conflict with the kingdoms of this world, we respond with love and conviction.
    - b. Ultimately, we aren't warring with people but with spiritual forces.
    - c. We serve one far greater than any king, emperor, or president and we know that Jesus will win and has already won.

B. Second, when obedience violates our Christian conscience.[4]

1. When I was in elementary school, I would go through the cafeteria line, and the lunch ladies would offer me green beans every week.
  - a. Most weeks, I would refuse and say, "It's against my religion."
  - b. But green beans are not against my religion; I just don't like them.
  - c. We are all capable of confusing personal taste for biblically founded convictions.
2. We all have things we do not like, not because they are morally wrong, but because we just don't like them.
3. Convictions are personally held beliefs that are in alignment with the teaching of Scripture but are not clearly declared.

- a. If I do this, then for me it is a sin.
  - b. We are going to talk about this a lot more next week.
  - c. I declare next week a blue jean sermon!
4. When we confuse convictions and personal taste, the world is confused too.
- C. This one can be abused. Let me share a valid example and one that isn't.
- 1. A very valid reason to object out of conscience is in the case of conscientious objectors.
    - a. 100 years ago, most evangelical and especially Pentecostal Christians were strong pacifists.
    - b. This was true through World War I and changed dramatically during and after World War II.
    - c. If the thought of killing a person violated your personally held Christian conviction, then it would be right to file as a conscientious objector.
    - d. However, that did not excuse men from serving in the military, but it meant them serving in non-combat roles.
    - e. This is a valid and biblically founded case of not violating your conscience and still honoring authority and submitting to the government.
  - 2. A non-valid reason. Pastors may opt out of Social Security if they are morally opposed.
    - a. When a person becomes a minister, they have one chance to morally object and opt out.
    - b. In some ways I'm opposed.
      - 1. I think S.S could be handled better.
      - 2. I have opinions.
      - 3. But I cannot clearly state that Jesus directs me to object to S.S.
      - 4. It didn't bother me when I was working a secular job, so how could I "object" when given a choice?
      - 5. I don't want to, but it doesn't violate my conscience or the clear teaching of Scripture.
  - 3. You can't oppose something simply because you don't want to do something!

- a. You can't oppose something simply because you don't like the person who told you to do it.
- b. You can't object because you don't feel like it, don't like it, or don't like them.
- c. But, when our government or authorities demand from us what God has put off limits, we are to lovingly but firmly object.

D. Notice what Peter said!

**1 Peter 2:13–17 CSB**

<sup>13</sup> Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority

<sup>14</sup> or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.

<sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.

<sup>16</sup> Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves.

<sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

1. If anyone would have taught Christians to resist, revolt, and overthrow the government, my bet would have been on Peter.

- a. Peter wrote this letter somewhere around 62-64 A.D.
- b. Peter was executed around 64-67.

2. Instead, he declares that we submit BECAUSE OF THE LORD!!!

- a. Why do I pay taxes? Because of the Lord.
- b. Why do I honor our local, state, and national leaders? BECAUSE OF THE LORD.

3. Then Peter goes on to say we are to submit to authority for an ultimate purpose:

- a. To accomplish God's will by doing good, honoring everyone, loving God's people, fearing God, and honoring the authorities.
- b. I like what Peter did in verse 17.

- 1. Honor: everyone.

2. Love: our Christian Brothers and Sisters.
3. Fear: Only God.
4. Honor: the Emperor.

### Where's the hope?

A. If you are the kind of person who looks around, wondering where our country and world are heading, I understand.

1. It is really hard to look at what is happening and be happy and confident in our direction.
2. We also know that American politics turns over every election, so it feels like we are never stable or steady.
3. Peter and Paul didn't have elections like we do, but they knew that the men in Rome were fickle and prone to excess.
  - a. Nero, who at the time of Romans, was relatively stable, would lose his mind in the next few years.
  - b. Rome would be rattled and would stay that way.

B. I remind you that our hope is not in Washington, D.C.

1. The hope for righteous government is not born on the shoulders of an American political party, but on the shoulders of Jesus.
2. This was prophesied long ago and a verse we read at Christmas.

### **Isaiah 9:6-7 CSB**

<sup>6</sup> For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.

C. We live in this world, but our eyes are on the one to come.

1. When Jesus returns, He will rule and reign.
2. He will establish His government with justice and righteousness.
3. No Epstein files, no CIA, no policies designed to show favor to any group at the expense of another. Perfect Justice and Righteousness.

4. The government will not be established on the rulings of judges or votes, but will be UPON HIS SHOULDERS.

D. Because we are citizens, we have roles in the future government.

**1. Paul said:**

**1 Corinthians 6:2–3 CSB**

<sup>2</sup> Or don't you know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the trivial cases?

<sup>3</sup> Don't you know that we will judge angels—how much more matters of this life?

2. Here is what John heard in the Revelation.

a. [Revelation 20:6](#)

**Revelation 20:6 CSB**

<sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

b. [Revelation 22:5](#)

**Revelation 22:5 CSB**

<sup>5</sup> Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.

If you feel overwhelmed or depressed by our world:

1. Pray more.

- a. Pray in the Spirit.
- b. Pray with the intention of honoring and loving those who are really hard to honor and love.
- c. Pray “God’s will be done,” and may it start with me.
- d. Pray for our leaders to be saved and filled with the Holy Spirit.
- e. Pray for our hearts to be loving and honoring when there doesn’t seem to be anyone or anything worth loving and honoring.

## 2. Be grounded in Scripture.

- a. Stop living your life solely out of personal feelings and emotions, but develop a biblical worldview.
- b. In [Rev. 20:6](#), we are prophesied to be priests of God and Christ and reign with Him: The internship starts now.

## 3. Do what you can here on Earth

- a. Go vote.
- b. Be on committees.
- c. Speak up when given the opportunity.
- d. Invest yourself in the land and sow seeds of Kingdom Righteousness.

## 4. Remember you are a dual citizen.

- a. There is no law against loving.
- b. When we motivated by Godly love, we are in the right even when we are told we are in the wrong.
- c. So love as Jesus loved us.

## Prayer

[1] <https://theyeshiva.net/jewish/item/2498/essay-chukas-the-pain-does-not-disappear-but-it-can-heal-me> Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

[2] Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

[3] R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 240.

[4] R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 241.