

Submission to Authorities

Romans 13:1-7

March 13th, 2011

When I came to Marshall County to pastor the Hardin Baptist Church, I was 22 years of age. As I began to visit homes in the community, it didn't take me long to realize that people are loyal, dogmatically loyal, to two things. It became evident to me, that people in Western Kentucky, especially Marshall and Calloway counties, are first loyal to their church; I'm talking about their church denomination. Baptist vehemently defended being a Baptist. Methodist defended being a Methodist, or a Presbyterian, or a Church of Christ, or a Catholic. But the second thing that I found people were really dogmatically loyal to was their political affiliation; their political parties. I can't tell you how many people would share with me whether they were a democrat or a republican within five minutes of my being there. People on both sides of the aisle made sure that as a young preacher I understood it was not my place to ever meddle in politics. So with that in mind, I approach this passage with a little fear and trembling.

In Romans 13, Paul is not only talking about our relationship to God, our relationship to ourselves, our relationship to the body of Christ, and our relationship to those outside the body of Christ, but he will also talk about the Christian's responsibility to his government. We are going to speak about this passage in general, because that's what this passage does. I am not affiliated with a donkey or an elephant. I am a man who is affiliated with the Lamb of God. I am a party of the Lamb, both politically and religiously. Please understand, I have no agenda this morning. As best I can, this message will not be philosophical, but hopefully, it will only be theological. Please listen to this with fresh ears and see this with fresh eyes because Paul spends a lot of time talking about our responsibility to the government that is over us.

Scripture

"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 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. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this 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."

Responsibility to the Governing Authorities

Paul is not the first person in Scripture to address a follower of Christ and his responsibility to the governing authorities. In Matthew 22, the Pharisees sent some of their disciples, along with the Herodians, to Jesus to entangle Him, to trick Him, and they asked Him whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes. Now Jesus knew that no matter what He said, it was going to cause disruption in some people's minds. But Jesus, being Jesus, just had a way of teaching. He asked for a coin, and as He holds that coin in front of those disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians, He asked them whose pictures on the coin (a denarii). They said, "Caesar's." Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." In many parts of the Roman Empire, on the back of the denarii was the picture of a god or a false goddess. So the Roman citizens knew that on the back side of that coin there was a picture of a god. We don't know whether Jesus turned that coin over or not, but He knew there was another side of the story, and then He said to render to God what is God's. Notice what Jesus did; He

didn't pit religion against politics. Jesus reminded His followers that as followers of Christ living in this world, they were citizens of two worlds.

Here on this planet, you and I are citizens of an earthly state, an earthly country, an earthly kingdom, and we are to have a loyalty to that kingdom. But at the same time, we are to remember that we are not only creatures of this world, but we are otherworld creatures. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, and therefore, we have a responsibility, not only to our earthly government, but we have a responsibility to God. Paul was discipled by the Lord in the desert for three years after his conversion. He makes it clear in his writings that he did not get his teaching or education from man, but from the Lord. Here, Paul gives us an in-depth treatment of our responsibility as Christians and followers of Jesus to our government. Now, in context here, the Roman Empire was not a democratic country. The man who sat on the throne at this time considered himself God. If you were a citizen of Rome, at any time you could be called upon to declare that Caesar is Lord; Caesar is your sovereign. Rome was capital city of the Roman Empire, it would have been considered the capital of the world at this time. The equivalent we would have today would be a pastor speaking to the Church in Washington D.C. Do you remember when the Cold War was going on? They would talk about life in Moscow and life in Washington D.C. Many times they weren't talking about just those two cities, but those cities stood for two different nations. One the capital of Russia and one the capital of the United States. Paul is writing to the Church in Rome, people living in the capital city of the world, and he tells them that every person is to be in submission to the governing authorities. The principle that God teaches is that Christians, no matter what type of government they are living under, are to be a people who submit to their governing authorities.

- **Submission**

The word, "*submit*," here is the Greek word, *hoopo-tasso*, meaning 'to be under' and then *Tasso* means 'to arrange in order.' It means that we are to submit, to bring ourselves under those who have been placed over us, so that there can be order in our midst. It was a word that was used in the military. In the military, we consider all people equal, yet at the same time, we consider all people different. There is rank in the military because there

must be different responsibilities so that when that army moves into war, there will be order and not chaos so that they can accomplish their objective. Because of that, the military is a system in every country of authority, and everyone knows who is over them and who is under them. The military is set up so that when they move, they move in order. We love to look at our military teaching institutions and watch them do those drills. It is amazing to watch that many people marching in step at the same time, then switch on a command. That is the picture here. God has ordained that we submit to our government officials for the purpose of having order and not chaos in our society.

Authority and Purpose of Government

We are to submit to the "governing authorities." The first word, "*governing*," means 'those placed in high positions; those who have been elevated above.' There are two prime words in the Bible for authority or power, but the word that is used here is the word, *exousia*, and it literally means 'to bear the right to tell.' According to God, our governing officials have the right to tell us what to do and what not to do; that's important. But this word also has a second characteristic, which is that government authority has the right to enforce people to do what they are told to do and keep them from doing what they are told not to do. Are we clear? As a citizen of a heavenly kingdom, God tells us that every person in that country, Christian or non-Christian, are generally to submit to those that have been placed over them. The reason they have been placed over us is so that there will be order and not chaos in our society. And then he reminds us that government authority has been ordained by God. He tells us in a negative way and then in a positive way that God has ordained authority. The reason God ordained that people would be over other people and they have the right to tell them how they should live and not live is because God knows what is at the core of mankind, and it is not good. God knows that without proper authority among societies of people, you would have total chaos and not order. If you want proof of this, you don't have to turn on your modern TV; you can, but you can go back and read the Old Testament book of Judges. Judges tells us there was no king in Israel and so the people did what was right in their own eyes. Now this next statement is not a political statement, it is a statement about God

ordaining order in society and not chaos. God keeps order in society through government officials.

Do you remember what happened when our government toppled the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein? I think we thought that when we did that there would be celebration; there would be jubilation in the streets, and everybody was going to hug everybody. We thought everyone was going to live peaceably ever after in Iraq because the problem was Saddam Hussein. But what happened? There was total chaos in Baghdad. The leading museum in Baghdad that holds most of our biblical artifacts was absolutely ransacked. Everybody in that city, once authority was toppled, did what was right in his own eyes and felt like they had the right to take what belonged to other people.

- **Officials are Servants of God**

That is exactly what happened in the book of Judges except the book of Judges doesn't talk about Iraqi people, Iranian people, American people, Chinese people, Russian people, English people, or French people. It talks about God's chosen people of the Old Testament who had been given the special revelation of God's law through Moses. And when there was not proper authority, those people did not follow the Law of Moses; they did what was right in their own eyes! As Christian citizens, whether we agree with our government or not, God has decreed that all nations of people need government officials, and those government officials have been ordained by God. Now, it is not every act of the people in authority, but authority itself that has been ordained by God. Then he tells us that government officials, and government itself, is not a terror to good but a terror to bad, because they are God's servants. We need to change a concept that we have in the Church in America about the way we view people who hold elected offices. We call them public servants, but I don't think that is right. We are fortunate in this nation to get to elect those who hold office over us. We are fortunate to elect the people who determine laws of what we should do and what we should not do, but they are not public servants; they are God's servants. The Bible calls them God's servants three different times, and Paul uses two different words. The first word that Paul uses for servant is the word deacon, *diákonos*, 'to have dirty feet, to wait tables.' God has put people in government positions so

that those people can be His servants, His deacons, if I can say that; not in the Church, but in society at large. God is not just concerned about life in the Church, God is concerned about life in society. And just as God has ordained authority in the Church, He has also ordained authority in the nation. It amazes me that one of the very words that Paul uses to talk about one of the ordained offices in the Church is the same one he uses to talk about public officials. So when we look at our elected officials, or even if we were living in a country that was communist, we have to have the attitude toward those people that they have been placed there by God and they are God's servants. They are God's waiters or waitresses for our good. How many of you talk about the deacons of this church in a bad way? How many of you lambaste or slander those guys? Now, how many of you slander our president? How many of you slander our congress? How many of you slander our representatives? How many of you slander our judges? How many of you slander our sheriff's offices? God help us when we are more loyal to a party than we are to the government that God has ordained! These people are not our servants; they are God's servants, and they are here to encourage good, not bad. Paul is writing the Christians living in Rome under the Roman government. Nero is coming to the throne shortly, and Paul is going to tell them that there is no need to fear authority if you are doing what authority tells you to do. So if you don't want to fear your government, just follow the law.

It's kind of like me; I do not fear police officers. I used to eat lunch at Pagliai's Pizza and there would always be three state troopers eating at the time I was eating (I don't know how that worked out). They always packed heat, but I never feared those guys. Do you know why I didn't fear those guys? It was because I wasn't breaking the law. Let me tell you when I do fear those state troopers. It is when I'm driving down the highway and the speed limit is 65 and I'm doing 82; then I am fearful because I'm breaking the law.

- **Promote Good and Punish Evil**

In this passage, Paul teaches us that government has been ordained by God to actually promote and reward good and to restrain and punish evil, for they are God's ministers, God's servants. They are gods of vengeance and they carry out God's wrath. If you are in government, in everything

you do, you are to be encouraging people to be better. In everything you do, you are to be discouraging people from being worse, or sinful, or bringing chaos into society. You need to remember that you are God's avenger. Paul reminds us that the government does not bear the sword in vain. In the biblical world, to bear the sword is to pack heat, to bear a gun; to carry that stick they carry. In other words, our state police pack heat because if you resist them, they have the right to make you follow the law. When you break the law, they have the right to enforce the law.

I think this passage is put in the book of Romans because Paul has just told us as individuals that we do not have the right to take the law into our own hands. No matter what happens to me, no matter what might happen to my wife, or my son, or my daughter, or my neighbor, I never have the right to take the law into my own hands, and you don't either. But God has ordained that there be a pay day for sin on this earth, not just in eternity. And the people who are to carry out God's wrath on evil doers is the government. God has ordained government officials to have the right to do what individuals do not have the right to do, and that is to be an avenger of God's wrath. Do you understand that?

Now, and I want to say this, and I know this is going to be controversial, but I believe it to be the truth of Scripture. This is not philosophical, this is not political; this is theological. It is the Church and individuals who are to treat those evil doers in a redemptive way and to pour hot burning coals on their heads so that there can be a change of attitude and a change of heart. That is not the government's responsibility. Even in a Christian nation, or a democratic country, our government is not in the redeeming business. The Church is in the redeeming business; Christians are in the redeeming business. We are the only ones who know how to redeem. The government is in the punishing business; they are in the punitive business. Please be careful when you try to impose your philosophical thoughts on God of how government should be, because it is not the United States who ordained government; God ordained government. Government, like marriage, can't be altered because of what man believes at the moment. Government is not a pragmatic solution to man's sinfulness. God had man's sinfulness in mind when he instituted government, and we can't change this. God has given the state the right to

bear the sword, and when our government judges people, they are executing God's wrath. They are doing what God wants done so that there will be order in society and not chaos.

The state of Illinois has just decided that capital punishment is wrong. I would hate to be that legislature standing before God one day when God is the very one who said if you take a man's life, you forfeit your own life. Jesus warned Peter in the garden that if he took up his sword and fought for Him, the government would take their sword and kill Peter. He told Peter to beware because those live by the sword, die by the sword. In Acts 25, Paul realized that he was being accused of a capital crime. He never one time tried to stop the capital crime, but said if I am worthy of death, then kill me because he knew that the state had the authority to execute justice with the sword. Authority to government has been given to the government by God.

Now here is the flip side if you are in government. It isn't the government's responsibility to impose your philosophical belief on a nation of people. You should be seeking God's will and who God is, and you had better set up your government to portray who you really are, and that is a deacon of God. You hold me, as the pastor, and the deacons of this church to a high standard. You should, and you should also hold your government officials to the same standard you hold us to. How dare we let government officials get by in their lives what you would not let me get by with in my life! The Bible never tells us they are public servants; it tells us they are God's servants. So a man should feel a call from God before he ever takes a place or position where he has been elevated over other people and has the right of the sword to enforce what he tells them is right and wrong.

- **Do not Resist**

Therefore, Paul tells us not to resist, because when you resist government, you resist God. The word "*resist*," in the Greek language, is similar to the Greek word for submit, *hoopo-tasso*. It is ***antitasso***, basically the same word. The Greeks would have picked up on this, but we lose it in English. Paul just said bring yourself under, for order. When you resist, you stand against order and you bring chaos. Tell me what is happening around the world today? It is total chaos because of corrupt government,

and lack of respect for government. It does not lead people to do the right thing; it leads people to do the wrong thing. That is why God teaches us an important principle that we have to understand in the Church. It is that man outside of Christ is not good. He is sinful, he is evil, he is self-centered, and he will take advantage of the situation and work the situation for himself; the same way a lost man will do in the position of government power. He will not consider himself to be God's servant, but he'll work that situation for his own power. But Paul tells us not to resist, don't rebel, hang in there; God has ordained order, not chaos.

- **Pay Taxes**

Then he tells us to pay taxes. Yes, I pay taxes and yes, you pay taxes. We pay taxes because we are supposed to pay taxes. It is not because the government tells us to pay taxes, but because God tells us to pay taxes. Yes, April 15th has been ordained by God. I mean He probably doesn't care what day we collect our taxes, but the principle we have to remember is that God Himself has ordained that there be people who look out for the good of the society, and it's a full time job. And because it's a full time job, these guys deserve to be paid. They deserve salaries so they can focus their attention on what government ought to be focusing their attention on.

What is the purpose of our taxes? According to Romans 13, the purpose of our taxes is to support the people who work for God, and that is why we gladly pay the taxes. You understand that principle. If I could teach politics from a Biblical view point, I would want to remind the government that they receive taxes and revenue, and honor and respect, from the people because they have been ordained for one purpose by God, and that is to keep order in society and that is the reason they bear the sword. Listen to me; God never ordained government to impose its philosophical belief on society. I don't care if you're a democrat or a republican, I don't care if you're an independent; it is not God's intention for government to ordain its philosophical opinion on its people. God set up government so that there would be order in society, and we pay our government officials to have the right to pack heat and to make laws to keep order so that there will not be disorder. If you are God's public deacons, or ministers, that He has put in place for the good of the society,

you need to be careful when you take responsibilities on yourself that was never given by God.

- **Pray for Officials**

So what should we do? We should pray just like you pray for me, just like you pray for your deacons. You ought to be praying for our president and get over what party he belongs to. You pray for him as one of God's servants. And you pray for congress, not for which side of the aisle they sit on, but because they are God's servants. You pray for our county officials, and you pray for our state officials. You need to pray for our law enforcement officials. They are a terror to those who do evil, and they fear seeing those men and women in uniform because they understand what they are doing may be right in their own eyes, but it's not right in the eyes of society, therefore it will not be tolerated. We need to pray for all of those people who believe they are ministers of God, keeping order in society, so that we, as a society, can be better. You and I, as Christians, set the example. We are to be the best citizens in the land no matter whether under a democratic government, or whether there is a republican, democratic, or an independent president. We are the people who, by our behavior and politics, reveal to the world what God's true plan of government is, whether we are in a communist, socialist, or a total dictatorship country. Government is for the betterment of society and to be a terror to the lawbreaker. The lawbreaker needs to know God has given government the right to execute judgment and when they execute judgment, they do it on His behalf as ministers of Him.