

**TUTORIAL**  
**3.16**

# Relating to Authority

Bible presenter Scot Keen delves into Romans chapter thirteen in this tutorial. After a rich discussion on truth so far in Romans, the author of Romans now practically shows us how these beliefs transform our lives.

## Introduction

In this tutorial, we move on to Romans chapter thirteen, the next chapter that deals with application. This chapter deals with relating to authority, specifically governing authority. Paul's major premise is will be that believers should submit to God-given authority as if they are submitting to God. This raises the question, "Why would Paul say this to the believers in Rome?" Let me first give you some background. I have previously mentioned that Paul is writing to the church in Rome made up of believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds.

In 49 AD Emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome because of Messianic movements and because of general distrust for Jewish people. Later these Jewish people were able to move back to Rome, and it is approximately ten to fifteen years after this that Paul wrote the book of Romans. So evidently there were still some sentiments against the government that were held among the believers there in Rome, most likely by the Jewish believers. This corresponds with the Jewish worldview at the time. For example, the Jews believed if they recognised Caesar, then that meant they were denying God as the rightful king over Israel. Remember the people asking Jesus if it was lawful to give taxes to Caesar or not? Some people saw it as treason to recognise Caesar in this way.

Many people think a clue as to why the Jews held this worldview is found in Deuteronomy chapter seventeen, when they come into the land that God would set a king over them. "You shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your own brethren. You may not set a foreigner over you who is not your brother." So based on Deuteronomy and the idea that God is the rightful King, some felt it would be treason to

recognise Caesar and so refused to submit to the governing authorities in Rome.

## **Submission to God-given authority**

Paul takes up this issue because it had become a problem. Peter also addressed this issue in the book of 1 Peter, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king or governors, for such is the will of God that by doing right, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men." So together they challenged believers to submit to the governing authorities, and in so doing, ultimately to submit to God.

Since God is the one who established human government, to resist authority is to resist the ordinance of God. "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Romans 13:1). Paul's argument is that believers should submit to government because God is the One who established it.

We know God established government all the way back in the book of Genesis, when He set up a basic form of human government by saying, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed." And so God instituted a certain form, you could say, of human government. But it goes beyond that. As Paul says here, there are no authorities that exist except from God. Those who are in power are ultimately there by the providence of God.

This is consistent with Jesus' claims in John chapter nineteen. When Pilate said, "Don't you know that I have power to release you?" Jesus responded by saying, "You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above." Jesus is telling Pilate that he would not even be in power were it not for the providence of God. And so God is the One who establishes authority, and therefore believers should submit to that authority.

## **Consequences of resisting authority**

Look at Romans 13:2, "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." Now, the condemnation that Paul speaks of is not eternal condemnation. He is simply saying that when believers disregard governing authorities they can expect to be punished by them.

Paul goes on to talk about this punishment in verse three. He says, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same." Governing authorities do not typically punish people for doing good things. They punish them for doing wrong things. So there is no need to be afraid, providing one is doing what is right.

In fact, Paul says in verse four, “It is a minister of God to you for good.” When he talks about it being a minister of God, he is saying that human government is God's servant, and it exists for a good reason. Human government is intended to deter evil. Now, granted, you are probably thinking about the exceptions to this that you have seen, when power is corrupted or things of that nature. We will investigate that shortly. Paul says, generally speaking, that civil authorities are a minister of God, and so a minister for good.

So Paul says that if you do what is evil, be afraid, for human government does not bear the sword in vain. When he talks about the sword, he is alluding to the ability of government to bring about the death penalty, which is common in many places. We know that James, John's brother, was put to death by the sword. That is one example. So Paul says the government is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practises evil. So therefore, Paul says it is necessary to be in subjection to the government, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake.

I will touch on this briefly here. Notice the first reason that Paul says believers should submit to government is because it is a delegated authority given by God. We see this elsewhere in Scripture. Husbands are to love their wives, and wives are to submit to their husbands. In essence, for a wife to submit to her husband is to ultimately submit to God, who gave that delegated authority. Likewise, children are to obey their parents in the Lord. To submit to a parent as a child is ultimately to submit to God who gave that authority. And so we see this throughout Scripture. We see this again in the local body, where Paul and other authors of Scripture would tell believers to submit to church leadership. That too is a God-given authority. And by submitting to God-given authority, one ultimately submits to God.

So Paul says that we submit to government for two reasons. Firstly for wrath's sake, meaning we submit so we do not face a penalty. We keep the speed limit, for example, because we do not want to pay a speeding ticket. Secondly, we submit to government for conscience sake. We submit because of what we know to be true, and since we know that God established these delegated authorities, we know that submitting to them means ultimately submitting to God.

## **What does submission look like?**

Look at verse six, “For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.” Paul makes an interesting application here. He says that we pay taxes as an act of submission to government. Now some would read this and say, “Well, Paul just doesn't know how bad it is where I live, and how much tax I have to pay.” Well, according to New Testament scholars, the taxes would be approximately 33% of a person's wage. And if you were a Jew, and you paid temple tax as well,

you would be spending 48% of your earnings on tax. So when Paul said this, things were extremely difficult. Nevertheless, Paul says that we submit to government by paying taxes.

I also want you to notice why Paul says we pay taxes, “Because of this, you pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God.” Now the Greek word for *servants* is *diaconos*. It is the same word that we use for a deacon. Obviously Paul is not saying that governing authorities are deacons in a local church. But he is using that language to emphasize that they are servants of God. Just as we support missionaries because they are devoting themselves to a certain work, or we pay pastors because they are devoted to the ministry, so also we pay taxes because civil authorities are devoting themselves to maintain order and safety within a society. They are serving God and we pay them accordingly. Of course it is not the same as supporting a missionary, in the sense that governing authorities do not normally recognise that they are serving God's purposes. But according to Paul, they are doing that nonetheless.

Look at verse seven, “Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” Paul has shown that we submit to government because it is established by God and because we want to avoid punishment. One way we submit is by paying taxes, and also by honouring those who are in public authority. In doing so we recognise them for who they are and what they do.

## Exceptions to the rule

Now the question comes up, and rightfully so: Are there any exceptions to this? In fact, in his commentary on Romans, Doug Moo says, “It's only a slight exaggeration to say that the history of the interpretation of Romans thirteen is the history of trying to avoid what seems to be the obvious meaning.” Are there times that it is okay to disobey human government? And I think we can sum that up in a very simple way. The only time a believer can justify disobedience to governing authority is when it requires disobedience to the Word of God. Our default is to always obey God. And God says to obey government. But if there happens to be a conflict between the two, then obviously believers must submit to God's authority. And so there are certain instances where that might be the case.

I will give you some of the exceptions I have found in Scripture. One is when it requires taking innocent life, as seen in Exodus chapter one. The Hebrew midwives did not take the lives of the Hebrew babies. Another exception is when it requires the worship of idols. In the book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the idol. And Daniel did submit to the edict that said he was not allowed to pray to God. These instances posed a conflict between obeying God and obeying government. And so these individuals chose to obey God instead of the government. And so there may be rare exceptions, but please keep in mind that the default is to

obey human government, and if there is a conflict between that and obeying God, then obviously obey the Lord.

## **Love- the fulfillment of the law**

Let's move on to the next subsection here. Paul says love is the fulfillment of the law. In verse eight he says, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." We saw how love takes place back in chapter eight. It comes by the Holy Spirit's indwelling. Now we are told to show this love to others. Paul says that love does no wrong to a neighbour, and therefore is the fulfillment of the Law.

So what should we do? Love. Why? Because we know the time. We have motivation. And notice what Paul says in verse eleven, "Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." Remember when we believed, according to the book of Romans, we were justified by faith. We believed and were saved. But Paul says our salvation is nearer than when we believed. Now he is speaking about our final salvation, glorification. He is talking about the consummation of our salvation. And it is nearer than when we first believed. Every day we get closer to our final and ultimate salvation.

## **Motivated- knowing the time**

And because that is true, Paul says it is time to awaken from sleep. It is possible for a believer to live in slumber, not fully engaged in what God is doing in history, and not walking with Him. And Paul says it is time to wake up. Years ago my wife and I were staying with another family, and we had a newborn who was about eight months old at the time. In the middle of the night, I woke up and saw that my son's head had fallen between two bars on the bed. I remember being so sleepy that I could barely wake myself up enough to do something about it. But I also knew that his life could be in danger. And so I just forced myself through the slumber to wake up and address this issue.

Well, that is what Paul is telling believers to do, to awaken from sleep, to shake off the slumber, and to be sober-minded because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. I would be confident to say that almost all believers have thought before at some point that they would really like to live their lives completely dedicated to the Lord. Romans 12:1-2 would say there is a question that should come before. If you really want to live for the Lord, when are you going to start?

Paul says our salvation is nearer than when we first believed, and it is time to wake up. There is no time like the present to choose to start walking with the Lord. Paul says the night is almost gone, and he is using *night* as a reference to this present evil age. Time is running out. Therefore, let us lay aside the deeds of darkness. Let us not live like unbelievers, Paul urges. Let us lay aside the

deeds of darkness. Let us put on the armour of light. Let us behave properly, as in the day. How are we going to live when Jesus comes back? Paul says live that way now. Live like it is day.

And Paul adds, "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy." We do not want to live that way, so how do we avoid those things? Look at what Paul says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Paul admits that our flesh still desires the things that he just mentioned. We avoid those things by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we live like who God has made us in His Son, which we learned about in Romans chapters six to eight. Living like Jesus is an application of those Christian life principles.

Look at the chart below to understand this. Paul gives facts, and then he gives the application.

| <b>Fact</b>  | <b>Application</b>                                      |
|--|---|
| <b>"...You have laid aside the old self..." (Colossians 3:9).</b>  | <b>"...Lay aside the old self..." (Ephesians 4:22).</b> |
| <b>"...[You] have put on the new self..." (Colossians 3:10).</b>   | <b>"...Put on the new self..." (Ephesians 4:24).</b>    |
| <b>"You have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).</b> | <b>"...Put on Christ..." (Romans 13:14)</b>             |

In Colossians, he says, you have laid aside the old self. In Ephesians, he says to lay aside the old self. And the idea is that we are to live as though it were true, because it is. In Colossians, Paul says we have put on the new self. In Ephesians, he says to put on the new self. Again, live as though it is true. And then in Galatians he says we have clothed ourselves with Christ. In Romans he says to put on Christ. It is true that we died to sin. It is true that we have been raised to walk in newness of life. We need to believe that this is true and yield ourselves to God on that basis. In a nut shell Romans thirteen is Paul's appeal to live according to Romans six to eight, and the principles we found there.



## **DISCUSSION POINTS**

### *Relating to Authority*

1. What are some reasons given for submitting to governing authorities?
2. What is the only exception to this rule?
3. In 13:11, when Paul refers to “salvation” what is he talking about?
4. What is the proper attitude towards the flesh?
5. What consequences might you face for obeying God instead of ‘Caesar’? Is it worth it?
6. How can you live in such a way that is a positive testimony in society?