

Subjection to Civil Authorities

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[0 : 00] God has established government.

And He did so for very specific and limited purposes.! And in fact, government will one day pass away.

! The church won't. But the governments that God has established will pass away. And He has placed every human under some form of government.

And we all know there's a wide variety of forms. And God's establishment of government, or what He calls in the Scriptures, the governing authorities is detailed to us in Romans chapter 13, 1-5.

And to understand the necessity of those verses, we are driven back in time to Genesis chapter 3.

[1 : 18] There's a direct correlation. Because in Genesis, we find our original parents, Adam and Eve, living in a perfect environment, having dominion over the animals and over the birds of the air, having an abundance of food, as every living creature at that time was a vegetarian.

And our original parents were enjoying walks with the Lord in the cool of the evening. And while I won't develop this theme too aggressively this evening, but when you read of God interacting with people on earth, and particularly with Adam, that is the second person of the Trinity.

That is the Lord Jesus Christ, in a pre-incarnate appearance, which theologians refer to as a theophany or a Christophany.

And Adam and Eve were given titanic freedoms to exist in God's perfect world. They were given certain positive commands, such as subdue and populate the earth.

In all the commands they were given, there was one negative. Of the many trees in the garden that bore delicious fruit, there was one tree in the middle of the garden that in Genesis chapter 2, verse 16 and 17, God said this, The Lord God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden, you may eat freely.

[3 : 11] But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. For in the day you eat from it, you will surely die.

Pretty plain spoken. And I'm not going to let anyone off the hook tonight. If women are in here, I might be a little softer on the men.

That command was given to Adam before Eve had been created. That was a command God gave Adam. Any knowledge she had of the prohibition placed on the tree in the midst of the garden was relayed to her by her husband.

Well, we know what happened. In Genesis chapter 3, we read these words. Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.

And he said to the woman, Indeed has God said, by the way, all lies originate there for the human race, as God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden.

[4 : 21] The woman said to the serpent, From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat. But from the fruit of the tree, which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat from it, or touch it, or you will die.

And let me add there, God didn't say that, did He? The serpent said to the woman, You surely will not die. For God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to her eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband, and I always hate to say this if Diane's in the room, who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves loin coverings. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the

presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

They died. They died at that moment. And then, of course, that begs the question, didn't they live for hundreds of years and produce male and female children?

[5 : 59] Yeah, they did. But they died the moment they ate the forbidden fruit. They died spiritually. They became separated from God.

That's spiritual death. And eternal spiritual death is hell. But they died spiritually there in the garden. They became separated from God.

Sin, which already existed in the universe because of Lucifer and the fallen angels, but sin was introduced to the human family, and I cannot understate this, fellas, everything changed.

Everything. The wellhead of humanity was poisoned. Everything that has flowed from that wellhead to this very day is tainted with sin.

Now, here we see our original parents taking for themselves and for all who would descend from them, and by the way, that's everyone, a new nature.

[7 : 12] They now have a new nature. It is called a sin nature, and that nature would dominate men and women for generations and millennia to come, even down to our day and beyond.

And I cannot understate to you how everything changed when our parents chose the path of disobedience. We see this manifested immediately as Adam and Eve tried to hide from God.

Where do you go to hide from God? Jonah tried it. He said, I went down in the depths of the sea to the roots of the mountains, and God was there.

By the way, we didn't discover mountains in the ocean until about 300 years ago. Should have read the Bible. We thought the earth was flat for thousands of years. Should have read the Bible.

He hung this sphere on nothing. Where do you go to hide from God? And they're going to see this disobedience manifested because when their children are born, one brother murders another.

[8 : 30] I'm always amazed being in the criminal justice system when we had four people on earth, one was a murderer and one a murder victim. And we had four people. You see it in the flood when God destroyed the human race except for eight people.

You see it in the people of Babel. And so it has gone down through the generations. Now, there's much we can learn from Genesis chapter 3, but that's not our focus this evening.

We are discussing the establishment of government found in Romans 13. But the point is that government was made necessary as a result of the actions of our parents in the garden.

We live in a fallen world. And it is a world without the controls and restrictions of government. We tend to a state of anarchy and rebellion.

That's what we gravitate toward. That is our sin nature manifesting itself. I see it every day. I see it in the reports I read. We see it in this horrific attack in the church in Texas.

[9 : 43] I got shot an 18-month-old four to six times with an AR-15, guys. Point-blank range. I don't know how you can do that. I couldn't do that if my life depended on it.

Not that it ever would. That's our sin nature. In Romans chapter 13, we read this. Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.

For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

For it is the minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid, for it does not bear the sword for nothing. For it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

[10 : 58] Therefore, it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. Now, the apostle Paul comes along, writing obviously by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and tells us we are to be subject to the governing authorities.

In a broad sense, every person on earth is subject to the governing authorities. But Paul's audience is believers, is Christians.

Every believer is to be subject to the governing authorities. And I say this with a little fear and trepidation. Paul did not say, if you find yourself fortunate enough to be living in a constitutional republic, be subject to the governing authorities.

He did not say, if you lived in a democracy or a republic or a monarchy, be subject to the authorities. He says that there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Paul lived under the Roman Empire, a dictatorship, with a guy that professed himself to be God as the ruler.

[12:16] You know, they kept getting new Caesars, that would be a hint. You know, every time a Caesar came along and said, I'm God. No, you're not. So Paul's going to give some reasons here to submit to governing authorities.

First of all, government is by divine decree. And again, there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Human government has been ordained by God for the benefit of society. And this is hard to say, and you're going to have to put your thinking caps on.

If you disagree, that's okay. Tell Mike, he'll pass the word along to me. No government has ever existed in violation of the sovereign will of God.

Now, we've had some horrible governments, haven't we? But God is sovereign. He's on the throne. As the psalmist says in Psalm 62-11, all power belongs to God.

[13:19] God is a ruler over all things, but He has, for a period of time yet to be determined, sovereignly allowed Satan to have limited power over the world and the affairs of men.

John told us that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. He went on to call Satan the God, little g, of this world.

This is all part of the fallen world we live in. And it takes us right back to the garden. All this goes back to the garden. There used to be a song about if we could just get back to the garden, but not have God.

Wouldn't work. This happened in the garden. Over the centuries, we've seen very corrupt governments rise, and we've seen them fall. In the 20th century, we saw Hitler and Stalin and Mao Zedong responsible for the deaths of hundreds of millions of people.

I think of Pol Pot and Cambodia, 50 million people. Before them, there were evil empires such as Persia, which is modern-day Iran, by the way, Assyria, and Babylon, which is modern-day Iraq, and of course, there's Rome.

[14:41] There's Rome. Believers who find themselves under such governments or rulers are in subjection to them.

It is part of God's divine plan for fallen mankind. But believers are not to blindly follow every decree of every government. There is an exception, and I'll get to that.

I will say this, though, that when I was in China with Phillips, we met with the president of China. I was in the room with the vice president, and then we met with the president, and the chairman and the executive went in with him.

I was out in the outer room. But I kept thinking, I wish I could talk to that guy one-on-one and tell him, you know, you're Christians in this society. If they're really following the Bible, they're the best citizens you have.

And they don't know that. They don't know that. So the first command here is to submit to human government because it has a divine origin.

[15:46] And second, resistance to government is rebellion against God. Romans 13, 2, the first part of that verse. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God.

And this is simple. Government has been established by God. If one rebels against government, he's rebelling against God who established the government. Rebellion against God is taken very seriously by the Lord.

In the book of Numbers, 250 men rebelled against God's established government. The earth opened up, fire enveloped them, and the ground swallowed them. Pretty serious.

The next day, the people of Israel grumbled again. That wasn't a time to grumble. These guys got annihilated. And the next day, Israel grumbled against God.

14,700 perished. I don't know how God came up with that number. 14,700 died. Rebelling against God is a heady thing, boys.

[16:50] It's a heady thing. Third, those who resist government will be punished. Second part of verse 13. And they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

The condemnation Paul is speaking of here is not the direct judgment of God. We just saw that. It is speaking of the fact that men must pay a price for having committed crimes against the government.

That's why I'm here. That's why I was an FBI agent. Crimes against the government. It is called punishment for crimes. Government has even been given the right and duty in certain circumstances to inflict capital punishment, the death penalty, on certain offenders. When Peter drew his sword to protect Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord forbade him. Had Peter killed a guard or soldier arresting Jesus, he would have been rightfully executed by Rome.

And you know, I'm asked all the time, do I support capital punishment? My answer is, yeah, I do. And then the person's quick head, well, do you really believe it's a deterrent? I said, absolutely. [18:04] That person's never going to murder anybody else. Never will. And I investigated eight capital murders, and seven of those got convicted and have been executed.

One was acquitted. But the seven I that I worked on, they all have been executed. Now, there's a lot we can learn from punishment under the Mosaic Law.

And I don't have time to develop this, so be like Bereans and search the Scriptures to see what if I'm saying is true. This is the Mosaic Law. The punishment given must meet the crime.

It was not over too much punishment, and it was not too little punishment. Punishment was inflicted by the proper governmental authority.

It was not to be inflicted by the victim or the victim's family. Punishment was never to be for personal revenge. You might remember months ago, I think it was before Mike got here actually, but I preached on a Sunday morning about the cities of refuge and how a guy could accidentally kill somebody, run over with his chariot or whatever.

[19:21] Family wanted to kill him. If he made it to one of the six cities of refuge, he was safe for a time. Punishment was designed to deter crime.

They'd say, look at that guy. Boy, I don't want to go through that. The law and punishment were to be impartial. It didn't matter who you were. If you did the crime, you did the time.

Punishment was inflicted without delay. Punishment delayed was considered punishment denied.

We execute people today in America that have been on death row 18 to 20 years.

Ironically, the defense attorneys are the ones to delay it. And then their last tactic is to say, well, it's been too long since the crime. He should be let off.

They're the ones that delayed it. It's amazing. With the exception of a capital offense, the offender had the possibility of pardon and rehabilitation.

[20:28] Under the Mosaic law, once the penalty was paid in full, the offender was allowed back into society as a respectable citizen. He'd paid his debt. Next, government serves to restrain evil.

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. God has ordained civil government to restrain evil.

Now remember, we live in a fallen world. There's evil everywhere at different levels. Paul is speaking here generally. There are times when governments abuse their authority and fear grips the law-abiding citizen.

Paul experienced that. In some respects, we sometimes experience it ourselves. We feel like maybe the government's out of control. But even wicked regimes, crimes such as murder and theft, are often deterred.

I mean, Hitler did horrible things, but at least he got the trains to run on time. They said he was the best train guy they ever had. God speaks to all people concerning their conduct.

[21:41] He speaks through conscience. He speaks through creation. And he has spoken to us through Christ. Every unregenerate ruler knows instinctively right and wrong.

God has put that in us. Without obedience to such laws, society will self-destruct. And government serves to promote good.

The Bible says, Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

For it is a minister of God to you for good. If we're living in obedience, then we should be praised. We just absolutely should be praised.

God desires that civil government promotes the public good. Generally speaking, and there are horrible exceptions, peaceful and law-abiding citizens have been favorably treated by their

governments.

[22 : 46] If government is following God's design, then the people should have no fear. People who do good should receive praise from their government.

We are to look to our government for protection of life and property. At the Barville Police Department, we receive hundreds of 911 calls a year asking us to do just that.

We also get some calls like, what do I set the oven on to make a turkey? But we won't get into that tonight. Paul understood that government was to do what was right.

In fact, he used his Roman citizenship, remember, to appeal a case once to Caesar. The Jews wanted him executed. They were trying to convince the local Roman authorities.

And they're getting ready to beat the target. And Paul said, oh, by the way, I'm a Roman citizen. They went into panic mode. The punishment for beating a Roman citizen was you took the next beating.

[23 : 50] If you killed him, they killed you. And he ultimately appealed that case to Caesar. And you know what? The Roman authority down there said, you know, he didn't have to do it.

I was going to let him go. So did Paul make a mistake? No. God said, you're going to Rome. And that's how God got him to Rome. He was taken up there to appear before Caesar.

It is not wrong to look to your government for protection. When Paul confronted the evil silversmith, a riot broke out. Paul was rescued.

Remember who rescued him? The town clerk. The town clerk rescued him. And he broke up the riot, and he ordered everyone to go home. And he was the governing authority, and they respected him, and they did.

It is in this passage that God declares the civil official to be a minister of God. This is regardless of beliefs or his relationship to God.

[24 : 55] He may not have any. In the Roman Empire, he probably didn't. That is a duty I wish every public employee in every government in America understood. Public officials are doing the Lord's work whether he realizes it or not.

I believe we do our greatest work for promoting the peace and safety of our people. I mean, more of a police. We're here to protect and serve.

That's what we do. Rulers are empowered by God to inflict punishment for disobedience. But if you do what is evil, these are God's words, be afraid.

Well, that couldn't be any clearer, could it? If you're going to go out here and do what is evil, and we have that in this town, be afraid.

For it, and that's government, does not bear the sword for nothing. For it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

[26 : 08] In a just society, those who do evil have reason to be afraid. The sword mentioned there is an instrument of death.

It represents the right of civil government to inflict punishment, which can include the death penalty for those who deserve it. As a police officer, I bear a sword called a Glock .40 caliber semi-automatic pistol.

I have it on right now. But that particular sword is used to protect myself. It's used to protect other officers. It's used to protect all you guys as law-abiding citizens.

And, you know, I have taken an oath to protect others and to do my best to prevent serious bodily injury or death.

I have the right to take a human life to prevent serious bodily injury or death.

[27 : 14] That's been given to me by the government. In this verse, the Lord affirms the punishment of evildoers, including execution.

And that takes us right back to Genesis 9, verse 6. Whoever sheds man's blood by his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God he made man.

Most Western countries have banned capital punishment. Most states in America have banned capital punishment. Let me say that those who do so are outside the will and clear revelation of God.

When a society rejects capital punishment, it comes under blood guiltiness from God. We now find ourselves living in a country that largely bans execution except for the unborn.

That's who we execute by 4,400 a day. So do the math. Let me back up and also say this. I've given a speech. Is extemporaneous like on the spot?

[28 : 18] Okay, Paul. Mike didn't answer. I'm going to let him. I was in a group of police officers and they said, we're going to give you an assignment. One of you has got to give a speech up here. Well, they all said, well, Tom Holland can do that.

They pointed to me. So I got up here with nothing and I gave them this. And I said, do you know, I told the 39 officers, I said, do you realize you're all in the Bible?

Some of you have never read the Bible. Some of you don't even believe in the Bible. Some of you don't own a Bible, but you're in there. Now, your individual name is not in there because it would be too voluminous. And I read that government, he bears the sword.

Branch of the government bears the sword. And I said, that's you. And they'd never seen that. They had no clue. Government should be submitted to for conscience' sake.

Verse 5, Romans 13, Therefore, it is necessary to be in subjection not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

[29 : 22] We are to submit to civil authority for fear of punishment and because of the wrath God permits civil government to inflict. But more so as believers, we submit to civil authority for the sake of conscience.

As God's children, we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. We have His voice telling us that disrespect for government is wrong. And there are times we know when the government engages in activities that we don't like.

It is for the sake of our Christian conscience that we choose the right path. Now, I promised an answer to you earlier and I'm going to give it to you now.

Are we ever to disobey our government? And let's not worry about China and Russia. Let's talk about the United States of America. Are we ever to disobey our government?

I had vigorous conversations when I was an FBI agent with some of my fellow agents that were believers. There were only a handful of us. But they didn't like my look on this.

[30 : 32] I think the answer is yes. I think it's yes. When our government or when the government of Britain or the government of wherever asks its people that are followers of Christ and commands the followers of Christ to do what is a clear violation of the word of God we are not only allowed to disobey we are commanded to disobey.

We're commanded to. Peter and John were ordered to cease preaching in the name of Jesus. They appeared before the supreme court of that day the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was the president congress senate and supreme court of Israel and they appeared before them and they said it's real simple do we obey man or do we obey God?

Well we all know there's only one answer to that right? When man even those in authority over us asks us to do something that is contrary to God's revealed word we obey God and we disobey the government and I don't say that lightly I'm I'm working for Caesar and I and I don't say that lightly but before we do so two at least two conditions must first be met one the passage of scripture that we're going to lean on and embrace to disobey a governmental order must be very clear it's got to be clear if the if the federal government came to this church and ordered pastor Mike to perform same sex marriages in the words of us living in the country that ain't going to happen it's not going to happen that would be a clear line in the sand beyond which this or any true church would go and we'd be in disobedience come what may but there are certain things in this road that we're walking on tonight that go beyond the ridiculous several years ago there were a number of churches in California

I know they had churches in California no John MacArthur's got a church I mean they have churches there were several churches in California that sued local governments for making them put up exit signs in the church they said we're not under you know the state the state has no business coming in here and forcing us to put up exit signs they argued the government had no power to do so guys that is not our fight we come off looking ridiculous they're there those signs are put there for protection that's to save lives that is not our fight we got to pick the fights that are biblically appropriate the fights that are worth fighting we don't that would be so

[34 : 26] I mean can you imagine the headline Highland Park Church refuses to allow the fire marshal to put up exit signs we'd come off as silly that'd be absurd so first of all we got to make sure we have the backing of scripture and I mean clear scripture clear scripture there shouldn't be any second guessing on that but secondly if we're going to disobey government and we think we have this clear scripture we've got to be willing to pay the penalty for that disobedience to Caesar and Caesar which is the government will require something from us if we're going to disobey him then

we've got to pay the penalty and there will be a penalty to pay and if we disobey we must stand tall pay the penalty exacted regardless of what it is now I'm going to get off a little bit on one thing that's always kind of aggravating me when George

Bush was governor of Texas there was a woman on trial down there for murder horrendous murder killed another woman and did so with a pickaxe about 40 blows arrested prosecuted sentenced to death got saved on death row apparently radically saved chaplain prison chaplain letter to the Lord literally was living for the Lord there was an outpouring of some named guys Pat Robertson on the 700 Club and others that since she is now a believer she should be exonerated some wanted her released some said commuted sentence I totally disagreed you still owe a debt to Caesar she owed the debt to society and the only way she could pay that debt was through death and George Bush understood that and she was executed and he was roundly condemned for it of course the non-capital punished people were already condemning him but people that believed in it thought she had this free pass now that she was with her there's nothing about that in scripture and you know I would like to think if I'm on death row for doing something like that and I get saved I'm going to understand I still owe a debt and I'm going to go to God I'm saved I know I'm going to be disciplined you know whatever loss of reward or whatever but I still owe this if for no other reason I went to this family that I took their loved one away from them and I would tell that family my last words would be I hope you can find your heart to forgive me not because of me but for your sake because it'll be the cancer that will eat at you and forgiveness let me say something about forgiveness guys guy comes in he murders your children well I got to forgive him forgiveness might be going to

God I don't want to get emotional Mike I'm not going to look at you forgiveness might be going to God and said I can't handle this God I'm going to let you take care of it that may be the I mean I'm not going to go to that guy and say hey it's okay because it's not okay I may just get to the point where I said God you're going to have to take care of this now I don't agree with the movie where the guy said he wanted this guy dead for killing a family member the preacher said haven't you ever heard vengeance belongs to his mind saith the Lord he said I'm good with that if he hurries and lets me watch we can't be like that here when Paul stood before the Roman governor Festus and made his appeal to Caesar he said this if I'm a wrong doer and if I have committed anything worthy of death I do not refuse to die if I've committed a crime an atrocity that meets the standard of capital punishment do it

I'm not going to refuse to die Paul acknowledged there were times when capital punishment was justified and if he had committed a capital offense against the state he was willing to pay the penalty and ultimately we know he was executed but unlawfully and Caesar is paying an eternal punishment for that Paul said I'm willing to take my punishment if I deserve it we must be so willing and leave the rest in God's hands I've met men that disobeyed government because they were trying to exact and violate their Christian conscience probably the one that comes to my mind most readily is Richard Warmbrand and I met Richard several times founder of Voice of the Martyrs 14 years in a Romanian prison most of it in solitary confinement the other was Alan

[40 : 08] Yuen Chinese man 22 years in prison just on the border in China on the border with Mongolia where the high for the year is like 32 and he was there at hard labor he had six kids at home when he went into prison little kids and almost every day he told me this himself I was sitting closer than I am to Mr. Lee in my hotel room and he told me this he said they came into my prison cell every day and said you know if you'll sign this paper that says I deny Christ will send you home and he refused wouldn't sign it after 12 years at hard labor he talked to me about the cold and working out sunrise to sunset a bowl of rice at noon and a bowl of rice with some hot water poured over in the evening after 12 years he told the Lord if you don't somehow strengthen me

I'm going to sign that paper I want to go home I don't want to deny you and his crime was baptizing 300 people that's what he was in prison for he prayed for God to strengthen him he went out he worked all day came in that night and the guard said we've had to double cell because of overcrowding you have a roommate the cell wasn't as big as that little square there so now he's got a roommate and he goes in and the guy walks over and shakes his hand he says my name is Watchman Nee it'd be like you guys have to go to prison and the guy says I'm John MacArthur or I'm Billy Graham he was the Billy Graham of China that was his roommate Watchman Nee was ultimately either killed or died in prison Alan made it out 22 years 10 years of house arrest finally got released and that next week baptized 300 people he's with the Lord now but I got to meet him twice