

October 10, 2021 - Dave Stough

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Preacher: Dave Stough

[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. So we have arrived at chapter 13 on our trip through Romans.

If you've got your Bible or your phone, please open that up. I thought today we'd just start straight out by reading that text. So read along with me, if you would please, Romans 13, verses 1 through 7.

If you owe taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honor, then honor. What a time to be speaking about the role of government in our lives. At least that's the way I feel. As America is literally in the middle of a deceptive revolution, I believe, most of us here find ourselves thinking through issues concerning government that we may never have before. As I read today's text, I'm sorry, as I read today's text, I bet some of you were thinking of exceptions to this text.

[2:43] I would imagine, if you're like me. Or maybe you were thinking of other parts of the Bible that give more light on the subject of government in our lives.

After all, we grew up in America, and that's our heritage, is it not, to question the government and endeavor to hold it accountable to the Constitution we have?

Or maybe, if you're thinking like I am, you're probably wondering maybe what to do in certain situations that may arise, because you see things changing.

I think it's prudent for us to incorporate all the teachings from the Word of God in today's talk on Romans 13. Don't worry, it's not going to be a real long sermon.

But I do want to touch on those texts, and I'll just mention them and talk about them as we go through Romans 13. So, I believe that a thoughtful, well-planned-out response is needed by us in light of possible changes coming up.

[4:05] So let me start out by asking you if you remember what Satan's final offer was to the Lord Jesus when he was tempting him in Matthew 4.

You guys remember that? Let me read it. The devil took him to a very high mountain, that's Jesus, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

And all this I will give you, he said, if you bow down and worship me. Throughout Scripture, we are reminded that Satan is the god of this world.

He is the prince and power of the air. He is in charge of this world's value system, and he also holds sway over the governmental authorities because they live within his system.

In his prideful rebellion, his goal is to have everyone worship him. His weapon of choice, deception. Unbelievers and believers.

[5:10] So, even if these government officials won't admit it, they are still under the influence of the god of this world.

I would dare say that even the United States of America at its founding, as much as we like in some ways what was going on with the documents they created, even then, they were under satanic influence.

Have you ever thought about it that way? Satan is the god of this world. So, as believers, I think it's wise for us to look at the physical, temporal world we live in in light of the spiritual warfare that's going on around us.

Now, we know from Scripture, especially Romans, that our God is sovereign over all and that he will set up his king, the Lord Jesus, on his holy hill in Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

God wins. He will reign and rule. The government will be upon his shoulders. But in the meantime, we are in the war. So today, as we look at Romans 13, bear in mind that God will use Satan by allowing him to have his way for a time as part of his judgment upon a nation.

[6:30] He did it with his own people. Israel surely will do it. He's probably doing it to us right here in America. Scripture declares in 1 Peter 4, verse 17, for the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God.

And if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? The world is being shaken right now. I'm sure you guys know that.

Governments are changing, not just ours. Economies are being upset. And I believe for two reasons. One, God is purifying his church.

Two, the final staging of nations is being arranged around Israel to prepare for the rapture and the seven-year tribulation.

So as we look at this instruction from God in Romans 13, realize that these teachings here are timeless. They apply to us in the America I grew up in, and it applies to us now.

[7:44] They apply to someone living in Iran right now that's a Christian. They are intended for believers to follow no matter what type of government is over them or what is going on in the culture around them.

These instructions are designed to defeat the work of Satan. The gospel of Jesus Christ is demonstrated in how we respond to the governing authorities.

That is the context that these were written in. So, like Romans 13 is the primary straightforward teaching in the New Testament on government. It's the main one.

There are two other passages in the New Testament that are straightforward teachings like this. This one is more detailed. The other two are in Titus 3 and 1 Peter 2.

If you take a few minutes on your own to look at the larger context of all three of these passages, you're going to notice a common theme in all of them.

[8:51] Paul writes about what God's grace has done for us in saving us from sin and then mentions Christ's return and the coming judgment.

All three of these texts look back to God's grace and look forward to judgment. It's like the Holy Spirit is saying in light of these truths, have faith in Christ right now to obey these passages and glorify God.

God wants us to rely on this more than he does the U.S. Constitution, which, by the way, is hard for me. Okay? Now, the admonition running through Romans 12 is to show a submissive spirit.

Well, you know, the first part of Romans 12, it talks about offering your body a living sacrifice. So we're submitting to God in that way.

Then it talks about being submissive to one another by preferring one another over ourselves. And then it even goes into our relationship with people who are enemies and how we give place to wrath.

[10:10] Even humbleness is seen there. That's a work of the Spirit. We're instructed to have this kind of spirit to remember this when we're thinking about human government.

Now, remember, the God of this world has a different value system than our Savior's. The devil endeavors to deceive us into thinking we should embrace at least some of these things.

After all, you've got to get along in this world. The reason I bring this up is because we are Americans. We have had the privilege of not only having the freedom of religion and speech, but when we see something that we don't like, we're used to fighting.

That's our heritage. Unfortunately, if you are like me, you may incorporate some worldly attitudes in your fight for what is right, or maybe even have some of those values in determining what is right. While God does call us to fight for what is right and to do what is right, He does not call us in His word to fight for our rights.

[11:30] There's a big difference. Yes, we should use the rights that we have in our country for His glory. Amen. But I don't read in the Bible where we've been endowed by our Creator with the inalienable rights of liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Do you? Those are precious to me, but I don't read those in the Bible. Now, there's nothing wrong with pursuing freedom and happiness in this life, but remember, that is not a right given to us by God that we're called to fight for.

And I believe in there lies the rub with many of us. And we'll talk more later about using the privileges of our earthly citizenship for the kingdom of God.

But for now, take note that God's instruction to us in all those texts that I was in Romans and the other two, they are laced with humility.

The humility that comes from remembering the grace of God in your life and looking forward to Christ's return in the coming judgment, being in a proper relationship with God.

[12:50] That's the context of these. Now, verse 1 in our text says, we are to submit to the authorities that exist in this world because they have been ordained or established by God.

Human government is run by man, but if you have read your Bibles, you know this, it was created and instituted by God. And Genesis 9 tells us the origin of human government.

Now, before the flood, there was no human government over the people in this world. Take a minute and kind of think about what it would have been like to live then.

People had a conscience to follow to restrain evil, but there was no law enforcement. When Cain killed Abel, he was worried about being a vagabond that people would hunt down and kill for what he had done.

And he told that to God and God put a mark on him to remind people that you don't murder, you don't touch him. I'm going to stop the killing right here. God values human life that much.

[14:01] And that mark would speak to people's conscience. There was no government in place to maintain order. People over time, though, they didn't follow their conscience and wickedness and violence, it says, increased and God was disgusted with the whole human race, so much so the worldwide flood came.

And after the flood, God gave mankind the responsibility to restrain evil by instituting human government. God told Noah if a man sheds another man's blood in murder, by man, his blood should be shed.

In other words, Noah, you are to set up a system here to enforce the death penalty on people who commit murder. God values human life made in his image.

The consequence for murder needs to be in people's minds if they're contemplating it because we have sinful hearts. It's a deterrent to evil.

The threat of execution needs to be there. And see, that is the primary function of human government and that is the spirit in which Romans 13 is written.

[15:23] Government is there to maintain peace and order by punishing those who do evil and cause the problems. the text stresses the point that whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against God.

So as a testimony to the spirit of Christ in us, shouldn't we have a submissive spirit that goes along with what is right?

Shouldn't the government know that it can rely on us, the church, to do and uphold what is right.

Last year, in California, churches were being told by the governing authorities to not meet at all for a long time because of COVID.

At the same time, though, they opened up casinos and gathering at riots was encouraged. So several churches engaged the government in disobedience.

They rightfully told the state that they overstepped their God-given bounds and that no matter what, no matter the consequence that they were going to meet in obedience to the word of God and worship him.

[16:46] They cited back to the governor medical facts that he chose to overlook. and they told him they were going to violate, the church wasn't going to violate his conscience by disobeying the commandment to meet.

They were in obedience to the higher authority in that case, Acts chapter 4 and 5. Now, there were many churches that did this throughout California.

The one most prevalent in my mind was Grace Community Church in Los Angeles. They actually had a long-standing good relationship with the police and the fire departments in Los Angeles

County.

They let those groups use the church's facilities for training and they had a good relationship there. So they had such a good reputation in the community that when the battle with the state started, the Los Angeles County police came to the church and told them that they weren't going to be arrested for disobeying the medical mandate because they were not tasked with enforcing that.

My point is, if Grace Community Church were a bunch of rebels, I don't think the police department would have come and told them that, right? Right, Bob? And, you know, so they're seeing that submissive spirit even then.

[18:14] Even though government officials are mostly not believers, they are still ministers of God. Verse 6 in our text says, they are God's ministers attending continually to their job.

They're God's ministers. It's a thought. I remember I heard a story when I was up at Emmaus Bible College. It was told by the late Dan Smith, who was a teacher there and more.

And if you didn't know him, he was a humble man, a very loving man with a lot of conviction.

Anyway, he told a story, a true story.

He was a passenger in a car and there was another Bible teacher driving and they were on their way to a conference. And they were running late and the driver was speeding and you guys said they got pulled over by the police.

And Dan Smith said the driver of the car had the audacity to tell the police officer that they were late, they were teaching the Bible, I couldn't believe this but I heard this, and that he was interfering with the ministry of the gospel.

[19:37] Oh, Dan Smith said he just sunk in his seat with embarrassment and kept his mouth shut. The cop didn't say much.

He just went back to his car, came back with a ticket, handed it to the driver and told him to read Romans 13 and slow down. I guess he was a Christian.

There are God's ministers continually doing his service. taxes. Our text says God ordained government to be a terror to those who do evil.

It reminds us that the normal function of government praises those who want to do good, but it does not bear the sword in vain upon those doing evil. Then it proceeds to tell us that we should not only obey the government out of fear of punishment, but also for conscience sake.

For this reason, pay your taxes. Don't cheat on your taxes. Let me remind you that at this time that this was wrote, Rome was the governing authority and they were known for heavy taxes.

[20:54] Rome was collecting revenue for its empire, but they weren't into socialism. They weren't doling it back out. If you were paying taxes and you didn't see much for your tax dollars except some new roads probably and some law enforcement, right?

Imagine being a Jew back then. You took some of your livelihood in worship to the temple, and then you paid other taxes, like a temple tax or whatever else the Pharisees imposed, and then you paid tax to Rome on everything you made.

And it was in this context, that Jesus taught, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. We don't have to agree with all that is done by the government with the money, but we dare not violate our conscience by refusing to pay.

Jesus taught Peter in Matthew 17 not to offend the temple tax collector by not paying the tax. And then he told Peter to go catch a fish.

He miraculously supplied what Peter needed to pay the tax. God knows what we need to do his will. The bigger issue between us and God and paying taxes and obeying the law is the issue of the conscience.

[22:26] Any citizen can obey out of fear, but Christians are called by God to a higher standard and he works in our conscience. That's our motivation.

He is our motivation and he works in our conscience. I remember back in the mid-1990s I was attempting self-employment through being the owner operator of Dave's painting service.

It was then I learned how much more the government taxes a business than it does individuals. As a newer believer and new in business, I had a lot to learn about walking with God to say the least.

I was paying my taxes at first, but it got to the point in the later 90s that I justified not reporting some income I made. Let's just say that after a while the Lord was working on me and that just wasn't settling good for me.

It was that and other things were bothering me. And I got to a point that I felt like I couldn't be before God rightly until I made those things right. God uses the conscience to bother us.

[23:41] He uses his word to instruct us and he uses his spirit in us to empower us to do what is right. In this case, it wasn't hard.

I was introduced to an accountant who amended my taxes for that year and I paid Caesar's. What was Caesar's? I remember Kevin Stiles and I thinking that could be a good testimony to this accountant.

I still use that accountant today. What kind of testimony I am to him, I don't know. Well, one thing I do know, I have a clear conscience and that's what's important to God.

how can we be testifying of the grace of God and the power of the gospel unless we have a clear conscience toward him?

It can't be done. Hebrews 9 14 says that the blood of Christ cleanses us, our conscience, from works that lead to death to serve the living God.

[24:48] Paul says in 1 Timothy 1 5, the goal of our instruction is love that comes forth from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Each one of us, even those among us that other Christians look up to, have to be before God and get things right. Only honesty with God and confession, confession, oftentimes to others also, is what clears, it's the only thing that clears your conscience.

When your conscience is captive to the word of God, then you are motivated to do what was right. Your conscience is the key in all of this, even when you disobey civil government.

So when that government, as we have seen some small demonstrations in our time, when it has overstepped its bounds by promoting evil and punishing good, even then our conscience will lead us to do what is right before the Lord.

You can't have a clear conscience if you're going to do things your way, even if the U.S.

Constitution says it's okay. In the book of Exodus and Daniel and Acts, we have examples of God's people disobeying an evil government.

[26:25] In all these examples, these people were not being rebels for the purpose of fighting for something temporal in this world. They were not fighting for their rights, but rather in the fear of God, they submitted to him in obedience to do what was eternally right.

And oftentimes, they suffered for it. They did not seek to change the government, but they only sought to glorify the king of kings in their relationship to the government.

Can we have the musicians come back up? I will close with a few of these examples. in Exodus, the midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's order to kill the Hebrew sons at birth because they feared God.

They had a clear conscience before the Lord. Consequently, God gave them favor with Pharaoh, even in their disobedience, and they didn't get executed.

And he even provided them houses to live in, which was a big deal if you were a slave. Daniel was an Israelite teenager seeking to keep God's law, but was uprooted out of his homeland by a brutal country and exported to another land for 70 years.

[27:58] He exhibited obedience to the foreign authorities above him to the point that he was in the king's court as an advisor. That's the same king who destroyed the temple that Daniel worshipped at.

Daniel knew that the authority above him was appointed by God, even if there were things that were going on that were tough. Daniel knew also who really was in charge and kept his conscience clear in obedience to the law of God and the law of the land unless those two things came in conflict.

When the king wanted him to violate his conscience by eating items forbidden under the law, he and the other Jewish young men with him convinced the king's court that God provided something that would be more healthier for them, so they left them alone and they didn't have to worry about violating their conscience.

When Daniel was under threat of death for praying to God, it says in the text that Daniel continued to do as his custom was in disobedience to the king, he prayed towards the temple.

God chose to glorify himself by miraculously delivering him from the lion's den. Daniel did what was right in all of this by having a submissive spirit first and then a clear conscience.

[29:38] As a result of Daniel's faith and his prayer to the Lord, he received special revelation from God about the future of Israel and the whole world that still blesses us today, will eternally bless us.

Daniel fought for the things of eternity by doing battle God's way here in the temporal. Satan is still at work trying to deceive us in various ways.

God has given us the ability to live righteously in this present age by the death and resurrection of his son and the abiding presence of the spirit in us.

When we fear him, we will want to obey the governing authorities that he appointed. When that government wants us to disobey God, we can have the power of a clear conscience in obedience to the Lord, knowing that he has in his hands our lives, he has all eternity, the same hands that still bear the scars for paying for our sin.

Lord, we thank you today. We thank you so much for your word. I just pray that your Holy Spirit speaks to each one of us as you've spoken to me. And I ask, Lord, you give us the grace just to trust you a little more.

[31:03] It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.