

“GOD AND GOVERNMENT.”

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February 1, 2026, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Romans 13:1-7

Prayer:

Prayer: Holy Father, direct all our hearts and minds to the truth of your Word and its application to our lives. Cause seed sown in weakness to grow by your power, thirty, sixty even a hundredfold. Come, Holy Spirit, hear and help, in Jesus name, Amen.

Introduction.

There are plenty of verses in the Bible we don't like but there are few that we take issue with as much as this one. Can we just go ahead and admit it, we don't like what it says. We don't like submitting to authority, government, police, teachers, bosses, husbands, parents, pastors/elders, basically anyone would dare to correct us or tell us what to do.

Why? We are Americans, we are independent, individualist. It is how our country started, rebelling against England, and we haven't stopped, it is in our DNA.

And that's not the only reason. We are sinners and that is how we got started. Back in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and we have been sinning that way ever since.

Let me tell you what you want me to tell you about this text. You want me to tell you all the ways you don't have to obey this text. You want me to tell you how this doesn't apply to us 21st century Americans. You want me to list the “Yeah, but...” and the “What abouts.”

Did you notice, Paul doesn't give any? It doesn't mean there aren't any. But if we start with the exceptions, if we start with when we should resist or rebel against this passage, we will get it all wrong. We are going to start with what it says and why it says it, to lay a clear foundation.

I am not naïve about what I will preach. I won't change your heart or your mind, only God can change our sinful, stubborn, rebellious hearts, but you should ask God to do that, to change you, correct you, to bring you into loving, humble submission to His will and ways.

Context.

I want you to keep in mind two things about the context of this passage. First, Paul wrote this letter to Christian citizens living in the capital of the Roman empire when the godless, wicked Nero was emperor. Government was not good. Paul is not naïve about government. He knows how the Hebrews were treated in Egypt, he knows how the Romans crucified Jesus, he has been in jail more times than he can count. He knows about bad government.

Keep in mind this text comes between Romans 12:9 “let love be genuine” and 13:8 about loving each other as the fulfillment of the law. Submission to authority is an expression of Christian love. Love is what should govern our hearts.

Where does authority come from?

Romans 13:1 For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

All governmental authority comes from God. There is no authority except what God has established. God raised up Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, God purposefully raised up evil kings in the OT. Nero, Hitler, Putin, democrats, republicans, and the local dog catcher.

Every nation receives from God the form of their government. The Bible doesn't endorse one kind of government over another, monarchy or democracy. Every kind of civil government is ordained by God and is under the authority of God.

Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate he said, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11).

The bottom line is people did not create government. It is not by chance or just by vote, but by the providence of God. It is God who raises up and God who brings down, both leaders and nations as He pleases and for His good pleasure.

Guess what? They are all sinners, even the very best of them. God is sovereign over good leaders and bad leaders, even the most wicked leaders. None of them do anything apart from the will of God. And one day they will answer to God for their use of the authority He gave them.

Why are we to submit to authorities?

Paul gives this command with reasons and consequences.

All governmental authority comes from God, so all Christians are to live in subjection to it. Because all governmental authority comes from God, to resist “it” is to resist “Him.”

All human to human submission is an expression of a believer’s submission to God. It is an expression of following Jesus who submitted Himself to the Father.

To be subject, or to submit, is an act of the will to give oneself over to those in authority; but it is not absolute, it is not blind obedience, there are limits. Submission is the path to a rightly ordered society, whether that be a nation or city or school or business or home or church.

Submission is an acknowledgement that a car can’t have two steering wheels, there has to be leaders and followers, rulers and the ruled. Civil government and rule is a blessing from God, and not a necessary evil. Government is the means God uses to govern His world.

What if I don’t submit? Paul warns of the consequence. If I rebel, I am opposing God, I am making war against God and I should expect to be punished, to bring down judgment on myself.

Ephesians 6:1-2 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

What happens when children rebel against their parents? Chaos ensues and it doesn’t go very well for everyone. What happens when church members rebel against the authority of the elders? Chaos ensues and you get church divisions and splits. What happens when citizens rebel against authority? You get chaos, coups, mob violence, a divided country.

Our basic demeanor, our default setting toward those in authority should be submission and honor. This is where we start and what we do until there are Biblical reasons for disobedience

Furthermore, the purpose of government is two-fold: to promote and praise that which is good, and to punish and prohibit whatever is evil.

Isn't that obvious. Don't we want to live in peace, without fear. The path to living in peace is living quietly, doing what is right, doing good. Rulers are no threat to those who do right.

God gives authority for the common good, to reward good and punish evil, and for our good. Paul and Peter believed that governing authorities are necessary for keeping the peace. God is a God of order – not anarchy or chaos.

We are called to submit to authority, even when that authority is unbelieving and pagan, even when we think they are wrong. That's what makes submission submission, when we don't agree.

Would you prefer bad government or no government? A bad teacher or no teacher? A bad boss or no boss? We grumble and complain about our government, but we have the luxury of complaining in relative peace, order and stability. There are countries with no government and the citizens suffer horrifically. Think Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Haiti. Think *Lord of the Flies*. Sinful stability is far better than sinful anarchy.

Without authority and submission to authority our world would be misery and chaos. We wouldn't have jobs without submission to authority. Schools, military, businesses, churches, families would all be chaos.

Paul says, "Obey the government because it is morally right to do so, and it is morally wrong not to do so." Submit for *sake of conscience* means because you know it is right because God put them in authority.

How many times do we have to say submission is never an expression of value or worth or superior or inferior. When we submit to someone it is not a statement of value, that they are better or more important.

Summary of why submit. Submit to civil authority 1) because it's instituted by God, 2) because it is good for you that there is civil authority, 3) because you will get punished if you don't, and 4) because if you don't, your conscience will condemn you for breaking the higher moral law of God.

What helps us to submit to authority?

What helps us to submit to authority especially when we think it is wrong? We must have a firm grasp of the sovereignty of God.

What about tyrants, dictators, evil, terrible leaders? Can we ever say their authority isn't ordained by God? How can you say it isn't?

Do you know God? Do you give counsel to God? Do you know what God should do? Do we know the mind of God? Do we know His ways? Remember God's questions to Job.

Do you know why God raised up Pharaoh, or Assyria, or Babylon, or Cyrus or Darius, or the Roman empire, or Quirinius governor Syria or Hitler or Stalin? Do you know the purposes of God in history? Do you know the judgments of God? Vengeance belongs to God. Tyranny is a judgment from God for the sins of the people.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

What does God require of us to give to the authority besides our humble submission?

Just as we are to outdo one another in showing each other honor, so we are to show honor to all those God has placed over us for the sake of ordering society.

In Acts 23:5 Paul called a man a name and was rebuked, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

Exodus 22:28 You shall not revile [NIV: blaspheme] God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

Our basic demeanor toward civil rulers should be one of honor. "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Pet. 2:17).

We must guard lips in how we speak about those in authority, for with the mouth the heart speaks.

Are there exceptions?

There are a few exceptions in Scripture but they are rare and they prove the rule. This is the norm, this is normal.

If the state commands what God forbids, or if the state forbids what God commands, if the government orders him to sin or to compromise his loyalty to Jesus Christ, then a

Christian is not required to obey. Like when Peter and John said, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Civil disobedience is required when matters of worship and the gospel are concerned.

But remember when Peter and John acted contrary to the governing authority, they also submitted to the punishment for breaking the law without complaint or resistance.

If the time comes to disobey, it ought to be done humbly, like Daniel and the king’s food, like Esther before King Ahasuerus, like Peter before the council.

What are the weapons of the Church of Jesus Christ? The sword? No. Guns? No. Violence? No. The weapons of the Church are the Word of God, the Gospel, prayer, preaching, worship.

Implications and application.

Let honest. For most of us most of the time living in Lynden in the United States our resistance to submitting has nothing to do with tyranny or oppression or godless usurping of authority and everything to do with our own willful selfish desires. I don’t like being told what to do.

We are all rebels at heart. I am a rebel, I have a rebellious heart. I get irritated at all the hassles at airports with TSA. They are just doing their job, they have authority and I need to submit.

I get annoyed going to medical or health facilities that require a mask. They have authority to do that and it is no big deal, but my heart is rebellious. Masks expose our rebellious hearts.

If this text makes us angry, that says our hearts are rebellious and we need to repent. Our reluctance or resistance is just an example of our rebellious hearts. We are rebels at heart.

If you feel the urge to do the opposite of what you’ve been told or asked to do, repent.

Rebels believe it’s better to ask forgiveness than to ask for permission. Rebels do what they want now and clean up afterward.

If rules are meant to be broken or rules don’t apply to you, you are a rebel.

We live in a rebellious generation who feel it is their right to sit in judgment of those in authority over them. Today's music celebrates rebellion. Christians are no exception. Rebellion against God-appointed leaders is the same as rebelling against the Lord and leads to nothing but trouble (Neil Anderson).

The point of this passage is to humble us under the Word of God and under His grace, so that it might go well for us in this life and that we honor God by honoring God's instruments of authority.

Scripture teaches us to do two things toward our government, submit to them and pray for them.

This is our opportunity to bear witness to the sovereignty of God. Christians should live exceptional lives as salt and light in a rebellious generation showing a better way.

Being submissive to God-ordained authority is an expression of our faith in Jesus. It shows we trust God to protect us and bless and that it will go well with us.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, do a new and transforming work in all our hearts, removing pride, rebellion, resistance and stubbornness and filling us anew with the grace of mutual submission, honoring others above ourselves, making allowances for others and overlooking offenses. Increase in this place greater love for you and for each other that we might prove to the on-looking world that we are your disciples.