

Not Ashamed
(Week 31)
Romans 13:1-7
“Civil Obedience”

Introduction

Jesus told them, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him. **Mark 12:17**

In **Romans Chapter 12**, Paul begins a long discourse on just what it means to be a Christian. It starts with becoming a “living sacrifice”, where our wills are surrendered to the will of God. NO longer do we act based upon how we “feel” in a particular moment, but rather, we act according to the leading of The Holy Spirit. And, as such, we will not only love those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we will love those who despise us as well. It is God’s love (agape) coming out from within us. For we know that **God so loved the world (John 3:16)**, and therefore, when we are like God, we love not only those who will love us in return, but also those who do not.

That being said, how are we to respond to those in authority over us? It should come as no surprise to the child of God that we are to love them as well. In **Romans 13:1-7**, Paul describes for us the way that a true “living sacrifice” will behave towards his government. Paul, of all people, understood full well the corruption of the Governments of men. The bulk of his ministry was conducted under the brutal Roman dictator, Nero. It is Nero who would hang Christians on crosses and set them on fire in order to light up his garden parties. One could argue that Nero was one of the most evil men who ever walked the face of the earth. So, how does Paul advise the Church of Rome to respond to the Government ruled by this man? With the same agape love that they were taught to show to one another!

I could not think of a more timely message for the Church, as I look around and see all that is going on in our world today. We are being constantly bombarded with image after image of what is commonly called “civil disobedience”, where those who find themselves dissatisfied for any number of reasons cause great disturbances to show their displeasure against those in leadership. At times the cause is just, and at times, it is not, but they riot nonetheless, somehow able to convince their consciences that “the ends justify the means.”

There will always be injustice in this world. It is fallen and cursed. The only hope for mankind is to accept the gift of salvation offered upon Calvary’s cross. Only the agape love of Christ can cause all men to love one another. It does this by changing us from the inside out.

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2

So the question is for the Christian, “What should we do when the government is unfair?” And many today do not like the answer. We submit ourselves to those in authority. Period. To the child of God there is no such thing as “civil disobedience”. There is only obedience and disobedience. If people would only read their *Bibles*, they would find that life’s choices are much easier to make. I for one am weary of society’s attempts to add so many shades of gray to what is forever black and white, set in stone. God’s people are a people of love and peace. When we truly love our adversaries as much as we do our brethren, then what is there to become angry about? This is why *The Bible* teaches that the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”. Kinda hard to start a riot when this is the prevailing “mood” of the crowd, is it not?

Sadly, many who call themselves Christians feel the need to join with the mob and bring anarchy to the streets, as it were, in order to take a stand for injustice. While I do believe that we are to be a people who should stand for the right and despise the wrong (**Romans 12:9**), we are never justified in disrupting the peace to stand up for what is right and just. There is a right way, and a wrong way, to take a stand for truth, and man’s anger can never bring about God’s righteousness (**James 1:20**). So how does the living sacrifice respond to those in authority? With agape love. We Submit, We Support, and Show Respect.

Submit (vs. 1-5)

Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience.

The Church of Rome knew full well that their government was corrupt. Paul did not need to remind them of what was indisputable fact. But the Apostle wanted to make sure that they understood that being a living sacrifice was to be submissive to those in authority, whether that authority be fair or not. We show love in the face of persecution. It is what Christ did. It is what we do. Paul goes one step further and explains the reason.

... authorities are instituted by God...

I think many Believers struggle with this concept. **ALL** authority given to men is granted by the will of Almighty God. The reason that God allows civil authority to rule over mankind is that without it, humanity will be completely overcome with depravity. Just read in **Genesis Chapter Six** what it was like on earth when mankind did as it pleased.

When The LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time, The LORD regretted that He had made man on the earth, and He was deeply grieved.

Genesis 6:5-6

We all know how the story ends. God washed mankind from the face of the earth with a great flood. There is nothing inherently good in the hearts of men. And without governance, they will ultimately behave like animals. I never ceased to be amazed at the depths to which human kind will go to satisfy their continual lust for more. A quick look inside a prison will be more than adequate to show a glimpse into the wickedness that lies within the human heart. Without governments and laws, none of us would be able to live in any kind of peace.

In Paul's day, the Roman government was brutal, to say the least, but the one thing they did not tolerate was anarchy. Like it or not, Rome kept its citizenry from running wild. If a people reject God as their sovereign, then it becomes necessary for something to restrain them. So God has ordained government to do just that. He has allowed men to be ruled by men. He has instituted the authority of government, in order to keep a lid on the depravity of men.

Paul commands the Church of Rome to obey the laws of their government in order to live in peace. The government has the ability (granted to it by God) to punish those who would be lawbreakers. This is what Paul is talking about, when he says **"because it does not carry the sword for no reason"**. Simply put, God has granted the governments of men to keep order, by force and punishment, if necessary.

America is filled with prisons. And these prisons do very little to rehabilitate criminals, but rather, they usually turn them into more hardened criminals. It has been said that when settlers first came to this continent, there were no prisons. The concept of incarcerating, rather than capital punishment, was introduced by the Quakers, who thought that capital punishment was inhumane.

It is also interesting to note that in ancient Israel there were no prisons, where people were compelled to "pay their debt to society", as it were. Instead, when laws were broken, the punishment was determined by whether or not the criminal could make restitution or not. For example, if you had stolen something, then you had to repay it with an added penalty to make up for what you had done. If you took another person's life however, that was something that you could not restore, and for this type of crime the death penalty was always required. So you see, those who would break the law, either had to pay for their crimes with restitution, or their own lives. I wonder how the crime rate in our country would look, if we practiced a similar method?

Governments have been given the sword as a deterrent to depravity. God has given them this sword. And the child of God should submit to this authority for two very important reasons. First, so they will not be punished, and second, because their conscience requires them to submit to God's will. For the child of God, there is no such thing as "civil disobedience". For we submit to the government because, in so doing, we submit to God Himself.

It is for this very reason that as Believers, whether we like who is in office or not, we pray for those who lead us. Every four years, we turn this nation into a battleground, Conservative verses Liberal, Red State vs. Blue State. And, as a result, half of the population is angry most of the time. But what would Christ have us do? Pray for those in leadership, because they would not be there unless He allowed it!

I have no idea what God is doing sometimes, or why He allows some to rule. In this country, I have been given the privilege to have a small voice in who is elected, and who is not, but quite frankly, I don't often get the one that I voted for. So what am I to do? Go out and start a riot? Continually complain about the incompetence of those who win the election? Slander them to any who would listen, so that "my guy" might win the next round?

I have a couple questions for each of you this morning. Did everything in this country get miraculously "fixed", when your candidate got elected? Or, did everything completely fall apart, when the guy you didn't want got in? If you answer truthfully this morning, you would say no to each of these. Would you like to know why? Because God doesn't need anyone in particular to accomplish His will. His purpose will be done, no matter what. So, let us accept those whom He allows to lead and pray for them accordingly.

God has used imperfect, and yes, even wicked men to accomplish His will many times over. I grew up reading a "King James Bible" as many of you have done. King James was by no means a perfect man. There were many of his subjects who despised him. And yet, he commanded that *The Bible* be translated into English for the common man. He did this not only for religious purposes, but also for political and monetary reasons (lots of people would pay dearly for English Bibles). And yet, look how God used him to get even more people to know His Word!

Alexander The Great was a wicked, amoral man, if there ever was one. In his arrogance, he wanted all the world to speak his own native tongue (Greek). He brutally conquered the known world and forced all to learn Greek. And when *The New Testament* was written (in Greek), so many more were then able to read it. God used a pagan despot to accomplish His purpose of spreading the gospel! Let the Church get it into our hearts and minds that God truly is sovereign. If we would only accept this truth by faith, I think we'd all sleep better at night. Don't you? Submit to those in authority. For they were given that authority in order to carry out the will of an all-knowing, all-powerful God.

So, the question arises, "Is there a time that we cannot submit to government?" Only when the government commands us to do something that is contrary with the laws of Scripture. We obey God above man, and therefore, we stand for truth in the face of governmental persecution. But even in this, we do not rebel in such a way as to bring violence. If a believer is imprisoned for his belief, then we are to do so in submission and love. Our LORD was crucified by His government. He did not lead a rebellion. He simply gave His life and prayed for His tormentors. THIS is Christianity.

Support (vs. 6)

And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. **Romans 13:6**

Like it or not, in order for any government to function, it needs money. It takes money to build roads, pay for schools, and to hire police and firefighters to keep our neighborhoods safe. For this reason, God not only requires that His people submit to the authorities that He has ordained, but to support them as well. In short, Christians ought to pay their taxes! You cannot serve Christ and be a "tax-cheat" at the same time. To withhold our taxes is to defraud those whom God has chosen to rule.

Now, I will be the first one to admit that I don't like a great many ways that our government spends our money. Can I get a witness? But that does not excuse me from paying my fair share. In Christ's day, the government was far less "fair" than what we have now. No one in leadership actually cared whether or not the populace liked the way their "tax denarii" was spent! And pretty much everyone hated the tax collectors of Rome. For the system was rigged against the common man. For you see, the

way the tax collectors made their living was to overcharge the people. Everything that they took in above what Rome required could be kept as a wage for the tax collector. Imagine the other disciples surprise when Jesus called one away from his collectors booth to become one of His disciples (namely Matthew also known as Levi. **Mark 2:13-14**).

No one I know “enjoys” paying their taxes. But we all know that they are necessary. I, for one, am glad that I get to drive on paved roads and call the police when I need help. Just in case you were wondering, yes, I am a strong proponent of police! Just imagine a world without them. More and more people are shouting for the removal of law and order in this world. Is it any wonder that Jesus said that when He returns it will be like the days of Noah? I believe that every Christian should become intimately familiar with **Matthew 24** (written by a tax collector by the way) and see just where this world is headed. Things will get so out of control that the whole world will long for a dictator (the Antichrist) to restore order. I won’t be here to see this for myself (rapture), but anyone with any discernment can see the handwriting on the wall.

In the meantime, pay your taxes. Don’t worry about whether or not the politicians spend the money wisely, for very soon, they too will stand before the same Holy God that we will, and give an accounting for all they have done. Let God handle them.

Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says The LORD. Romans 12:19

Remember this verse the next time you get upset, or when you think about your tax dollars going to fund causes such as Planned Parenthood. God won’t give the evil men (or women) of this world a “pass”. These corrupt politicians will have their day of reckoning before The LORD. Just make sure that your dealings are lawful and fair. Support those to whom God has given civil authority. Pay your taxes.

Show Respect (vs. 7)

Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor. Romans 13:7

In all honesty, I must admit that I am neither a great fan of politics, nor politicians. I do not personally believe that many of them are sincere, whether it comes to either their professed faith, or their “feigned” concern, for us little people who live in the real world. Call me a cynic, but that is simply how I feel. I know many Christians who feel that it is our “Christian duty” to be overly-active in the political arena. I could not disagree more. I do not believe that we are called to “clean up the pond”, as it were. I believe that we have been called to catch fish out of it. In short, the purpose of The Church is to make disciples and not to restore the moral integrity within the governments of men. That being said, I will only vote for leaders, who at least “claim” to share my Christian beliefs. But I do not place my faith in the governance of men. In fact, I believe that the more that men are governed by The Spirit of God, the less government they need! Even so come LORD Jesus.

But the Scriptures make it unmistakably clear, that because our God has chosen those who would rule over us, that we are to treat them with honor and respect. We do this, not because they are necessarily deserving, but because God has chosen them to govern. As I have heard it said many times before, we may not agree with the man, but the office is to be respected. That means we honor all of our leaders, whether we believe they have earned it or not.

As I am writing this, I cannot help but think of the polarization of our nation today. Let it be said that we, as followers of Jesus Christ, love those with whom we agree, as well as, those with whom we disagree. Let it be said of us that we honor those in leadership... period. No exceptions. Pray for our nation. Pray for our leaders, and *Submit*, *Support*, and *Show Respect* to all those whom God has, in His sovereign wisdom, chosen to rule over us. There is no such thing as “Christian Civil Disobedience”. If Paul could command the Church at Rome to honor Nero, then Christ can certainly command us to respect the laws of our government and its elected officials. Agape... is for EVERYONE, not just those who side with us.

And let all of God’s elect say... TRUTH!!!