

**AN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
ROMANS 13:1-7**

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M.I. GOD USES GOVERNMENT TO TEACH US SUBMISSION AND OBEDIENCE, TWO QUALITIES THAT MAKE US MORE CHRIST-LIKE.

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Keep in mind that we are in the practical living portion of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. In chapter 12 he described how we are to live as the church. Also keep in mind that Paul does not think of church as an institution or as a building. The Bible's definition of church is believers in Jesus Christ gathered together with Jesus as the head. Paul describes the church as a living body. So chapter 12 gave us principles and guidelines as to how we are to live together within this church community.

In today's passage, Paul is going to give us some principles describing how it is that we are to relate to governmental authority. Even though we are not citizens of this world, and even though we are citizens of the kingdom of God, we are still living in the United States as citizens or legal aliens. Paul gives us some clear guidelines what our relationship to government ought to be.

Now there is a huge problem in today's passage. Usually when there is a problem in Scripture it is due to the problem of not understanding the vocabulary, the text may have variant readings, or we are so removed from the culture that we can't understand what is going on. However, we have no problems understanding today's text. The vocabulary, the text, and the meaning are all crystal clear. If you were to research this passage throughout the centuries, you would find that there is much more written about what the text doesn't say, rather than what it does?

And I think that emphasizes the message of this passage. The text is clear. Paul plainly says that we are to submit to government authority and obey the laws. It's plain and simple. However, our thoughts immediately drift to things such as, "What if the

government is corrupt? What if the government does bad things? What if I don't agree with the government or laws?" In other words, when do I not submit to the government and when do I disobey the laws? Let me demonstrate how clever we are: We ask, "So if we lived in Nazi Germany, should we obey the government and help exterminate Jews?" The answer is, "Of course not. We should disobey in that case." However, my challenge to us this morning is this; we are not faced with that situation right now.

I can't remember who said this but I think it perhaps was Mark Twain, "I'm not so much worried about the things I don't understand in the Bible, I'm worried about what I do understand and am not obeying." This morning's passage is all about submission and obedience. We are good at neither. Those of us in positions of authority abuse it, and those of us who are not in authority don't have much respect for it.

Let me give you an example. You remember that church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. "How tough was it?" One night I was at one of the deacon's home. His teen-age son came in and said, "Dad you said when I proved that I was responsible, you would let me take the car out. I raised my grades in school. In fact I got all A's on my last report card. I have been reading my Bible every day, and I have not missed church or youth group all year. What do you say dad? Can I have the car?"

The deacon looked at the boy and said, "You're only two-thirds of the way there. Now all you have to do is get that ridiculously long hair cut. When are you going to get it cut?"

The boy responded, "Well, I don't see why I have to get my hair cut. Jesus had long hair, didn't He?"

The deacon looked at his son and said, “That’s right son ... and Jesus walked everywhere He went.”

I think it is easy for us to look around and find abuses of power. But I think if we were to examine our own spirits, it would be just as easy for us to see how rebellious we are when it comes to submission and obedience.

I know there are many people who really want to know what God’s will for their lives are. Let me tell you ... because I know. Here it is: It is God’s will that we become more and more like His Son, Jesus every day. That’s what God’s will for your life is. That’s what God’s will for my life is. Now let me give you some really bad news. Two qualities that stand out in the character of Jesus were His submission and obedience. I can say without hesitation that it is God’s will that we learn to be submissive and obedient. But hold on because the news gets worse; and this is the main point of today’s passage: **GOD USES GOVERNMENT TO TEACH US SUBMISSION AND OBEDIENCE, TWO QUALITIES THAT MAKE US MORE CHRIST-LIKE.** I want you to let that sink in. God uses secular, corrupt government to mold us into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now those of you who really know me may be saying, “With your view of government, do you really think you’re the best guy to be teaching this passage?”

And my response, “I think I’m the perfect guy.” You see, I have a very cynical view of government. I don’t expect politicians to act morally or for the best interest of the people. Almost all of you know that I don’t vote and I almost never get into political

discussions. I think our government, like all governments from the beginning of time are corrupt and obsessed with power.

Now let me tell you why I think I'm the perfect guy to preach this passage; I submit to the government and obey the law. I did two tours of duty in the United States military. I have good conduct medals and achievement citations. I have worked for the government as a civilian and received awards there as well. I pay my taxes. I obey the laws. And I do what I'm told. As cynical and mistrustful as I am, I don't preach or teach anything that is remotely anti-government or anti-American. I think that I'm a pretty good citizen. So I think I'm the perfect guy to tackle this passage.

Some of us may think that we are submissive and obedient but my guess is that we haven't given too much thought to what submissive and obedient mean. I think that most of us are like C. S. Lewis' dog. Lewis said, "My dog never quite seems to obey me. It's just that from time to time his will agrees with mine." Isn't that the way we are? We will submit and obey when we agree. If I gave each of you \$100 and told you, "Take this money and buy something for yourself," would anyone have trouble obeying that command? I don't think so. That's not what obedience and submission is all about. It is when we are called to submit and obey when we don't agree and when suffering is involved that we come to understand these concepts.

I. LEARNING TO BE SUBMISSIVE (Vs. 1-5)
SUBMISSION REQUIRES US TO SURRENDER OUR EGOS TO GOD.

Having said that, let's get into the plain portions of this text first. In verses 1-5 we can learn to be submissive: **SUBMISSION REQUIRES US TO SURRENDER OUR EGOS TO GOD.** Submission requires us to let go of our pride, to let go of our sense of importance, and to let go of our perceived rights.

A. THE AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT (Vs. 1-3)

Verses 1-3 give us the source of the authority of government. It is hard to catch the power of the Greek in English here. Literally the text starts out, “Every soul,” must be subject to the ruling authorities. Did you catch that, “Every soul?” That means every person and it means the whole of every person. We are not to obey authorities grudgingly, half-heartedly, but with whole-hearted submission and loyalty. The wording is clear. Paul is saying to each one of us here this morning, “I want you to wholeheartedly submit to your federal, state, and local government. I want you to wholeheartedly support your police, fire, and military personnel. For those in school, submit gladly to teachers, administrators, and principals. The text is clear. There is no fudge room.

Why? Look at the second half of verse 1; because every government and authority is in place because God established it. There is no world leader or government in power that God has not placed there. If you stop and think about it ... that’s incredible. Pharaoh was put there by God. Nebuchadnezzar was made king of Babylon by God. Cyrus rose to power by God’s hand. Antiochus, Nero, and Caligula all came to power by God’s hand. Pontius Pilate, the one who had Jesus crucified, was placed in power by God. Adolph Hitler, Sadam Hussein, and every other horrible dictator were placed in power by God. There is no other way to read this text, and that was clearly the theology of Old Testament Jews. They believed all rulers, good or bad were there because God placed them there.

I hear so much political talk coming out of Christian’s mouths. Let me remind you Republicans that kept bashing Bill Clinton for his immorality and his liberal politics

... God placed him in that position. And let me remind you democrats who keep saying that George Bush stole the election ... God placed him in that position. Like it or not, God has brought each leader to power. That is simply fact. Nowhere does the Bible try and justify this, it is simply stated that that's the way things are.

Here's the natural consequence of that. If we rebel against authority, then we are bringing judgment on ourselves. If God has placed an authority over us, and we rebel against it, then we are in reality rebelling against God. Now we can immediately go to the extreme and point to Nazi Germany, but I'll deal with that later, for now, let's stick with some common sense examples. My guess is that most countries hold broadly to a definition of right and wrong that is in agreement with the Ten Commandments or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Most countries have laws against stealing, killing, cheating, etc. Some countries and societies may define these more extremely or less extremely, but most countries have laws against harming others.

Keep in mind that Paul is writing to Christians in Rome. If they obeyed the Ten Commandments, fed the poor, clothed the naked, and visited prisoners, for the most part, they had nothing to fear from the government. In fact, if you read through the book of Acts, you will see that the government under Roman law actually bailed the Apostle out of some difficult circumstances. But also keep in mind that Paul is not naïve and he will be ultimately executed by the Roman government and there were plenty of examples in his recent past where the government killed many Jews.

But for the most part, if we in the United States live out our faith, the government would consider us to be good citizens. In fact, many Christians every year are presented with good citizen awards because of the good deeds they are doing in the community. So

the point is that God has placed every authority in power and we are called to submit to that authority.

B. THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT (V. 4)

Verse 4 spells out the purpose of government. Here is the realistic premise we must start from. Since we are all born into original sin, it is our nature to be self-centered. If left to our own devices, we would end up killing one another. God instituted government to prevent this total chaos from ruling. Look at the first phrase in verse 4. It says that the government is God's servant to do good. That word servant is the same word as minister or deacon. For Paul it has religious connotations. The government is God's minister. The purpose of government is to maintain order so that God's people can do the work we were called to do. The government is to maintain order by rewarding the good and punishing the evil.

Look how much power God has given the state to punish evil. He has the sword and is given authority to bring God's wrath on evildoers. Last week Paul commanded us not to take revenge but to leave room for God's wrath. Here we see that the government has been given authority to administer God's wrath and punish evildoers all the way to death. The purpose of government is to maintain order so that the gospel may advance; government keeps this order by rewarding good and punishing evil.

C. OUR RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT (V. 5)

Our response to government is spelled out in verse 5: Here is where the rubber meets the road. In the book of Ephesians, Paul commands us to submit one to another out of reverence for Christ. Husbands are to submit to wives. Wives are to submit to husbands. Parents are to submit to children and children to parents. Masters are to

submit to slaves and slaves are to submit to their masters. Why? Because when we submit one to another, we are actually submitting to Christ. It is a way in which I learn submission. When I submit to my wife, children, and the board of this church, I am actually submitting to Christ because of my love for Him.

When I submit to the federal, state, and local governments, I am actually submitting to Christ because of my love for him. I don't agree with federal, state, and local governments. I don't trust federal, state, and local politicians. However, God placed them over me and I will submit to their authority because I love God who put them there. So I don't obey the law because I am afraid of government or politicians; I obey and submit because I love God. Are you loyal to George Bush, Rod Blagojavick, Mayor Daley, and Alderman O'Connor? Do you whole-heartedly support them? God has placed them over us. We learn submission by submitting to these authorities. Like it or not, the text is clear. In the end: **SUBMISSION REQUIRES US TO SURRENDER OUR EGOS TO GOD.**

II. LEARNING TO BE OBEDIENT (Vs. 6-7)
OBEDIENCE REQUIRES US TO JOYFULLY DO THINGS WE DON'T NECESSARILY WANT TO DO.

These next two verses are great, especially for those of us who live in the United States. Verses 6-7 help us to learn obedience. Remember the definition of obedience: **OBEDIENCE REQUIRES US TO JOYFULLY DO THINGS WE DON'T NECESSARILY WANT TO DO.** God couldn't have picked a better avenue than paying taxes. How many of you out there enjoy paying taxes? I certainly don't like paying taxes, but after studying through today's passage, I think I can be joyful knowing

that it is helping me to be more like Christ. Remember, Jesus said, “Give to the government what belongs to the government and give to God what belongs to God.”

A. THE REASON FOR TAXES (V. 6)

The reason for taxes is spelled out in verse 6; where Paul is making this a religious issue. Again Paul describes government officials as God’s servants. Last time Paul used the word deacons, this time he calls them liturgists. For Jews, this service was done by priests in the temple. Perhaps today we would refer to them as worship leaders in the church. So now the government officials are worship leaders. Paying taxes are like paying tithes. Our taxes pay for military protection, for police, fire, and all sorts of other services. Politicians are appointed by God to protect and to serve.

I think most of us take tithing seriously. I think most of us are serious about giving 10% of our money to God, but how serious are we about paying our taxes? For Paul, paying taxes seems to be a religious duty. The government is appointed by God and God tells us to submit to the government and to finance it by paying taxes.

B. OUR RESPONSE TO TAXES (V. 7)

What is our response to taxation to be as described in verse 7? We are to pay our taxes, the government provides services and we are to pay for them. The principle is that we are to pay our debts. The military protects us, the police and fire departments protect us. We have roads to drive on and schools to educate us. We are to pay for these services. We address the President as Mr. President. We address senators and representatives as the honorable senator so and so. We address Mayor Daley as Mayor. We address judges as Your Honor. Remember, we are to pay all of our taxes, state, federal, local, business and import taxes. We are not to try and cheat or fudge. Give to

Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. I want to emphasize this; I want to emphasize this in the strongest way possible. It doesn't matter what you think of the people in government, we are called to submit to them. It doesn't matter whether you think paying taxes is fair or not, this passage is crystal clear: **SUBMISSION AND OBEDIENCE REQUIRE US TO JOYFULLY DO THINGS WE DON'T NECESSARILY WANT TO DO.**

III. EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE
WHEN HUMAN AUTHORITY REQUIRES US TO VIOLATE GOD'S LAWS, THEN WE MUST DISOBEY THE AUTHORITIES ABOVE US. HOWEVER, WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO BE SURE WE ARE NOT USING THIS AS AN EXCUSE TO SIMPLY DO WHAT WE WANT TO DO.

If we are like most people throughout history, we don't have much interest in what has just been spelled out. We are more interested in finding justification to rebel against authority and government. Indeed there are times to rebel and disobey: **WHEN HUMAN AUTHORITY REQUIRES US TO VIOLATE GOD'S LAWS, THEN WE MUST DISOBEY THE AUTHORITIES ABOVE US. HOWEVER, WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO BE SURE WE ARE NOT USING THIS AS AN EXCUSE TO SIMPLY DO WHAT WE WANT TO DO.** Let me throw out some examples of exceptions to the rule.

A. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

First let's recall some biblical examples. In the time of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar decreed that at the sound of the trumpet, all the people in his kingdom were to bow down and worship his statue. Three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down. They refused to worship anyone or anything but God.

When the king threatened to throw them in the fiery furnace, they responded, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O’ king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O’ king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Later in the book of Daniel, a royal decree was made that no one could pray to any god for 30 days. All prayers were to be addressed to King Darius alone. Listen to Daniel’s response to this. “Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”

In the New Testament, the Apostles John and Peter were arrested for healing and preaching in the name of Jesus. They were arrested, beaten, and threatened. When they were commanded to stop speaking and teaching about Jesus, this was their answer. “But, ’Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God, for we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’”

If you notice, in all three instances, they were commanded by the governing authorities to go against clear commands of God. They were being forced to violate their consciences. The choice was to either obey God or the government; they all chose to obey God and disobey the authorities.

B. MODERN DAY EXAMPLES

Let me give just two obvious examples from modern days: During the Nazi occupation of Europe, the government mandated all people to turn over Jews. Many

Christians, perhaps most famous of whom was Corrie Tenboom and her family, not only did not turn in Jews, they hid them in their houses at great risk. In fact, Corrie was arrested and put into prison by the Nazis where she was humiliated.

In most Muslim run countries today, it is illegal to be a Christian and talk about Christ. Every day, missionaries and every day believers disobey these laws. They are arrested, tortured, and many killed for their faith in Jesus Christ.

So it is safe to say that there are times when we are clearly called to disobey the law and there are times we will be called to disobey authority.

C. SOME WARNINGS

However, let me just give some warnings. I have been out of the country several times in the last couple of months but unless I missed it, I don't recall Mayor Daley building any statues of himself or his father and commanding that every day at 2 PM the sirens would blow and everybody would have to fall on their knees and worship it.

I don't ever recall Alderman O'Connor bringing the police here and telling us that if we mentioned the name of Jesus one more time we would be arrested and the church closed down.

I don't recall Bill Clinton or George Bush signing into law any prohibitions of being Christian.

Listen, we are so rebellious, that we are good at taking things we want to do and put a religious spin on it. The Apostle Paul and Jesus were not naïve and they certainly were not stupid. The Roman Empire was a lot like modern day United States, perhaps even a little more corrupt and perhaps a little more anti-Christian. Yet both submitted to and obeyed the government. Jesus submitted Himself to torture and death. Paul spent

the greater part of his old age in prison. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, along with the Apostles, each faced death to disobey authority. The next time you are tempted to put a moral spin on why you can cheat the government or disobey them, ask yourself, “Is this worth dying for?” And then ask yourself, “Am I willing to die for it?” If it is, then by all means disobey. If not, then shut up, submit to the government, obey, and pay your taxes.

There will come a time when we are called to disobey government. The book of Revelation spells out that time for us. However, remember this: **WHEN HUMAN AUTHORITY REQUIRES US TO VIOLATE GOD’S LAWS, THEN WE MUST DISOBEY THE AUTHORITIES ABOVE US. HOWEVER, WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO BE SURE WE ARE NOT USING THIS AS AN EXCUSE TO SIMPLY DO WHAT WE WANT TO DO.**

Again, let me say this; God uses government to teach us about submission and obedience. It’s not easy for us to learn these two qualities because they go against our nature. But the Apostle Paul has told us that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and we are to be conformed to the image of Christ: **GOD USES GOVERNMENT TO TEACH US SUBMISSION AND OBEDIENCE, TWO QUALITIES THAT MAKE US MORE CHRIST-LIKE.**

Listen to two descriptions of Jesus; one from the book of Hebrews, and one from the book of Philippians.

While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could deliver him out of death. And God heard his prayers because of his reverence for God. So even though Jesus was God’s Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered.

Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing;

he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross.

Jesus knew how important submission was. Our salvation was at stake. And if Jesus, being perfect God had to learn obedience through suffering, what makes us think we can learn obedience and submission any other way. But learning submission and obedience is important to us. Listen to what the results were in Jesus' life.

Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.