

# Submitting to authority

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please, if you have God's Word with you, turn to Romans chapter 13, which is where we are this evening, Romans 13. We'll read the entire chapter, Romans, and beginning, yeah, obviously, verse 1 to the end.

Now hear God's Word, Romans chapter 13. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists God, what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

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

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.

[ 1 : 25 ] Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason, you also pay taxes.

For the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing. 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. Owe no one anything except to love each other.

For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandments are summed up in this word.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, and therefore love is fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.

[ 2 : 36 ] For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone. The day is at hand. So then, let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Let us walk properly as in the daytime. Not in orgies and drunkenness. Not in sexual immorality and sensuality. Not in quarreling and jealousy.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. Well, may God bless both the reading and the message of his word to us.

Romans 13, for me, takes me back to when I was a teenager and actually got arrested by the police in a police station. Now, it wasn't a proper arrest. I think my word, our pastor, is suddenly revealing stuff.

It wasn't a proper arrest. It was a building site, which we didn't know at the time was the brand new police station in St. Orstal Cornwall. We decided to jump over the park because we were fed up with the slides and the roundabouts and the swings and all of that.

[ 3 : 51 ] And we thought we would just play hide and seek in a building site and use the little round discs that are used for wall ties. You put a wall tie in between blocks as you build a cavity and they're round to hold them in tight.

And we thought we would throw them at each other. Just typical boys. Boys will be boys. And so here we are having a whale of a time until this police officer spoiled it.

Well, he, well, yeah. And so he pulled us to, he pulled us aside realizing that we were just boys. We just jumped over the hedge into a building site. We didn't know it was a police station until he pointed out to us saying, Now listen, lads, if you carry on messing around like this, you may find yourself in this building one day.

Pointed out to us that it was going to be a police station. The point is, is that governing authorities are a blessing. And they're a blessing from God. Police, judges, prison officers, these people are instituted by God into society as a blessing for good conduct and as a judge for bad conduct.

So any rebellion against them is a rebellion against God himself. This is what Romans 13 is pointing out.

[ 5 : 10 ] That God establishes these governing, these civil authorities, as a blessing on a society. Now they're not perfect, but we are to submit to them.

But there are exceptions when we can say no to the policeman. When we can say no to the judge. Okay? They are few and Christians shouldn't go around looking for the things that we can righteously disobey the law with.

The general rule is that we are to submit to the governing authorities. But there are exceptions. Christians, always obey until it's time to not obey.

Okay? Always obey until it's time to not obey. This means that there needs to be a huge amount of discernment on the side of the Christian to be able to know when to make that decision.

And many, many Christians get it wrong. Many Christians are fighting causes that they just not need to fight. And other Christians that aren't fighting those are looked upon by the ones who are fighting as hopelessly compromised.

[ 6 : 21 ] But this is an issue of discernment. Okay? It is right that we're to fight against certain authorities. But it is an exception. It's not a rule.

So Paul not only lays out that governing authorities are a blessing from God that we are to submit to, but then he lays out certain principles that we are to understand, verse 10 in particular, that love does no wrong.

That love does no wrong. And that love is fulfilling the law. Love is actually fulfilling God's law. And part of God's law, or what God has laid down, is the governing authorities.

And so to go against them unrighteously is actually to go against God, Paul says. To not submit to them when you should be submitting to them is to actually not to submit to God.

So Paul is actually putting, even though these authorities may be ungodly, or at least the people in them may be ungodly, the authority itself is actually a blessing from God.

[ 7 : 27 ] And so we end up living in a society full of tension. Okay? And the tension can be so subtle, it can come down to something like this.

That even though the law dictates this, I believe God has told me that I can whatever comes next. Now, I've seen that happen time and time again in churches, and no doubt you have.

People no longer serve in areas that they're more capable to serve in, simply by saying, I don't believe God has called me to this anymore. Well, that could be true, but it could also not be true. God cannot be used as the reason or excuse for not doing, or not serving, or not submitting to the authorities.

God sometimes is the reason why we shouldn't, but he's not the reason all the time. And just because he is some of the time, doesn't mean that we can use him whenever we feel like it.

This is what Proverbs has to say, that when the righteous rule, the people rejoice, and why wouldn't they? But when the wicked rule, the people mourn. Now, I want you to pay at least a fair bit of attention to that, because what Proverbs is doing, rightly, is making a distinction between the authority, the powers, and then the people in those powers.

[ 8 : 49 ] Okay? So the wicked, when they're in power, they have the same authority that the righteous did, it's just that they do something different with it. Okay? So there is a distinction here that can be made between police officers, or the police force, or the prison service, or judges, and then the type of people that make up those police officers, those judges, or those prison officers.

There's a distinction to be made between the established authority, the need for an authority at that level, and the people in that authority. So when the righteous rule, okay, the rule is the authority, and when the righteous do it, people rejoice.

Right? Because criminals get locked up, and that's a good thing. But when the wicked rule, then backhanders happen, and certain people get away with things that they shouldn't get away with.

Why? Because it's not the authority that's to blame, but it's those who are in authority that are bending, that skewering that issue there.

And this is something that we need to pay careful attention to, because if we don't, we won't know when to say, yes, I'm going to submit here, or no, I'm no longer going to submit here.

[ 10 : 05 ] So civil authority is meant to be understood as a blessing from God. But a distinction has to be made between the authority itself and the people in authority.

We are to submit to God, and we are to submit to God by submitting to the authorities. Now, here's an important distinction. If a police officer asks me to submit, I shouldn't because he's asked me.

If a judge asks me to submit to the law, I shouldn't just because he's asked me. If the Queen of England asks me to submit, and let's just say she does, okay, I shouldn't just because she's asked me.

In fact, any of these people who ask me to submit to their law, I shouldn't do it because they've asked me to. I should do it because God tells me to. And that's the lesson here.

We don't submit to the police because the police say so. We submit to the police because God says so. Okay? We don't submit to the judges and the law courts because they tell us to.

[ 11 : 08 ] We do it because God tells us to. And that's an important distinction to make because if we're able to make that kind of distinction and follow that, then when God tells us not to, okay, we're not under the authority of the police or the judges or anybody else.

We're determined by God. God tells us when to submit and when not to, when to obey and when it's right to not obey. So here are three headings, three simple headings to clarify this issue.

Now, a few things do need to be clarified. Several distinctions need to be made. And of course, several exceptions. So here are the headings. Number one, blessing.

Number two, submission. And then number three, discernment. And this is how we're going to understand the meaning of Romans 13. Blessing, submission, and discernment.

So let's take blessing. Verses one and two. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God.

[ 12 : 20 ] And those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed. And those who resist will incur judgment.

For the rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. The issue that Paul is laying out here is that when God has established an authority on earth, that that authority is a blessing.

It is a blessing to society. Judges, by and large, should lock up bad people and support good people. We live in a society, however, where this is slightly skewed when you see demonstrations in London over the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

And their comment, if you listen carefully, they always make the same accusation. The police are protecting the wrong people. They're protecting the people with the big houses and the big companies and the big cars and the rich, rich, 1%.

And us down here, who are having to lift off food banks and stuff like that, are being held back. So this whole issue becomes skewed in a society because the police are now caught in a middle ground because money, okay, buys power.

[ 13 : 41 ] Okay? Who was it? Was it not Warren Buffett, the other guy who said, you can have all the governments in the world you like, just give me control of the money. Okay?

Money buys power. That's corruption in authority. But by and large, by and large, it is true that the authorities that are established in this world, in this country, in America, and in other countries are there as a blessing for society.

That bad people get locked up and good people don't. Good people, it says here, should be rewarded, okay, in the same way bad people get locked up.

Now, we also learn that, here again, that vengeance is God's and not ours. God actually carries out his wrath, out his vengeance, through the authorities on earth.

So, give you an example. Last week, we learned that God says, you're not allowed to do anything because vengeance is mine. But here in Romans 13, he tells us how he does it.

[ 14 : 49 ] He does it through judges. He does it through priest's offices. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, but he carries out that vengeance through the justice system. It carries out that vengeance, that wrath, through the prison service.

Okay? Locking people up. Sending people to prison. In America, you can take it as far as the death penalty. God carries out his wrath through the authorities that he has established in the countries, in the world, that he has established.

So, people think that, well, I got caught and these people caught me. No, God is dealing with them. We don't like to think about it that way. We think, they're still going to have to meet God at some point, but God deals with people through authorities.

Whether the authorities themselves realize it or not. So, vengeance is mine, says the Lord, leave it to God. So, these authorities are a blessing.

But as we look at these authorities, we are to recognize that we too are to submit to them. But a distinction has to be made between the authority as a power and then the people in authority.

[ 16 : 05 ] Whether that people, whether that person is a righteous leader or a wicked leader, that will determine, by and large, the type of influence they have through the authority that they have been given.

Genghis Khan, who's probably not a man you'd expect to turn up in a sermon, but Genghis Khan used to, when he used to defeat his enemies, he used to tell them one thing. I am God's judgment.

That was it. He'd ride into battle, he'd defeat, you know, some of the Chinese armies and other people, and his argument was, I am God's judgment. Now, whether he was or not isn't the point, but the issue here is that that's partly true.

God works through wicked people, okay, as much as he works through righteous people. Now, that's something that we may find hard to stomach, okay, but that is true.

And the Old Testament is full of that truth. good people and bad people, God works through. Now, there is no authority on earth that isn't an authority unless it has been granted by God.

[ 17 : 13 ] And the best example of this is Jesus and Pilate. You will remember that as Jesus stood before Pilate, Pilate tries to explain to Jesus that he has the power.

Jesus knows better. Pilate says, do you not understand that I have the power to let you go or to crucify you? Do you not understand that I can let you go this very moment? I can let you go free and you can walk away or I can crucify you.

And Jesus, in turning to Pilate, says, you have no power at all, none, unless it is given to you by my Father in heaven. Jesus understood and trying to make Pilate understand that yes, he is in authority, yes, he is the type of person that he is, and yes, he will exercise his authority by turning to a crowd.

Okay, when was the last time you saw a judge in a courtroom turn to the gallery and say, what do you want me to do with him? When was I like, never.

But Pilate does that very thing. He turns to the crowd, the mob crowd, and says, you know, what do you want me to do? In fact, he washes his hands of Jesus. It doesn't make him innocent. What do you want me to do?

[ 18 : 29 ] He doesn't even undertake the authority that he's been given. But the authority that he has, he only has because God has given it to him.

So the issue here is that the spiritual condition and the moral condition of those people in power are always going to come into play. Okay? What type of head teacher do you have in the primary school?

will more or less dictate certain things of whether or not Christians can get in. Same with secondary schools. Okay? These things matter. We understand that those headships and authorities are important and governments are important, but we need to understand equally that the people in those positions matter.

When the righteous reign rule, the people rejoice. But when the wicked rule, the people mourn. It's true in the Old Testament.

Every time you have a good king, the people are good. Every time you have a bad king, the people are bad. Every time you have a good judge, the people are good. And every time you have a bad judge, the people are bad.

[ 19 : 35 ] It goes almost hand in hand. Leadership dictates the nation that follows that leadership. And so, Paul wants us to understand that it is true that authorities are a blessing.

Authorities are a blessing. Even the wicked people in authority are a blessing, but in a strange kind of way. But the things that come into play here is that it does, a distinction has to be made between the authority itself and the people in the position of authority.

But authorities, civil government, is a blessing from God. So secondly, submission. Submission. If we do not submit to the governing authorities, then we are not submitting to God.

It's as simple as that. If we do not submit to the governing authorities, whether we agree with them or not, if it's not against Scripture, if it's not anti-Christian, okay, we may think the taxes are too high and I'm not paying it.

Well, if you're not going to pay it, you're not submitting to God and that's something that Paul gets onto here. God wants us to understand that when we submit to the local government, that the bigger government, we are actually submitting to God.

[ 21 : 01 ] Now the issue here applies to those in authority as well. That if we have to submit to the lesser authorities because we submit to God, that doesn't mean it's any different for those in authority.

They also have to submit to God. Okay? I have to submit to God and those in power of authority have to submit to God and if everyone is submitting to God, then there's no problem.

The trouble is, is in a nation where you have Christians submitting to God and in a civil government that doesn't, then tension occurs, problems happen and we need people like Tare and the Christian Institute to be able to go into parliament and make cases.

Okay? The Christian case for the way things should be. So Paul moves on saying that authority is a blessing, but he moves on to this issue of taxes as an example.

That it does seem to be a recurring theme in scripture, doesn't it? That Christians don't want to pay tax. Or it was the Pharisees first who didn't want to pay tax and it could be here in the Christian church that they don't want to pay tax.

[ 22 : 09 ] And I wholeheartedly agree that we shouldn't. But the trouble is, is I'm being told to. And this is why I'm being told to.

Because if God has established those authorities, then somebody has to pay for them. Okay? We pay for them by paying our taxes.

So God establishes them and then he tells us to pay for them. This seems unfair. And so you can imagine the tension that you feel of what's happening here.

Remember the people that came to Jesus. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? It's the same kind of question. And Jesus understands that he's going to be drawn into a trap and he says, you know, render to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar.

Render to God the things that belong to God. In other words, get the issue straight in your own mind first. So he says, bring me a coin. And they bring him a coin. He says, well, whose image is on the coin.

[ 23 : 08 ] And they say, well, Caesar's is on the coin. He says, well, give to Caesar that which Caesar has managed to get his image on it. But then make sure you give to God that which belongs to God. In other words, give to God that which has got his image on you.

And that's a helpful distinction here in Romans 13, that you've got to be really clued up on what belongs to God and what belongs to the authorities. You are not to give to the authorities that which belongs to God.

Okay? And you're not to give to God that which, or not give anybody that which belongs to the authorities. So pay your taxes. But make sure your life is given to God, not over to the state.

You don't give yourself away like that. You give to God what belongs to God and you give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Paul's saying, pay your taxes.

But the objection is clear and here's the objection. I don't like the way Caesar's spends my money. Right? I give all these taxes every year and I get this horrible thing in the park that looks like a totem pole and I don't agree with it.

[ 24 : 18 ] What a waste of money that is. Okay? And how many of us, how many of us, even in the church, will not submit to the authorities above us because we don't like the way they're spending the money?

So what do we do? We don't pay. We don't give. We don't pay our taxes. We don't tithe, whatever it may be. What are we doing? Well, we're elevating ourself above the authorities that God has put in position.

And we're doing it, we say, out of a conscience that is godly. Well, it cannot be that godly because you only get to do that after you've not submitted to the authorities that God has told you to submit to in the first place.

I may not like the way the government spends their money, but I do not have a choice when it comes to God in not submitting to that. God wants me to submit to him by submitting to them, and one way I have to do it is to pay what is owed.

And then Paul here goes through a whole list of things of making sure you're in a position where you don't owe anybody anything. In other words, if you do, pay it off quickly. Never be in the position where someone is always chasing you up.

[ 25 : 36 ] Pay what you owe. Don't, maybe next week, haven't got it this week. Listen, on a practical note, if someone in here owes somebody else money in this church, let's just say, and you don't have it, don't avoid them, just be honest and say, you know what, I don't have it.

I promise that I'll give it to you when I have it, but I don't have it at the moment. That is far better, okay, far more God honoring than it is to avoid them by saying, I haven't got it, I can't go to church because, right?

So the issue here is clear. Number one is we don't have a choice whether or not we give or not, depending on whether or not we like what the authorities do with it. We just don't have that choice.

That is to not submit to God. That is, in fact, ungodly. But it's also true that if we do owe something, then we must pay it up and pay it up quickly, even if it's between brothers and sisters here in the church.

But there are exceptions when it comes to submitting. And that is when the civil authorities, the governing authorities, say that this must be taught or that must be taught, and it's unbiblical.

[ 26 : 53 ] unbiblical. Or when this is what you must have now in your church. This is what you must practice in worship. This is how I expect you to parent.

This is how I expect family life to be. Now, when the governing authorities start laying down laws in those areas, we have a God-given right to say, hang on a minute, you are now speaking out of your sphere of competence.

Okay? They are not competent to speak on these matters. Okay? They have been given an area of authority to speak into, but there's a lot of things that they don't have authority to speak into.

Issues of worship. Worship through the family, worship through parenting, worship even through obeying God's law, and most importantly, obeying through, obeying God's law.

So when those in authority start speaking outside of their sphere of competence and start rearranging God's law and start rearranging God's meaning, to God's law, okay, we then have a God-given right to not submit.

[ 27 : 56 ] There is a time to obey, and then there is a time to not obey. Okay? We are always to obey until it's time not to obey, and that requires discernment.

And so with this last point, this is what we move on to, discernment. The issue regarding submission is when do I do it, and when do I not do it?

Okay, when do I submit, and when is it the time to no longer submit? And the only way to get the right answer is to be able to discern God's will very carefully.

Now, hopefully, this should go without saying, but I don't think it can go without saying. So I'm going to remind you. Verses 8 through to 14, Paul reminds us that God's law is good.

That God's law, to uphold God's law, is to fulfill the law. To love is to fulfill the law. The point here is that love and law go together.

[ 29 : 01 ] Okay? Love and law go together. Love for God, love for our neighbor, and love for God's law are all compatible. There's no tension.

Now, our neighbor, generally speaking, will want us to fulfill God's law with them. At least, some of it. But there will be parts that they won't want us to fulfill.

They want us to be a godly neighbor, perhaps, but they won't want us to be a godly neighbor at the same time. Because godliness here speaks into everything.

And so it's one thing to know God's law, it's another thing to practice it. How do we apply it? In discerning and discernment. In a discerning way.

So I'm going to do it with a current issue. The issue is full of emotion. It's full of tension. I'm not likely to get locked up, but there's always the possible chance.

[ 29 : 59 ] Okay? But we're not going to worry about that for a moment. But there is no clarity over the issue that I'm going to put forward. I'm going to put forward the biblical case, and I'm going to show you, hopefully, how God's will, God's love, and God's discernment is to be applied to a real life issue today.

So we'll take the issue that's been on the news recently over in Ireland to do with abortion. Full of tension. Full of emotion. There is no way, no way to handle this.

Even the most sensitive person who handles it in the most sensitive way, if handled biblically, will be accused of the most outrageous things.

Okay? Simply because they handle it biblically. So, simply put, God's law says, do not murder. That is a loving thing to do.

Do not murder. Most people would agree with this, but most people would only agree with this under certain circumstances. And abortion is one of them. Now, the whole issue gets far more complicated when you have to deal with the issue of rape.

[ 31 : 12 ] What happens when a woman is raped? It's horrible. Now, I can't even begin to imagine or even pretend that I can get close to imagining or knowing what goes through any woman's mind at that point.

And it'll be different for every single woman that has gone through it. But the question that is being arisen now, okay, is should that woman be entitled to an abortion?

Should that woman be entitled to an abortion? The issue is, that's not actually the issue. That's not actually the issue. Why are the authorities, authorities, why are the authorities so quick to make a second victim?

Think about it. In a situation like that where a woman is raped resulting in a child, you have one guilty person and two that are innocent. Okay?

One guilty person and two that are innocent. The man is the guilty party. The innocent is the woman and the resulting pregnancy.

[ 32 : 25 ] Both of those are innocent. So what sense does it make to make the situation right by making another victim? By killing the child?

What sense does it make, okay, well, how does it make any sense at all to be able to make, to take the innocent and turn them into a victim?

If you're going to kill anyone, shouldn't it be the man? Okay, if you're going to do the right thing, doesn't it make sense to go after the man rather than the child? And yet, this seems to be perfectly acceptable.

Now, I understand that this is an issue full of high emotion, high tension, and a lot of feelings. But the issue here is that feelings don't trump God's authority.

They are real. They are painful. And they don't go away. But the issue is, is if everyone in society went off their feelings, there would be no authority at all.



[ 33 : 29 ] Everyone would just do what they felt was the right thing to do. I think both men and women need to learn from the prostitute found in One Kings.

I think we need to pay careful attention to the prostitute who understood carefully and wisely when she was brought before Solomon over the death of a child and whose child was this.

And she understood the value of the child living. Okay? She understood. She was a wise woman, despite the fact that she was a prostitute. She understood the issue.

And there's a lesson there for all of us that we can learn from that woman. And it's a lesson we should learn quickly. Now, many Christians will agree with what I said, but there's going to be a lot of Christians who don't.

Now, those who don't will always struggle to rationalize their case. And their case will only ever be rationalized on the individual feelings and trauma. But the issue here is, while all of those things are true, and they are true, I'm not belittling them in any way.

[ 34 : 35 ] And if I was a woman and that happened to me, I would probably be so distraught that I would go ahead and have an abortion. I just couldn't, I just could not handle, I just could not handle the whole thing.

But I'm not the authority on the issue. God says, don't murder. And so, taking all these things into consideration, we are still left with the fact that God says, do not murder.

That's discernment applied in a very difficult and a current situation, when it's right to no longer obey the law.

So, in conclusion, it is the case that some Christians can make mountains out of molehills. They just want to fight every single battle. And they feel that other Christians that don't fight anything are hopelessly compromised.

And the thing is, it could be true in both cases. It could be true in both cases. It is true that some Christians are hopelessly compromised, and it's also true that other Christians just want to fight everything when it doesn't need fighting.

[ 35 : 46 ] But the issue here is that we must worship God and be discerning in our worship as we worship God properly. As we learn in the Reformation talk on Wednesday evening, sola scripture is important.

It's something worth fighting for. That God's word is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. The life before a living God who sees our every movement, thought, and judgment.

He is the one that we all have to come face to face with. Now, it is also true that the morality of the church and the morality of the world overlaps. Okay?

There's plenty of people in the world that believe that murder is wrong, and nearly everybody in the church, hopefully everybody in the church, equally believes that murder is wrong.

The morality overlaps. It gets difficult because the Christian believes that murder is wrong under any circumstances. But the world doesn't.

[ 36 : 50 ] If you're under a number of certain weeks and in the womb, it's perfectly okay to be murdered. Okay? So, we take this issue, which we think is black and white like murder.

The trouble is, it's not black and white. It's very complicated and very difficult. But the issue for us is not one of feeling, though it is one of feeling.

At the end of the day, it's one where we are to come under the authority of God and not under our own feelings for direction and discernment.

I'm not saying that any of this is easy. And I'm not saying that we're not going to fail all the way to our graceful glorification. We will. All the time. What I'm saying is, in a world that God designed, okay, God's standard is the standard.

God's authority is the difference between what is truly right and truly wrong. So, as Paul says here, addressing us directly, let us walk properly.

[ 37 : 51 ] Walk properly as light in the darkness. Easy? Not at all. But let us do it. Amen. zausia Z bread Amen.

Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[ 40 : 14 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Amen.