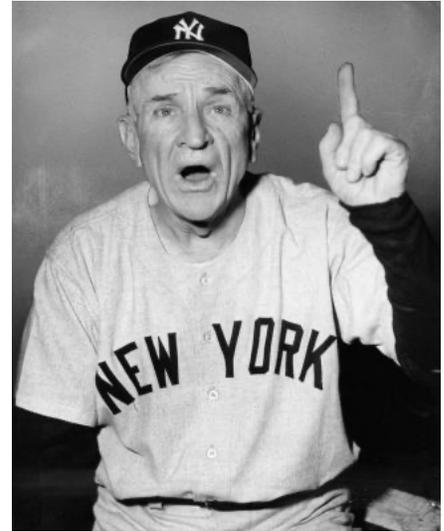


**YOU AND THE GOVERNMENT, PT. 1**  
**ROMANS 13:1-7**

If you are a baseball fan, **you know this face** — one of the most successful managers in baseball history.

If you are not a baseball fan, you might still recognize his name: Casey Stengel. Casey had an ability to say the right thing in wrong ways that made listeners chuckle at his malaprops. I don't know when he said this, but his comment on politics is timeless: "I stayed up last night and watched the Republican Convention all night long. I watched all of them talk, and listened to them and seen them and **I'm not interested** in politics. If you watch them and listen to them you can find out why."



Stengel was reflecting an idea that living in the world is hard. Living under government — and sometimes inept and corrupt governments — is hard. We see ungodly laws and unrighteous living and it not only saddens us, but we see the encouragement of injustice and it grieves us. We see those who should be upholding moral truth and goodness perverting it, and we anticipate the end of a culture (**1:32**). So we need to be reminded of how we are to think about and relate to the government.

As we come back to Romans 13, Paul is exceedingly clear in this passage about how we should think about and relate to the government. The last couple of weeks, we saw the responsibility of government to us; today we will focus on our responsibility to government. Simply said,

**EVERY BELIEVER SHOULD ALWAYS HONOR HIS GOVERNMENT.**

Or even more precisely, *because God has ordained every government*, every believer should always honor his government. How will we honor the government? In these verses, Paul identifies **three responses** for the believer to the government; we will discuss the first of those today and the other two next week:

- 1. SUBMIT to the Government (vv. 1-2, 5)**
  - ✓ Submission is for **ALL** people (v. 1)
  - ✓ Lack of submission is rebellion against **GOD** (v. 2)
  - ✓ Submission is for maintaining a clear **CONSCIENCE** (v. 5)
- 2. Do What is GOOD (vv. 3-4)**
- 3. Pay Your TAXES (vv. 6-7)**

**EVERY BELIEVER SHOULD ALWAYS HONOR HIS GOVERNMENT.**

- Some of the truths we will hear today and next week are hard. They are contrary to the flesh; while the flesh must die, the flesh doesn't want to die. So we are naturally resistant to some of these things.
- But these truths are good (right); and these truths are good (beneficial) for us.
- One of the core truths that we teach beginning counselors and disciplers is the power of **2 Tim. 3:16-17**. What the Scripture says about everything is good for us and will make us to live more satisfying and (more importantly) more God-glorifying lives. Hear these truths in that way: how can I honor the Lord in my relationship to the government?

**1. SUBMIT to the Government (vv. 1-2, 5)**

• Submission is for **ALL** people (v. 1)

- ✓ **What is submission?** The word **to be in subjection**, is a familiar NT word; it is the same word as he uses in **Eph. 5:21** (and implied in 5:22; also Tt. 2:5) and **Tt. 2:9** (slaves to masters) — wherever the believer has someone in authority over him, he needs to place himself *willingly* under that authority and follow that authority.
- ✓ The person who submits does so willingly and voluntarily. He *chooses* to submit. There may be an external reason for the individual to submit, so that submission is “forced;” but this submission is more than compelled compliance. The person who submits as unto the Lord, does so willingly, voluntarily, and joyfully. So submission is actually an attitude of heart that results in *joyful* and *God-honoring* obedience. We see other examples of this kind of submission:
  - A child might obey his parents externally while inwardly he is grumbling about the task. That's obedience, but not submission (Eph. 6:1).
  - The wife submits to her husband (Eph. 5:22), the church is submissive to Christ, young people are submissive to their elders, church members submit to their leadership, soldiers submit to their superiors, slaves submit to their masters, the Son of God submits to God the Father, and citizens submit to the government. Submission — living under the authority of others — is normal for every person everywhere.
  - Summary: the one who submits willingly gives up his “rights” in order to serve another.
- ✓ So submission in Romans 13 means that whatever the government has mandated, the believer is under obligation to joyfully submit to that law. He is to place himself under the law and under the authority/leader behind the law.
- ✓ **Who should submit?** Paul is very clear that this is for **every person** (lit., “every soul”). Submission is not optional for anyone. No matter where or when anyone lives, he is to place himself under the authority of the government and follow it.

- ✓ Some have suggested that Paul is being ironic — what he is saying is so absurd that he must have meant the opposite — he doesn't mean that we are to be submissive, but that we are to be subversive. Except this is the consistent teaching of Scripture.
- It is what was taught in the OT to Israel — after Jerusalem was sent to captivity in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah wrote a letter to those in captivity, saying, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare” (Jer. 29:7).
- This is what Jesus taught — **Mt. 22:15-22**. Taxes rightly go to the government, and we are obligated to follow and live under the authority of the government — even our Savior!
  - ... Jesus came to offer people the opportunity to have their hearts transformed, not overthrow government (// Mk. 12:13-17).
  - ... Jesus Christ lived under the Roman government, authorities far more oppressive and corrupt than our own, yet he never uttered a word about reclaiming the culture or overthrowing the government (something many expected Him to do, e.g., **Acts 1:6**).
- This is also what Peter wrote in his first letter to a church that was scattered (**1 Pt. 2:13-14, 17**).
- And this is what Paul wrote to Titus (**3:1-2**). Except in Titus Paul not only says to submit, he also says to ***be obedient*** and to ***malign no one...***
  - ... This was written during the time of Nero who after he burned Rome, blamed the Christians and had them crucified, burned as torches, and covered with the skins of animals and torn by dogs.
  - ... Under Rome, Jerusalem was overrun in A.D. 70, destroying the Temple and killing 1.1 million.
  - ... Polybius said it was almost “impossible to find...personal conduct more treacherous or public policy more unjust than in Crete.” And, the Cretans were constantly involved in ‘insurrections, murders and internecine wars’.
  - ... It is these kind of governmental leaders Paul said they were to obey (present tense, so, constantly and continually). We're quick to for reasons for civil disobedience, but Scripture repeatedly emphasizes civil *obedience*. Why?
    - We submit because government is decreed by God (**Rom. 13:1**); He put our government in place for our good and to submit to the government is to submit to Him.
    - We submit obediently because not obeying government is disobeying God (**Rom. 13:2a**).
    - We submit because those who disobey will be punished (**Rom. 13:2b**).
    - Further, Titus tells us that we obey government because rebellion against government is a mark of the unbelieving life (**Tt. 3:3**, foolish and disobedient). And because obedience is a mark of the transforming work of Christ and the Spirit (2:14; also 1 Pt. 2:21ff).
    - Finally, we obey because our obedience is a testimony to unbelievers (**1 Pt. 2:12-15**). We silence their slander.

- ✓ Summary: If a law is made and it applies to me, I must obey; and if there is an authority over me, I must submit — joyfully. And that is what is hard for most of us, because we are trained culturally to distrust and resist leadership.
- ✓ One of our girls was very young, maybe three, when she was disobeying in front of my parents. I gently corrected her and exhorted her to obey with “a happy heart.” Mom looked at me, “Terry — isn’t it enough that she obeys?” Nope. Submission is willing and joyful — for three-year-olds and for 63-year-olds.
- ✓ Disobedience and rebellion may be commendable attributes in the culture, but they are condemnable attributes in the believer.
- **To whom does the believer submit in government?** (Are there any limitations?)
  - ✓ Our submission is to the **governing authorities**. The word **authorities** refers to anyone who by position has an ability, right, and “permission” to exercise power over others — his commands and will must be obeyed by others. When used of governmental leaders (as here), there is never any promise that these leaders will be righteous. In fact, because they are men, these leaders will always be sinners, just as the citizens are. And the citizens must still submit to them.
  - ✓ This term is non-specific and broad — it includes anyone who has any kind of authority — in our context, anyone from the President, to the Senate, House, down to state officials, city and county leaders, policemen, deputies, and constables, judges from the Supreme Court to the Traffic Court. It includes building inspectors and DMV employees. Anyone that has authority, we submit to them.
  - ✓ Even if the individual is flawed (and he will be), if he has a position that requires our submission, we do so as an expression of joyful obedience to God.
  - ✓ A Christian cannot be an anarchist.

*“Submissiveness has always portrayed the Spirit of Christ in His people. Rebellion has never produced any response from God other than judgment.” [Kenyon, quoted by Hiebert]*

- ✓ Our default response to our government should always be submission and obedience. Most of us struggle with this. Submission is not an American value, but it is a Biblical and godly value.
- ✓ As believing Americans, we have rebellion and anarchy in our flesh and in our cultural heritage. Resistance to submission comes from Adam and from the American Revolution. We are doubly trained and prepared to rebel against authority. As believers in a submissive Savior, we need extra vigilance to fight against the rebellion in our hearts. One writer has rightly said,

*“Much, [though] not all, of the anti-government sentiment in the United States today is thinly veiled hatred of law and exaltation of brutal self-will. Thus it easily slips over into ‘righteous wrongdoing.’” [Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 22]*

- ✓ Are you in willing submission to your governmental authorities? Have you chosen to submit to them and are you content and at peace with that? Are you reading and meditating on the things that will make it easier for you to submit? Submission will only happen as your mind is renewed. Take care to give Scripture more weight to how you think about your government than anything else.

- **Lack of submission is rebellion against GOD (v. 2)** — This verse answers the “why” question

- ✓ Not everyone finds it easy to submit to government, so Paul reminds us of the consequence of rebellion against the government — **whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God.**
  - To **resist** the government is to align oneself in opposition to and fight against the authority.
  - The problem with such resistance and rebellion is that it is also **opposed to God’s ordinance** — it is to stand against God, “shaking one’s fist” against Him.
  - An element of discontentment with government is that it is really discontentment with God and His sovereignty (just as anger against my wife is anger against God who gave her to me). We must maintain a holy discontentment with unrighteousness when we see it in the culture. We must hate what is wrong, but we also must stop cultivating unrighteous anger and entrust it to the Lord who will take care of it at the right time (Eph. 4:26; **Rom. 12:19-21**).
  - Paul is appealing to the truth of v. 1 — God has established and ordained every authority so to resist those authorities is to be in opposition to what God has commanded and ordained.
- ✓ We are prone to minimizing discontentment and rebellion as an American right to free speech. But the free speech must first of all be speech that is submissive as unto the Lord and befitting Christ.
- ✓ No one suffered more injustice from a civil government or court than Christ. Yet His example was humility and submission (Jn. 18:33-38). It would have been easiest for Pilate to condemn Christ, yet by the end of the conversation he was ready to acquit Christ. This is why Peter says what he does in 1 Pt. 2:22-25. He was truthful, humble, and submissive. And that is our example (**1 Pt. 2:21**).
- ✓ Understand that if you and I oppose the government, we invite the judgment of God on ourselves — **will receive condemnation upon themselves.**
  - R. C. Sproul rightly says, “If we resist the authorities that God has appointed, we might be regarded as heroes by some, but we can expect only the visitation of God’s judgment.”
  - This judgment might come through the government (**vv. 3-4**), but it is *from God*.
  - As we live in this world and under this government (which at this point is only persecuting us with words and not with physical atrocities as in Rome), we do well to “so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (12:18).

- **Submission is for maintaining a clear CONSCIENCE (v. 5)**

- ✓ If we do not submit to the government, then we face the judgment of God through the avenging actions of the government (vv. 4-5a). But we also are in danger of sinning against our consciences.

- ✓ So Paul says in v. 5 that ***it is necessary to be in subjection***. Submission to government is a divine constraint. It's not optional. Because God has ordained government and given it particular duties, the individual is always (as much as possible) to be in submission to that authority.
- ✓ And the reason he gives for our submission in v. 5 is our ***conscience***.
  - Remember that in **2:15** Paul said every person has been given a conscience. The conscience is not the Holy Spirit in believers, but an innate understanding of a divine moral code — what is right and what is sin — in every person. And that conscience is to guide and direct our activities.
  - The conscience is a guide, monitor, witness, and judge to and of our moral actions. The conscience functions as both a guide to morality and evaluator of the moral quality of our actions. So Naselli and Crowley write this: “Your conscience guides you to help you conform to moral standards, monitors how you conform to them, testifies to how you conform to them, and judges how you conform to them, thus making you feel guilt and pain...The conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong. It's basically your...moral awareness turned back on yourself.” [*Conscience*, Kindle location 541.]
  - So what Paul means in this verse is that God has placed in the conscience of every man the truth that the government is given for his good and he is to submit to it (vv. 1b-2). And if he does not submit, he is sinning against his conscience and training himself to rebel against his conscience.
  - Especially for the believer, sinning against our conscience and what we know is true is one of the worst things we can do against ourselves.
  - Luther said, “To go against conscience is neither right nor safe.” He was right. We never want to train ourselves to ignore or go against our conscience.
  - Naselli and Crowley: “As a general rule, you should assume that your conscience is reliable, even if it isn't perfect. And since conscience is usually right, the Bible says that we should do what our conscience says until we are convinced from Scripture that it needs adjusting.” [location 797]
  - Elsewhere they add, “When you ignore your conscience, you foolishly reject God's priceless gift and thus defy the God who made you.” [“Why You Shouldn't Ignore Your Conscience”]
- ✓ When we don't submit to the government, we violate our consciences and train ourselves to sin even more (in other areas as well). [And if you say, “My conscience doesn't convict me,” you may be in a particularly dangerous place.]
- ✓ This idea of conscience actually has been an impetus for rebelling against the government — especially in the past year with COVID restrictions.
  - “I am not going to wear a mask because that violates my conscience...” In order for that to be a violation of one's conscience, wearing a mask would have to be a sin. Only if it is sinful to wear a mask can the conscience condemn us — “you were *wrong* to wear the mask.” Mask wearing (and a host of other COVID restrictions) are preferences we don't like, not conscience issues.

- An easier example: a few weeks ago Raye Jeanne and I went on vacation and crossed the border into another state. On the Texas side of the border, the speed limit was 75 mph. In our neighboring state, in the same terrain (flat and straight and no houses within sight), for about 20 miles, the speed limit was 55 mph. It was *sooooo* slow. Everything in me said, “this is ridiculous; there is no good reason for this speed limit; let’s drive 75 mph!” But I also realized that I had no right to contravene the speed limit; so I set my cruise control at 55 (and watched as car after car raced past me at 70+). My *preference* was 70-75; that is not a conscience issue.
  - Can we just be honest with each other that many things we claim to be conscience issues that preclude us from obeying the government are simply personal preferences?
  - And just for clarity’s sake, what do we do with preferences? We set them aside for the sake of submission to the authorities over us.
- ✓ Submit to the government as much as you are able (without disobeying God) and by that, keep your conscience clear of sin.

**CONCLUSION:** I can do no better in summarizing this than echoing the commentator Douglas Moo: “Government is more than a nuisance to be put up with; it is an institution established by God to accomplish some of his purposes on earth...” And because that’s true, honor the government by submitting to the government.

**BENEDICTION:** Rom. 11:33-35