

Submission to Governing Authorities

📖 Romans 13:1-2a

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We're studying Romans 12-16. This is the section we've titled Exhortation because in 12:1 Paul says "I urge you..." This word "urge" is *παρακαλεω* and means "to come alongside as a friend" and so to exhort one to live in a particular fashion. That is what Paul is doing in Romans 12-16. He is coming alongside of us as a friend and exhorting us to truly live by presenting ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice and in 12:2 to maintain this way of living by not being conformed to the spirit of this age but being transformed by the renewing of our mind through studying the text. This is the process of sanctification and it proceeds primarily on the basis of the doctrine that Paul has taught in Romans 6-8, "the mercies of God" in His provision of the Spirit so that His fruit is produced in our lives. Romans 12-16 is the fruit of the Spirit as manifested in our relationships with the Church, the world and the state.

In 12:3-8 one manifestation of living by the Spirit within the Church is humility. Humility is having a proper estimate of our value. We all have value but some believers overestimate their value. This is seen when we start to try and do everything in the church either because it's not getting done or we think we can do it better than others. That is arrogant because each of us does not have every spiritual gift. Paul's point is to foster humility by reminding us that each of us has only a very limited spiritual gift and we are all part of one body and each part of the body needs every other part and so we should allow room for others to use their spiritual gift. That's humility, it's recognizing that I am not all there is to the body of Christ. In 12:9-16 another manifestation of living by the Spirit within the Church is love. This kind of love is a familial love because we are a family and we should strive to put other family members ahead of ourselves. The training ground for this is in the home and in the home your goal should be to put others ahead of yourself. It is not to get what you want but to serve the others. That is why when it comes to the qualifications of an elder it says that the man must have an orderly household. That is to say that the home is the training ground for the Church. If a man is leading in the home, he will be putting others ahead of himself and that is one qualification for being an elder. That is a familial love. At the heart of leading is love, love for one's family and we are a family and we should love with a family love. In 12:17-21 another manifestation of living by the Spirit is love; but this time love toward the world. This is not a family love because they are not yet a part of our family. But this love is to influence them to want to become part of

our family. That is why it is so important when they treat us with evil that we do not exact revenge but respond in such a way that they are prompted to wonder what is different about us and where this unorthodox response is coming from. And even to do good to them so that they are convicted of guilt and pressed to come to grips with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It may seem difficult to do this but it is not as difficult when we realize that when they do evil to us they are not getting away with it because God is ultimately going to repay them for all the evil they have done. So there is no reason for us to exact justice by revenge. We are to allow space for God to do that and He will do it in His perfect time. So in Romans 12 we have seen the manifestation of humility and love among the Church and love toward the world. Now we come to Romans 13. This is our relationship to the state and this is summed up by the word submission.

There are some who think that this section is out of place because it is clearly about our relationship to the government and nothing before has been about government, and besides, Paul returns to love in 13:8ff. So then these verses interrupt and so it is thought that a redactor, a later editor, must have added these verses to Paul's letter to the Romans. I reject that kind of argument which comes from the school of higher criticism. The higher critics view the Bible as a merely human book and are constantly trying to find an explanation for how the books of the Bible came together from a merely human point of view. But we view the Bible as coming together from God working through human authors and so there is a rhyme and reason for Romans 13:1-7 at this point.

In 12:2 Paul said do not be being conformed to this world. The government is a part of the world. It comes complete with kings, rulers and officials that are of the world, they do not rule in righteousness. Since this is so we might think that Paul's stance on the Christian's relationship to the government is that we should rebel. That seems to be, in part, why Paul is addressing this relationship in 13:1-7. The syllogism would be as follows: we are not to be conformed to the world...the government is part of the world...therefore we should rebel against the government.

This was precisely difficult among Jews at the time. Most Jews did not like paying taxes to Rome because they were a Gentile kingdom. Remember that some Jews were part of a group known as the Zealots. They refused to pay taxes to Rome. Then you had others who were tax collectors. They collected taxes for Rome and were considered traitors. Simon was a Zealot and Matthew was a tax collector. Both became disciples of Jesus. I've often wondered how the two got along. The only answer I can find is that they both submitted to Jesus' clarification in the Gospels when the question came up and He said, "Show Me the coin used to pay the poll-tax" and they brought Him a denarius and He said, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." The only way to understand that statement is to say that Jesus held that they had a responsibility in the human sphere to an unrighteous Caesar and at the same time a responsibility in the divine sphere to a righteous God.

That was not easy to accept, it seems to be a contradiction, and how do we respond when Caesar and God are in conflict? There are two basic things one must understand in order to know how to live under the government. First, that we live in the times of the Gentiles as ordained by God. The times of the Gentiles are outlined in the Book of Daniel. These chapters reveal that history would be ruled by four successive Gentile kingdoms; Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome and then a fifth kingdom would come, the kingdom of God. They also reveal that Jews could prosper under these kingdoms by submitting to these kings and kingdoms as long as they did not contradict the law of God. Daniel himself was a prime example of this in Babylon, as were his friends Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego. They understood that the times of the Gentiles were ordained by God and that Gentile kingdoms will rise and fall, Gentile kings will come and go as history marches toward the establishment of the kingdom of God and that they would find blessing as they submitted to these kingdoms. Second, that we must obey God when there is a conflict between God's word and a Gentile king's word. Daniel, as well as his three friends, and their responses to the laws of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius illustrate this. In Dan 1 Daniel requested not to eat pagan food and shrewdly constructed a test so as to be given permission not to violate God's word. In Dan 3 Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego refused to bow down and worship an idol because it contradicted God's word. In Dan 6 Daniel refused to stop praying to the one true God. All of these examples show how we must respond when there is a conflict between God's word and a Gentile king or ruler's word. If one thinks this is only for Israel in the OT the examples continue for the Church in the NT. In Acts 4 Peter refused to obey men rather than God. In Acts 16 Paul refused to allow Roman rulers to break Roman law. In Acts 23 he refused to allow Jewish rulers to break the Mosaic Law. And yet, all along we want to be at peace with the government. We are not looking for a conflict. In 1 Tim 2 Paul tells us to pray for kings and all those who rule over us that we may have peace in our time.

But the general rule is to submit to Gentile powers because if we do not then anarchy will result and the Scriptural argument is that any human government, even one that is corrupt and imperfect, is better than anarchy. So the general argument being made is that we should be in submission to governing authorities. The reason Christians still struggle today is because we still live in the times of the Gentiles like Daniel. And we live in the fourth kingdom of Daniel, Rome, which is presently re-forming into its final manifestation, the most hideous kingdom of man ever devised. We have not yet seen it re-form into its Scriptural description but we can see that it is forming and when a ten nation confederacy has arisen in Europe then it will have re-formed. And so lawlessness is increasing every day. That creates tremendous tension for us and I am sorry to tell you that the tension is only going to increase. How are we to live? In general, we submit to the government but when God's word and king's and ruler's word come into conflict we must obey God rather than men. And all along we must stand up when those in the government are breaking the law and we must be praying for our rulers even though we know where things are headed.

It's clear in Romans 13 that Paul is speaking to the general point of submission to the government and not dealing with cases of civil disobedience, though I have cited them so we don't forget there are other passages.

Several things should be observed about Rom 13 before the exposition. First, these verses presuppose human government to be a divine institution. In verse 1 Paul refers to the authorities which exist as being established by God and in verse 2 he refers to them as having been ordained by God. Human government must first be an existing structure before there can be any human rulers. Human government, therefore, is presupposed to be a divine institution and we will find that it was created and established by God in history for the well-being and ordering of society. Second, any human government is better than anarchy. Governments take many forms, monarchies, oligarchies, democracies, republics for which I stand, et. al. Under each of them there are penalties for evil. But remember that under anarchy there is no penalty for evil. This makes any human government better than no government at all. Paul teaches this in verse 2 where he says that those who oppose governing authorities will receive condemnation and in verse 3 where rulers are a cause of fear for those who do evil and in verse 4 rulers are avengers who bring wrath on the one who practices evil. Under anarchy there is no fear among men who do evil and there is no condemnation for those who practice evil. Therefore, any human government is better than anarchy. Third, Paul is not saying that all governmental laws are correct and must be followed by the Christian. He is simply upholding the principle that submission to the government is necessary for peaceful, orderly living in a fallen, post-Flood world. And as long as a government is fulfilling its function of maintaining peace and protecting the people from both foreign and domestic threats, it is carrying out its divinely mandated purpose and we should submit. If it oversteps these bounds we must protect ourselves and those who are innocent, though we should submit at all other points. Fourth, Paul does not answer every question that we might have. For example, he does spell out clearly that we must pay taxes, perhaps even high taxes, but he does not spell out what we must do if our tax dollars are being used to fund immoral things like abortion. Some of these questions require us to use wisdom principles from other portions of Scripture. Fifth, we must understand that if we decide not to submit to the governing authorities on a point then there will be consequences for our choice and we must be willing to face the consequences. There is no easy way out. Eventually, all governments on earth will come into conflict with the will of God for believers because Satan is still the god of this world and his ideology seems to infect almost everyone that gets into politics. When this happens and we are told to violate God's word we must remain true to God's word knowing that we could face fines, imprisonment, or even execution. These are consequences we must be willing to bear. Both Paul and Peter, at least according to tradition, were executed under Roman authority. Their example alone should show that they were willing to face the consequences. That's enough historical background and introduction. We'll deal with the rest as we work through the text and correlate it with other passages to get the overall Scriptural view of the Christian and his relationship to human government.

In 13:1 Paul says, **Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.** The Greek word translated **person** is *ψυχη* and means "soul." The "soul" is not just the inner part of man but a Hebraism for the whole person. In the Hebrew Bible when God created man He took dust from the earth and built the material side of man. Then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life giving him an immaterial side. The result was man

became a person or soul. Thus man is both material and immaterial and the soul is a result of their combining. That is why the biblical concept of the soul is not immaterial only but both material and immaterial. This accounts for the latitude with which this word is used in various contexts, sometimes being used of the immaterial side of man and other times being used of the material side and still at other times of both sides as here, and therefore the total person. Paul is saying the total person is to be in subjection.

Further, **every** “total” **person** is to be in subjection. The word **every** denotes every person without exception and not just believers. The reason every human is to be in subjection to the governing authorities is because human government is a divine institution that was given to all mankind for the purpose of maintaining orderly societies and protecting the people from all threats both foreign and domestic.

What does it mean **to be in subjection**? The Greek word **to be in subjection** is from the verb *υποτασσω* and means “to place or arrange under,” to line up under. It presupposes an orderly structure or ranking where each has his place. There is a structure to society and we need to know our rank in that society so that we can line up under the proper authorities. Without subjection everyone becomes their own authority and society swings toward licentiousness, anarchy and chaos. With **subjection** there can be order, stability and peace. It might be important to observe that Paul could have said every person is to be *obedient* to the governing authorities but he didn’t because that would imply coercion or compulsion. Instead he said every person is to be in *subjection* in order to imply the importance of willingness on our part to be in subjection. We ought to want to be in subjection. The reason stated at the end of the verse is theological in nature.

Who are we to willingly be in subjection to? Paul says, **the governing authorities**. The word translated **governing** is from the word *υπερεχω* which literally means “to have or hold over.” In the lexicon it is defined as “to be in a controlling position, to be highly placed.” It refers to someone who holds a high place or office over others. **Governing** is probably a good translation since it implies being over others. The word **authorities** is *εξουσια* and refers to one who has “ruling authority.” Angels are sometimes referred to as having ruling authority (e.g. Eph 1:21; Col 2:10) and some commentators have gone in that direction in this text but they do not seem to be in view in Romans 13. How would we get laws from angels? How would we pay taxes to angels? These questions show that angels are not in view. The ruling authorities are human and we are to be in willing subjection to them.

It is important to note that Paul has individual people in mind that we are to subject ourselves to and not just the divine institution of human government. In verse 1 he says be in subjection to the **governing authorities**. Both of these words are in the plural and refer to the plurality of people who hold the offices of ruling authority. Sometimes this is hard to do if we do not like them but this is something we should do.

The reason stated is the second part of 13:1. **For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God**. There are two parts to this reason and we will spend the rest of our time on these

two parts of the reason. The first part, **for there is no authority except from God**, means that there would be no human rulers except God delegated rule to humans. In other words, human government is a divine institution and it would not exist if it were not given by God. When did God institute human government? Human government is the fourth divine institution following responsible dominion, marriage and family. The first three were given at Creation. The fourth was given after the Flood. This means that human government did not exist until 1,656 years after Creation. Turn to Gen 4:14 to see that for the first 1,656 years of history there was no human government and that God Himself functioned as the government and the human conscience was to be a restraint upon evil. Note that in Gen 4:14ff, after the event of Cain murdering Abel, God himself acted as judge and punished Cain and condemned any human punishment. Cain was concerned that as he wandered around on the earth another human would find him and capitally punish him because he killed Abel. So he says, "Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." So the LORD said to him, "Therefore who ever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him." Clearly God Himself acted as judge and punished Cain and did not give any place for a human to exact any punishment. This state of affairs continued for 1,656 years until the Flood.

Now turn to Gen 9:6 to see that after the Flood God instituted human government and gave man the right to act as judge and punish fellow humans and that the most basic punishment is capital punishment. The first humans who had governmental authority or rule over other humans were Noah and his sons (cf 9:1). God said to them, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man." This is to say that if a man murders an innocent man then that man shall be capitally punished. This is the origin of human government about 4,360 years ago and Noah and his sons were the first rulers of that government. The most fundamental right of human government is to capitally punish someone who takes innocent human life. Without that right a human government really does not have any power to protect the innocent. Capital punishment was given to protect the innocent because it deters evil, despite humanist arguments to the contrary. The only reason it does not deter evil as effectively as it does is because of delays in carrying it out that separate the crime too far from the punishment. If it was carried out as swiftly as God said it should then it would be more effective. This even notwithstanding arguments to the contrary that sometimes there is a misappropriation of justice. God knew that justice would be misappropriated and innocent people would be capitally punished. He is omniscient. He knew this and instituted it anyway, knowing that even His own Son would be crucified under a misappropriation of justice. Without it the world would have plunged into evil far more quickly than it has. In any case, the reason **there is no authority except from God** is because God is the one who created human government in the first place. This was to curb evil, protect the innocent and bring about order and peace.

The second part of the reason we should submit to ruling authorities in Rom 13:1 is that **those (authorities) which exist are established by God**. This essentially means that all rulers in the world are in positions of rule because God put them there. There are means for them getting into office but Paul does not discuss the means. He only discusses God's sovereignty over, in and through the means. The Greek word translated **established** is from *τασσω* and means "to arrange, to appoint." The meaning is that God has arranged history so that certain individuals are appointed into governmental offices.

Let's look at some examples of this. There are hundreds of examples but turn to Daniel 2. Dan 2 is the great metal statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. Nebuchadnezzar did not understand the dream and he was skeptical of his servant's ability to interpret dreams and so he added the difficulty of revealing the dream as well as interpreting it. When none could tell him the dream he set out to destroy those servants because their profession was a scam. Daniel, however, prayed to God with his friends and in verse 19 the dream was revealed to him. In response in verse 21 Daniel says, "It is He who changes the times and the epochs..." That's an expression used by Paul in 1 Thess 5:1 that refers to changes in kingdoms. Daniel is saying that God is the one who brings about kingdom changes in history. Then he says, "He removes kings and establishes kings..." So not only does God bring about kingdom changes in history but also He brings about king changes. Now in verse 37 we see this confirmed, Daniel says, "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory;" So who gave Nebuchadnezzar his kingship over the kingdom of Babylon? God did. And he actually calls him the king of kings. This is a title given to only one Gentile king. What does it mean? A king of kings is the greatest king. It means Nebuchadnezzar is the greatest Gentile king. Remember that, we'll come back to it. In verse 38, "and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all." God caused Nebuchadnezzar, who was an unbeliever at this time, to rule over that kingdom. Now watch in verse 39 as the entire series of Gentile kingdoms is predicted in advance and takes us all the way to our own day, "After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you," which was what kingdom? Medo-Persia. "then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth..." which was what kingdom? Greece. Verse 40, "Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces." Which was what kingdom? Rome, phase one. Verse 41, "In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. ⁴²"As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. ⁴³"And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery." All that is highly involved but the main point is what kingdom? Rome again, but this time phase two and we are presently living in the development of that form of the kingdom of Rome. And then when it has re-formed verse 44, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not

be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

⁴⁵"Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." The fifth kingdom is what kingdom? God's kingdom. It comes to earth after the four successive Gentile kingdoms. So who controls kingdoms, the times and the epochs? God. God has already laid out in advance 600 years before Christ the four major Gentile kingdoms that would rule over the land of Israel as well as the final form of Rome which will be a global kingdom and which we are racing toward today. That shows you that God controls kingdoms.

Slide down to verse 48 to see that God controls the appointment of rulers within those kingdoms, "Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon." There we see the king promoting Daniel and my point is that under the auspices of Rom 13 the king's promotion is the means but God is over and above the means. God was the one who made Daniel favorable in the king's sight. So we see how God arranged the circumstances. And note verse 49, "And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel was at the king's court." So we see more means, the king appointing three more men through the request of Daniel but who is over and above the means? God. God was the one who made Daniel so favorable in the king's sight that Daniel could make requests of the king to appoint men under him in the administration. This is how governmental offices are filled.

Turn over to Dan 4. Here we have Nebuchadnezzar again. This time he has a vision of a great tree and its sheltering all the birds and beasts and then it's cut down. We won't go into all of it except to say that Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest Gentile king, became so arrogant that God humbled him by making him go around on all fours like an animal and eat grass until he acknowledged something. God did this with the greatest Gentile king and the first in the times of the Gentiles to be an everlasting memorial to Gentile kings and rulers against becoming arrogant. And what did God want him to acknowledge? Middle of verse 17, "In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men." That God is in control of history. This is to be a lesson to all Gentile rulers that God is the one over history and He gives the office too whoever He wants to for whatever purpose He is accomplishing. It may be to bless, it may be to curse, that is God's prerogative. Then in verse 30 you see the king reflecting on his majesty and in verse 31, while the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared; sovereignty has been removed from you...until" middle of verse 32, "until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes." This happened to Nebuchadnezzar, the first and greatest Gentile king in the times of the Gentiles and he went around and he ate grass on all fours and his fingernails grew out like eagles claws until in verse 34 he returned to his senses blessing God and I think what follows is his profession of faith. I think the greatest Gentile king, the one that stands at the head of the times of the Gentiles, came to faith. And I think he is set out

as an example to all Gentile rulers who follow that you should not get arrogant when you get into office and also of the importance of coming to faith in the one true God who gave you the office. That was taught from the very beginning but it has not been heeded. Most who go into office in this country never even read the Book of Daniel. But it's the most important book for Gentile politics ever written. And it's a travesty that they don't read this because this is wisdom.

Anyway, we could go on about this all day long. Dan 2 and 4 are not isolated cases. Daniel 8 speaks directly of Alexander the Great and his conquests. God put him into power. Daniel 11 goes into the greatest detail of any prophecy in the entire Bible. It predicts, this is all predictive, it hadn't happened yet, it was predictive; predicts the Persian rulers Cambyses II, Darius Hystaspes and Xerxes the Great who, after the fact his life was sketched in detail by Herodotus. Then it predicts the Greek rulers after Alexander the Great's empire broke into four parts, the Seleucid and Ptolemaic parts which vied over the land of Israel including much of the drama and twists and turns of the rise and fall of kings including Ptolemy, Seleucus, Ptolemy Soter I, Seleucus I Nicator, Antiochus I Soter, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Antiochus II Theos, Ptolemy III Euergetes, Seleucus, II Callinicus and many more including Antiochus IV Epiphanes who we read of in 1 and 2 Maccabees who persecuted the Jews horribly and desecrated the Temple and is the forerunner and picture of the anti-Christ who is to come. All of these were predicted by God including details of their life to show what?

Rom 13:1, **those (authorities) which exist are arranged and appointed by God.** He ultimately put them there. He uses means. The means are mentioned but they may be free elections, corrupt elections, revolutions, coup d'etats, murders, banishments, anything. The ruler and his administration may be good such as Cyrus the Persian who sent the Jews back to the promised land or it may be evil such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes who desecrated the temple. Whatever the means, intents or ideologies they were all appointed by God; all the Roman Caesars, all the Byzantine rulers, all the Sultans, all the Presidents of the United States including those who rule in all branches of government; executive, judicial and legislative were arranged for and appointed by God through various means, in order to fulfill His plan for history.

So for those two parts of the reason, first, that there is no human government except that given by God and there are no rulers except those which are appointed by God, we should willfully submit to governing authorities. And that is why Romans 13:2 gives this grand conclusion. **Therefore whoever resists authority has taken his stand against the ordinance of God.** To stand against them is to stand against God. This is not the total picture of course. Those who come out of this passage saying that we have to submit to the government at every point are doing a dis-service to Scripture. So we're out of time but understand that this is just a beginning and when we speak generally about the government it's true, we are to submit to the governing authorities. God put them there. Render to Caesar that which is Caesars. But there is much more and much of it regarding civil disobedience that I spoke of earlier and we will need to look at in order to have a full-orbed biblical posture toward the current governmental administration in our country.