

Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13:1-7 (ESV)

Wow this is an interesting passage. What is more interesting is to see how it will play out in our lives.

¹ 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.

Subject to governing authorities. We need to be careful here. This is talking about national, state and local governments here. Over the years I have heard this spoken about as a passage about church governance. I am not sure we can take that view too much. Paul would have spoken specifically about the church or the Ecclesia (gathering) if he wanted to make us think about church regulatory lines. What he is speaking about is the respect and behaviour before the laws and authorities of civil government. But having said that, I do think that there are broad principles here on how we treat people. From the top down.

He is blunt – **Be subject**

The greek word here means to submit oneself. – That is make a conscious decision to be in submission.

How do we place ourselves in submission to our government? Follow the rules.

– **In other words obey.**

Why?

For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

God put them in power. I have to be honest I get really disappointed with people's comments about politics. I am not speaking specifically about here, this is a broad Christian culture thing. We have such strong opinions and those opinions often flow over into really bad behaviour. It is one thing to have an opinion it is another to slander people. It is not only a Facebook or twitter thing or even an internet thing. People are really distasteful in their comments about our leaders.

The comments about Prime ministers during the Rudd, Gillard, Rudd, Abbott, Turnbull era have been horrifying. I am not talking about media, I am talking about Christians. I think we have dropped our bundle here. We are called to pray for our leaders.

Be subject to means to follow their lead. Oh that's a tough one. But listen up, this is what the bible says:

² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

What level of resistance? Physical or verbal.

I think sometimes voice opposition is not just opposition but a verbal resisting. We need to treat our politicians with integrity and respect. Now I have worked for or worked with in committees a number of politicians in various roles. Liberal senator Michael Baume, Independent John Hatton, Kay Hull, and Eric Fitzgibbon. Actually went to a BBQ at Joel Fitzgibbon's place but that was before he was in parliament. Notice a broad range so you won't work out my political preferences after all we are not supposed to talk about religion and politics but seems talking about God is my job I had better stay away from casting judgement on politics!

All of them were in it to help their community, all of them really cared about the welfare of the constituents.

Resisting the political legal system we incur God's judgement. That's what this passage says. We need to be careful not to go guns blazing and have a free for all at politician's expense.

We need to not become like the media and be counter cultural, set a witness. Sure you can disagree but with respect.

Look where Paul goes next.

³ 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,

⁴ 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.

Here Paul offers standard ancient moral exhortation. This is a standard comment that the Romans used to explain their legal processes. Sure the Roman state did many evil things; even its court system was based on social class. But the Romans generally advocated justice and toleration, and at this point the Christians had nothing to fear from them. Paul thus does not need to qualify the general principle he is articulating at this time.

"The sword" refers to the standard method of execution in this period (beheading); in earlier times the ax had been used. Swords were carried in front of Roman officials to indicate their authority over life and death. There is often some cultural stuff we don't quite get. The greek gives the impression that the sword is carried as a sign of a deterrent. I suppose for us today the sign that says "Speed camera's used in the area" is similar. Supposed to be a deterrent from speeding.

Next Paul follows it up.

⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

Interesting Paul is saying you should be good christians and be submissive but if you aren't just be scared and the result is the same.

This is kind of saying, also that **it's just the right thing to do.**

Paul now unpacks the concept.

⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

⁷ 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.

The empire as a whole levied a property tax (often about 1 percent – I like the sound of that!) and a head tax; local provinces or kingdoms added further taxes; there were also customs duties. Taxes were used to finance roads and run the government but also to support Roman armies and temples devoted to the worship of the emperor.

Officials expected and received honour by virtue of their position. Some of this honour was expressed by people giving gifts. That would be seen as a bribe these days but it was accepted that if you went to a meeting with a governor or official, you took something . We used to do it when we went visiting someone. Take a plate of food to share or a bunch of flowers. Same principal.

But where does this leave us, right now.

I think that last verse nails it.

⁷ 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.

Give people what they deserve.

In our context, yep pay ya taxes, but also pay ya tithe. Pay the bills you gotta pay,

But here is the biggy.

Respect those you should respect.

But this one is bigger again.

Honour to whom honour is owed.

Give credit where it is due.