

The Source of Civil Authority

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[0:00] Romans chapter 13.

Romans 13, and we're going to be looking at verses 1 through 7, or at least we're going to begin to. You've heard that many times before, haven't you? And we're going to spend a couple of Sunday nights speaking about the, well, the subject that these seven verses speak to, instruct us about, about government and the role of government, really more specifically our relationship to civil authority.

And I want to spend quite a bit of time on the, I think, the most important aspect of it. A particular aspect or feature of our responsibility to civil authority that we had better get, or we're not going to get the rest of it, any of it.

So we'll be looking at that tonight. Romans chapter 13 and verses 1 through 7. I'll read it here in just a moment. But let's remember something. And, you know, sometimes it is perceived as the preacher belaboring a point.

But this is one I need to continue to put before you and have you remember as we work our way through the rest of Romans. And that is everything that we're studying now, all the way to the end of the book, all the way to the end of the letter, is attached to what Paul said in Romans chapter 12, verse 1.

[1:42] That famous passage. So let's remember. Always to keep that in our minds. Paul exhorted every believer, every follower of Christ to do what?

To present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. That's how he launches out into verse 12.

And it is from there, from that basis, that foundational principle, statement, really command, that everything else builds throughout the rest of the letter.

So let's keep that in our mind because as we go forward, and we've already finished up chapter 12 and now we're getting into chapter 13. As we go forward, Paul is going to instruct us on just what that looks like.

That is, presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to God. Just what does that look like? How does that play out? How do we live that out?

[2:48] And so in chapter 12, and this is ground we've already covered, remember, he showed us what that looks like in the context of the church, within the body of Christ.

How presenting our lives a living sacrifice, our bodies a living sacrifice, what that looks like in the church. And now as we get into chapter 13, he is taking us outside the church into a very important area of life.

Extremely important. Very significant. And that is in the area of civil authority. He is going to now show us what presenting our bodies a living sacrifice should look like in the context of citizenship. And this is very important. Very key. All right, so Romans chapter 13, verses 1 through 7. Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.

For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

[4:10] For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is God's minister and avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Therefore, you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake. For because of this, you also pay taxes.

Oh boy, subject to taxes here. For they are God's ministers. Again, they are ministers, God's ministers, attending continually to this very thing. That is the ministry of God. Render therefore to all their due, taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

[5:16] Alright? So there is, or are, seven verses where Paul unfolds the Christian's responsibility or how we are to relate to our civil authorities.

Now let me cover just a few things before we actually get into the text. First of all, you should know that some Bible scholars over the years have questioned the authenticity of these verses, these seven verses.

Not this guy, but there are those who have over the years and still today. And they charge that Paul did not write these verses. And so they would say that these seven verses represent, the technical term is an interpolation.

It's an interruption in Paul's writing. And these verses were written by somebody else after Paul wrote his letter. In fact, they would argue possibly years after Paul wrote this letter.

And they would point to the fact that, you know, if you took these seven verses out, the flow of thought, the kind of the scheme, the theme of writing would not miss a beat.

[6:34] And so it just seems to make sense that these don't go here. Now, I don't agree, of course. I don't think that's right. And really, there is no hard evidence, textually or otherwise, to believe that Paul did not write these verses.

And I would even argue that the verses, these seven verses, do not form any kind of interruption in the thought. They make perfect sense. Again, as I say, and as I've already said, starting with verse 1 of chapter 12, he is now going to show us, the believers, how to present, why presenting your bodies, a living sacrifice is so right, and how that works itself out in all the different contexts of life. So it makes perfect sense to put these seven verses in there. We need to know. Now, I would add that those who think these verses should be stricken from Romans do so primarily because they object to the substance of these verses.

And let's just admit it, if you give it much thought, these verses produce more questions than they do answers, in a sense. We'll get to those questions here in a moment.

But really, those who live in other forms of government and under more tyrannical rule have had a problem with these verses.

[8:03] They do pose a problem. In fact, one of the chief objectors to the authenticity of Romans chapter 13, 1 to 7, wrote this in his commentary. He said, These seven verses have caused more unhappiness and misery in the Christian East and West than any other seven verses in all of the New Testament.

Now, that's a stretch. But let's just admit it, they do cause some trouble. And I think after we study these scriptures, these passages, I think you'll see that and understand that.

Let me cover another thing. Even though these verses are authentic, and I've already kind of alluded to this, even though I believe these are authentic, this is part of the letter.

Paul doesn't skip anything. There's no interruption here. It's not written by someone else. Paul wrote this. It's part of his letter. It's authentic and therefore inspired of the Holy Spirit, part of the inerrant text.

Even though that's true, these verses do not answer all of our specific questions about the Christian's relationship with civil authority. Like, what about Christians living under non-Judeo-Christian government?

[9:20] Like Islam. Think about these verses that I've just read and apply these verses to those living in that form of government.

Or, if not Islam, maybe communism. And so what about Christians living in those kinds of civil environment and government?

That's a good question. Or, what about Christians living under, just simply under a cruel and unjust government? And there have been many believers over the years who have lived under cruel rulers.

Tyrannical rulers. Good question. Here's one. Here's another question. Is it wrong to refuse to pay taxes to an unjust, immoral government?

Good question. For example, take the abortion issue in our own country. Is it wrong to refuse to pay taxes in order to protest against a government that is funding abortion?

[10:41] Taking tax money and funding abortion? So, should we withhold our taxes because of that? I'm not making statements with these questions, okay? I'm not answering them. I'm just asking them.

These are questions we ask. And I guarantee you, as we look and work our way through this text, you're going to have some of these questions. Here's some others. What about the issue of separation of church and state?

That's a big question. What about war? Let's just take that one. Should Christians serve in the armed forces? Submitting, in that sense, to civil government?

Now, let me say this. And there are many other questions that I could pose that you may have in your own mind. Let me say this. I think this passage does answer some of these questions. And we'll get to those as we work through it. And others of these questions are answered elsewhere in Scripture. We may or may not delve into those.

[11:40] But I cannot answer all of the questions. And the text does not answer all the questions that we may have. And, you know, I think here's a good question.

Is violent revolution ever justified? Let me make that more specific. Take our own American Revolutionary War.

Now, we weren't there, but you know the history of it. So here's the question. Should colonial Christians have supported the American Revolution? After having read what Paul wrote here, isn't that a question?

I don't know that I can answer those questions. And I'm really not going to try to answer all of those questions. But I can do this. I can lay before you what I believe the text means to say to us. Just taking the text itself. And as one preacher put it, I leave you to fill in the blanks on your own. All right? He said, I don't really like that.

[12:51] Well, sorry. I can't do it. I can't answer all those questions. All right. So let's get into the text. And we're going to really deal with one major issue or major part of it.

And then we'll leave the rest of it until next Sunday night. Here's the first thing we need to consider. The source of civil government. I want you to know that all that Paul says to us in these seven verses must be understood on the basis, from the foundation of an understanding of the source of all authority.

Or we're not going to get the rest of it. Let me put it another way. The starting point in any discussion on the subject of civil government is the sovereignty of God.

That's the starting place. That's the key. That's really the key to it all. It's the key to our understanding of what the Bible is teaching us here.

And that is the key. The sovereignty of God is the key to obedience, to our obedience to what the Bible is commanding us here. We must begin there.

[14:10] And there's a whole lot more to that than you may think. That must be said. It all starts and ends with the sovereignty of God, really as does everything in all of creation when you get down to it.

But what does Paul say here in verse 1? And I want to read it to you in the New American Standard this time around because the New American Standard brings out the imperative that is here in the text.

It's in this verbal clause. It's an imperative. And the New American Standard really brings that out. Let me read it to you. Every person... Now listen to it very carefully. If you have an NASB, you can look at it.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. That's the first thing he says. This is the divine command.

It's an imperative. And by the way, the command is to all people, not just believers. You see that? He said every person...

[15:14] He doesn't qualify person as either an unbeliever or a believer. Certainly we would think he's speaking to believers, but really it is both believers and unbelievers.

Every person is to be subject in subjection to the governing authorities. And why? Why must we all be subject to the governing authorities? Well, he says, for there is no authority except from God. Now, the context is civil authority, but the broader context is that all authority is from God. Alright, but we're going to focus, because Paul is focusing on one certain specific context of authority, and that's civil authority.

And he said, there is no authority. None. Except from God. And he goes on to say, and those which exist are established by God.

They're established by God. So, all authority is from God. That's what Paul said. All authority is established by God.

[16:28] Or your version might have ordained by God, or appointed by God. There are a number of different renderings of the word there, but all of it is from God.

From God. By God. Now, let me show you something that I think is very interesting in the Greek text. And this is important for us to get. Verse 1.

Look at it. What does it say? First, it says, every person is to be, what? Subject, or in subjection, to the governing authorities.

The NIV says, must submit to the governing authorities. Every person must. That's what he said.

Now, the words, or the word subjection, is the Greek word, hupatasso.

I can write it down just like it sounds if you're taking notes. Hupatasso. Hupatasso. Doesn't that just bless your heart? Hupatasso.

[17:32] And it's a compound word. A lot of compound words in the Greek language. And it's two words that are glued together, put together. Hupatasso.

Hupat is a preposition. And it means under. Tasso is a word that means to line up.

Matter of fact, we've already covered this ground a number of times in our study in 1 Peter. I think I've already talked about it probably in Romans. This word appears a number of places in the Bible.

So, hupatasso, under, to line up. Tasso, to line up, generally used in the military sense. And those of you who've had military careers, and some of you are still involved in that, it's a military concept.

It means to line up by ranks. To put them in order. To line up. Hupatasso. And so, he's saying everyone must, everyone, believers, non-believers, must hupatasso.

[18:40] Line up under their civil authorities. We must line up under them in ranks. Under their authority. Hupatasso. Line up under their authority.

Now, watch this. Next, Paul says, for there is no authority except from God. Now, pay attention to this. And those which exist are what?

Ordained, appointed, established by God. The words established by are two words in the Greek language.

And they are tasso, hupa. Same words as before. Only in reverse order. This time, not a compound word.

But same words, put in reverse order, tasso, to line up. Hupa, under. Now, I know most of our English texts have the word by or of God, but it's hupa, preposition, could be translated under, and that's the meaning, to line up under.

[19:54] Now, put this together. And what do you have? You have a clear statement of the absolute sovereignty of God over all, including every civil government that has ever existed in all of history.

Regardless of the form of that government. Regardless of whether that government was benevolent or malevolent. The absolute sovereignty over all, all.

We could translate Paul's kind of play on words, and that really is what it is, this way. Every person is to line up under the governing, their governing authorities, for those authorities that exist are lined up under God.

That's exactly what he's saying. They're all under Him. All of them. Every single one of them. You can't name one that's not. That is, we put this together, we are under them, and they are under God.

Whether or not they acknowledge that, whether or not they rule in accord to that, in agreement with that, they are all under God. So, all of us, all of them, under the authority, the absolute sovereignty of God.

[21:17] Now, I'm not trying to belabor the point, but we must get this before we're going to get any of the rest of this. What Paul is saying, that is, not just to get it, to understand it, but to submit to it and live it out.

We've got to get this first. Because, you see, if we do not start with the sovereignty of God in our understanding of the role of civil government, we don't start there. We will, at some point, struggle with our submission to our civil authorities.

If we don't get the sovereignty of God first, don't start there. We must start there. Let me ask you something. Isn't it pretty easy for you to believe that God is sovereign over civil government? Isn't it pretty easy for you to believe that? I mean, honestly, think about it. Isn't it pretty easy to embrace that and accept that and understand that? I mean, isn't it pretty easy for us living here in the United States of America?

I think it is. And maybe not as easy as it once was 20, 30, 40 years ago. I mean, a lot has changed in our civil environment.

[22 : 30] The longer you've lived, the more you've seen that and understand that. Many of our freedoms have been and are being taken away. Surely you recognize that, seeing that.

And the free exercise of Christianity in, God bless USA, free exercise of it is becoming more and more restricted.

And yet I would say to you that still it is pretty easy to trust the sovereignty of God when it comes to our civil authority. That He is sovereign.

We don't have any problem with that. It's pretty easy, you see, for us to trust in God's sovereignty when He gives us Christian leaders, rulers. Or if they're not Christian, they are at least people of high moral character.

Pretty easy to trust in the sovereignty of God in our civil government when we have leaders like that. We haven't always had leaders like that. But on the whole, by and large, our leaders have either been Christian or have lived according to Christian values or have had high moral character.

[23 : 42] And so it's not hard for us to believe in the sovereignty of God when it comes to civil government. But what if instead of a president democratically elected by the people, we had a Caesar like Nero?

Nero. And, you know, Nero, by the way, was on the throne when Paul wrote these very words. Nero hated Christians. Nero had them arrested, soaked in animal fat, tied to stakes, and set on fire to light his garden parties.

That's Nero. Nero.

Nero. They're prevalent. They abounded. I would say to you that no government in America has ever been as pagan and anti-Christian as the government of ancient Rome. Not just in Nero's time, but many of the Caesars in this era.

[25 : 19] We've never had a government like that. Paul wrote under this government. And he said all civil authority comes from God.

Does that make sense to you? Do you doubt that? That every civil leader and government exists by the virtue of the sovereign appointment of God.

That's what Paul said. Regardless of the government. Regardless of how they rule. Cruel or otherwise.

If you doubt that, consider a few examples. Consider Pharaoh. The Pharaoh of the Exodus. And I bring him up because Paul has already written about him.

Back there in Romans chapter 9. In Romans chapter 9 verse 17, Paul's subject there is the sovereignty of God as well. It's the sovereignty of God within the context of salvation.

[26 : 27] But listen to what he said concerning the Pharaoh of the Exodus. He said, For the Scripture says to Pharaoh.

The Word of God says to Pharaoh. For this very purpose I have raised you up. God raised him up. This wicked Pharaoh.

Who oppressed God's people. Who oppressed God's people. Cast them into servitude. Slavery. This very Pharaoh that had all of their male babies destroyed.

God raised him up. He raised him up. And he went on to say that I may show my power in you. And that my name may be declared in all the earth.

And he certainly did accomplish that. But nevertheless, the idea is that this wicked Pharaoh of the Exodus was ordained by God himself.

[27 : 30] Consider Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar, you know, the wicked king of the Babylonians. We're not going to look at it.

But three times in Daniel chapter 4, verse 17 and 23 and 32. Three times Nebuchadnezzar hears these words from God. This is what he said.

The most high rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. That is, gives the kingdom of men to whom he will.

God does that. He sets kings up. And queens up. And presidents up. Regardless of what you think of them. Regardless of whether they're kind and benevolent or cruel and malevolent.

And God sets them up. That's what he said in Nebuchadnezzar. He said it three times. The most high rules the kingdom of men. He's sovereign over all. But he gives it to whom he will.

[28:31] Consider Jesus. What Jesus said to Pilate. Here's a great example. Defining text. In John chapter 19 and verse 10.

10 and 11. This is what the Bible said. Pilate said to Jesus. You know the story. He said to Jesus, are you not speaking to me? You're not going to say any words?

Because Jesus stood there and didn't answer his question. He was silent. And he said this to Jesus. Do you not know that I have the power to crucify you and the power to release you?

This is Pilate speaking to Jesus. The Lord of glory. The second person of the Trinity. Here's Pilate, this mere man. And he says to Jesus, don't you know I have the power to crucify you? I have the power even to release you?

And how did Jesus respond? Jesus answered, you could have no power. By the way, the word power is *exousia*. And it's the same word that Paul uses in Romans chapter 13.

[29:33] *Exousia*. It's authority. A delegated authority. And Jesus said to Pilate, you would have no power. Could have no power at all. I love that little addition.

And it's right out of text. You could not have power over anything at all against me unless it had been given to you from above. That's what Jesus said.

Did Pilate have authority over Jesus? Yes. He did. Did Pilate rule in Jesus' case fairly?

And rightly? No. He made a big mistake. Did Jesus submit to his authority anyway? Yes.

What was the result? His death? His crucifixion? Pilate ordered his crucifixion. And it was carried out by his rule, by his authority.

[30:40] Did Pilate have the authority to do such a thing? Yes. He did. From whom did he get it? From the Caesar in Rome?

Well, in a sense, in the immediate sense, yes. But what did Jesus say? He said, you could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above.

That is, it came from God. What was the basis upon which Jesus submitted to the civil authorities of his day? On what basis did he submit?

Fear of the consequences? No. Did Jesus submit to the civil authorities of his day because of the threat of punishment or the threat of imprisonment or the threat of death?

No. Did Jesus submit to his authority, the civil authority of his day, because he had the hope of good things happening as a result? No.

[31:45] None of these things. This is what we've got to get. That he submitted on the basis of the sovereignty of God over all civil authority. That's the basis upon which he submitted.

You see, listen. His submission to Pilate was submission to God. And that is Paul's point. That is the foundational truth that we must get before we will ever get any of the rest of it.

Of what Paul says here. Even the part about taxes. Verse 2. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God.

There it is in a nutshell. Whoever resists. By the word, I can't resist to tell you that the word resist is *antitasso*.

There's that word *tasso* again. It has a preposition on the front of it again, but this time it's *anti*, which means against. So it means to line up against.

[33:05] It's the absolute opposite of subjection. It is rebellion. And Paul is saying rebellion against civil authority is rebellion against God himself.

Unqualified, regardless of the authority. Rebellion against the civil authority is rebellion against God. That's what Paul is saying. Whether we like it or not. Whether it produces questions, and it likely does, or not. This is what he's saying.

I'm not going to let you just fill in the blanks entirely. We're going to talk a little bit about submission next time. But what that submission involves.

But here's the bare truth of it. Submission to civil government is submission to God, who is the source of all civil authority. Ours and any that exists in the world today, or has existed or will exist.

[34:06] God is the one who gives it. Now we're going to stop there tonight. The next Sunday we're going to look closer at the command. The actual command to submit to civil authority.

Because therein lie many of the questions. This whole issue of submission. And we ask the question, are there limits to our obedience to civil authority?

And I would say, and I'll explain next Sunday, yes, there are limits. And we'll talk about that. And so is civil disobedience ever permitted by God?

And the answer to that question is yes. But we're going to have to discuss that next time. So next Sunday we'll finish up this section on civil government. And so we'll consider not only the source of civil government, but three other things.

Submission to civil government. The service of civil government. What they do. What their service is. Their ministry. And then the support of civil government.

[35 : 08] And there's the issue of taxes. Thank you.