

Romans
A Gospel Response to Government (Part 6)
Romans 13:1-7
July 12, 2020
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Well, Romans 13, let's read again together what the Apostle Paul writes here under the inspiration of the Spirit about our responsibility and a proper understanding of government. You follow along Romans 13 and I'll begin reading in verse 1:

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. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 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; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 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.

In the context of Paul's letter to the Romans beginning in chapter 12 and running to the end of the letter, he gives us what our response should be to the gospel that he has so clearly taught in the early chapters. And here we learn in this unique paragraph the Apostle Paul, a gospel response to government. I've noted for you that the paragraph begins with a universal command to submit to government. Verse 1 says every person, literally the text says every soul, everyone without exception is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. And then beginning in the middle of verse 1 and running all the way down through verse 6 Paul presents a series of reasons for submitting to government. I'm not going to unpack each of these, if you've missed some you can go back and catch up online. But let me just list them for you. Here are the 5 reasons we have seen so far:

1. God established the principle and structures of all human authority.
2. God has appointed all who currently occupy positions of authority in government.
3. Verse 2 goes on to teach a third reason and that is if you refuse to submit to a government official without biblical grounds, that is, unless Scripture is being broken. Your being command to do something Scriptures forbids. If you refuse to submit you are opposing God's ordinance.
4. God has assigned government the role of maintaining order by punishing wrong and praising good.
5. We looked at this last Sunday. God established government and appointed rulers for our good.

Now today I have an ambitious plan and that is for us to consider the three final reasons to submit to the government. Get your minds engaged and if you are taking notes get your pencils warmed up because we are going to cover a lot of material here in the next few minutes.

The sixth reason that we are to submit to government is, if you refuse to submit, again with out biblical grounds, you will justly suffer God's wrath through government. You remember verse 3 says if you want to have no fear of authority, do what's good and you'll have praise from the same. Now in verse 4 we see the contrast to that, "...But if you do [*literally if you are doing*] what is evil, be afraid." The Greek verb implies that if you are breaking the law you should be in a constant state of fear. Fear of what? Fear of punishment. Break the law, Paul says, and you should be afraid. Why? "for [*because*] it [*could be it as in the government, or it could be he as in a government official either one but in the end the same idea is included here. Why should you be afraid?*]" does not bear the sword for nothing"

Now the word bear is an interesting word. It means to carry something habitually, constantly, or regularly. And therefore, it sometimes is even translated as to wear something. And I think that's the idea here. A government official doesn't wear his sword for nothing. In 1st century, Rome those who were in government, either wore a sword themselves or it was worn by those who served them and were standing around them. And the sword symbolized the rulers right to use force in order to punish criminals. It includes, when you see that word sword, think of all of the possible penalties that the state can use against those who break the law. But of course, especially it's pointing to the death penalty, to capital punishment. In fact, this word sword occurs earlier in Romans in Romans 8:35, a violent death. We can endure, we can be faithful, we can overcome even in the face of violent death by the sword.

The sword, and the reason it's used here is the sword was often used in Roman government for execution. In fact, if you were a Roman citizen and you were guilty of a capital offense the most likely way you would be killed was by the sword. You would be beheaded. They reserved the more gruesome penalties for those who were not Roman citizens by and large. In fact, in Acts 12:2 Herod had James the brother of John put to death with a sword, beheaded. It's likely how Paul was martyred. He was a Roman citizen and tradition says that he was beheaded and in light of the fact that he was a Roman citizen it's also likely that he was beheaded.

Paul says that a government official, does not bear, or he doesn't constantly wear his sword for nothing. In other words, for no purpose. It has a purpose. What is that purpose? Government has the right to punish those who break its laws. A God given right to do so. And it is armed and authorized to use deadly force, not only within the state itself, but even by God. Because verse 4 goes on to say for "it" or "he" either one is a minister of God in using the sword. Notice for the second time in verse 4 Paul says the government officials are ministers. It's the Greek word that is often translated deacon. But it's used in secular Greek outside the church to refer to government officials. From the emperor to local bureaucrats, everyone, they are ministers. And notice the emphasis again is on

ministers of God. Again, in the Greek text, the first phrase, “is of God they are ministers.” It’s to stress the fact that they actually operate on God’s behalf.

Let me just hit the pause here for a moment and speak to you if you have a role in government. Anywhere from local law enforcement to local government roles, up to the highest offices in our country. If you serve in government, you are a minister of God to accomplish these purposes that have been unfolded here. And to God you will give an account for how you have exercised that responsibility.

So, what is one way that government officials minister on God’s behalf. Obviously, there are a number of them. We talked about some of those last week. But here specifically one way is, notice verse 4, “as an avenger.” Now when you hear that word you have to get like Marvel comics out of your head. You’ve got to get any of those sort of revenge concepts out of your head. That’s not involved at all. The word avenger simply means the one who punishes. When government punishes notice it does so, verse 4 says, “who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”

Now what’s the right question to ask? Who’s wrath? And the answer is not the government’s wrath but God’s wrath. You remember all the way back in chapter one of Romans verse 18. Paul begins the body of his letter with that statement that says that the wrath of God is now being revealed. He’s not talking about in the future. He’s not talking about when Christ returns, you know in hell. He’s talking about right now. It’s now being revealed. How is God’s wrath in the 1st Century and in the 21st Century, how is it being revealed today. Well, in Romans one the answer is by God abandoning people to their sin. You know when people give themselves over to paganism like our culture is doing. That’s Romans one. They exchange the worship of the Creator for the worship of the Things the Creator has made. What does God do? He abandons them to their sin; He gives them over to sexual sin. He gives them over the to affirmation of homosexuality. He gives the culture over to a depraved mind. Which means that you begin to call those things that God says are evil good. You don’t just do them, fallen man has always done them, but you begin to say they are good, they are right, they are wholesome.

So, that's one way God shows His wrath is He abandons people to their sin. But here in Romans 13 Paul says God is also revealing His wrath today by using government to punish the one who practices evil. This isn't His eschatological wrath, this isn't the wrath that will be shown at the great white throne of judgment or in eternal hell, in the lake of fire. Instead this is temporal wrath. When government bears the sword to punish evil, even the Roman government under Nero, it's a minister of God. It's as though God Himself were executing His wrath against human sin.

Although, Scripture forbids us from exercising personal vengeance, that's chapter 12 verse 19, don't take your own revenge. Here in chapter 13 Paul reminds us that God often accomplishes His vengeance against sin through government.

So, how does government punish sin? Well, look at verse 4 again, it bears a sword. What does it use that sword for? Not to rap the knuckles of those who break the law but to execute them. As government officials bear the sword, they represent God. Now let's be clear God expects those who bear the sword, who execute His wrath against those who do evil, He expects them to do so under the God ordained principles of justice. How is that principle of justice enumerated in the Old Testament? It's called the Lex talionis. You've heard that term. The Lex talionis. It's a Latin phrase that literally means the Law of Retaliation, but it captures a phrase that occurs three times in the Old Testament, three passages. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Now if you grew up watching old westerns like I did, that verse was usually yanked out of its context to justify personal revenge. That's not what the Lex talionis is at all. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was actually a commitment to doing justice so that the penalty fit the crime. That phrase occurs three times in the Old Testament law. I'm not going to have you turn there but if you want to jot it down you can look at it later. Three times: Exodus 21:22-25, Leviticus 24:17-22, and Deuteronomy 19:15-21. And each time that phrase occurs, the point is clear. The concept of Lex talionis, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, means that the arrest, the treatment of the accused while in custody, the sentence, and the execution of that sentence should all fit the crime.

This was revolutionary in the ancient world. I mean if you have read anything in history you know about Hammurabi's Code for example. So, what happened if you lived under Hammurabi's Law Code? If you stole something, they cut off your hand. That didn't fit the crime. So, what does God say ought to be done? Well a thief ought to pay back what he stole and make additional penalties in restitution. There should be interest paid if you will on what he stole. And so that's how the punishment fits the crime, that's Lex talionis, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, it fits the crime.

Now under the Mosaic law, there were primarily three means of punishing a law breaker. Have you ever thought about this? Under God's law in the Old Testament, if someone broke the law there were one of three ways they could be punished. One was restitution and fines. That was frequently true. You made restitution; you paid a fine for having done it. So, you didn't just restore what you took, you had to now pay above and beyond that depending on the crime itself as to what percentage that was.

A second form of punishment that was available under the Old Testament law, was corporal punishment. And that is scourging or public beating. Now immediately when we hear that we're like, "How horrible." Really? You think that's a lot more horrible than locking a guy up for 5 years?

The third penalty under the Old Testament law was death by stoning, or hanging, or the sword. So, the death penalty.

Now when you hear that list of three, did you notice what was missing? No prisons. Now there were prisons if you look at the Old Testament. There were prisons in neighboring countries, and they were later introduced into Israel by some of its kings, but they were primarily a pagan idea. And weren't communicated in the law of God at all. If I understand correctly it was the Quakers who introduced prisons to America in the 1700's. They believed; the Quakers believed that locking up a criminal for a period of time could make him penitent. That's why early prisons were actually called penitentiaries. They were to make the penitent, to make them repent of their sins. But you know and I know that prisons have instead become cesspools of evil. Instead of reforming, prisons help

criminals learn new ways to break the law. It encourages sins like homosexuality, involvement in gangs, in drug use.

Regardless, putting all of that aside, whether it's done well, or it's done poorly by God's plan government exists to punish those who do evil. So how does government know what's evil? You ever thought about that? Well, clearly, they often get it wrong, but they often get it right. How do they get it right? It's because, remember chapter 2 verses 14 and 15? The substance of God's law, what He requires morally of people is written on every human heart. That includes the heart of rulers. What that means is, even evil governments generally forbid murder. They generally agree that lying about contracts is wrong. They generally agree that stealing another man's property should be forbidden. And although they allow many sexual sins, most governments forbid some of the most egregious sexual sins of violence and so forth.

So, in a flawed way, human laws often reflect God's moral law. And government punishes those who break those laws and in so doing they carry out, albeit imperfectly and sometimes even abusively, the temporal wrath of God against sin. The fact that government sometimes gets it wrong and misuses or abuses its authority doesn't change the reality that it can be a beneficial reality. In fact, think of parents there are many parents that misuse and abuse their authority but that doesn't mean the concept of parenting should be done away with. It's a gift of God.

Now before we leave this point, I need to step away and briefly address three huge ethical implications. There are questions that may have come to your mind even as I have walked through what I've done so far. If they haven't, they should. Alright? So, let me deal with three big issues.

Number one, does the Bible teach capital punishment? The answer to that is, yes it does. The Bible distinguishes between the sinful taking of a life and capital punishment. One is strictly forbidden the other is commanded. Now to understand this you have to go back to the Book of Genesis. Turn back to Genesis 6. In Genesis 6 we learn that one of the major reasons for God sending the flood to destroy humanity was violence. Look at Genesis

6:11, “Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with [what?] violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has become before Me: for the earth is filled with violence because of them: and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.’” And then He goes on to give instructions for an ark. So, one of the key factors in God destroying the people on this planet with a worldwide flood, was because of the violence that had marred humanity.

Now God destroys the world except for 8 people who survived, Noah and his family. At the end of that God makes a covenant that He would never again destroy the earth with water because of man’s sin. Go over to chapter 8:20 Noah builds an altar, he makes sacrifice, verse 21, “The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself ‘I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.’” Verse 22, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” Now that verse does not mean that you and I should not be wise stewards of our planet. Clearly, we should we have a responsibility to do so. At the same time God has committed, he has sworn by Himself that the world will exist until He ends it.

So, He makes this covenant. But what’s going to happen about man’s violence? How is man’s violence to be curbed or restrained after the flood? I mean God’s law is clear that such violence is forbidden right? Exodus 20:13, “You shall not murder.” The sixth commandment. First of all, make sure you understand what that means. The Hebrew word translated murder there includes if you look at it and you trace it through its context in the Old Testament, you’ll find that that word includes several crimes as we think of them. It includes the crimes that we define as murder, first and second-degree murder, and voluntary and involuntary manslaughter. Or as they are labeled here in Texas murder, capital murder, manslaughter, and criminally negligent homicide. The penalty for those crimes under Old Testament laws was the death penalty. The one exception was involuntary manslaughter where you could in fact, flee to a city. But something was taken

from you, your liberty was taken from you, you had to flee to one of the cities of refuge and stay there until the High Priest died. Because you had taken a life, albeit accidentally, but negligently. But for the rest of these crimes it was capital punishment.

Now understand this, that capital punishment predates the Mosaic Law by a couple thousand years. And it is required not just of Israel but of all mankind. Look at Genesis 9, the first four verses of Genesis 9 you know, describe God's blessing on Noah and giving him dominion over the world and giving him everything, every living being for food. So, we could eat meat as well as vegetation. God gave it to us for that end. Verse 4, "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." Now watch verse 5, "Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed, [Why?] For in the image of God He made man."

So here is a command to all of humanity that predates the Mosaic Law by a thousand years that says if someone unjustly takes a life you are to take that person's life. Why? Here's the irony, to show the sanctity of human life. If a beast kills a man, the beast is to die. If a man kills a man, that man is to die. Why? To show the sanctity of human life. That humans are made in the image of God. But to carry this out biblically the just taking of a life in exchange for the life unjustly killed, has to happen the way God has prescribed.

So, let me give you some caveats. Capital punishment can only happen: Number one: If the accused is justly tried and guilt is established. By due process, that is where there is a hearing over the matter untainted by partiality, prejudice or any other travesty of justice. That's Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 17, and countless other places. And there has to be sufficient evidence. Usually two or more witnesses is required. There is some debate if irrefutable forensic evidence could be allowed.

Secondly, the death penalty can only happen if the death penalty fits the crime. And obviously here in Genesis 9 the only command for the death penalty addressed to all nations is the unjust taking of another life. The other capital punishment cases that are in

the Mosaic Law were commanded of Israel only. However, those laws do illustrate that there are other crimes that could warrant the death penalty and may be determined by individual government. However, the point is the crime should be so horrific that death alone fits the crime. A life has to be taken because in a very real sense another life has been taken.

Thirdly for there to be the death penalty it has to be carried out under the jurisdiction of a duly appointed government authority. This is the message of Deuteronomy 19 and of Romans 13, the government bears the sword. You see even the Old Testament, that avenger of blood you read about that was not somebody who just decided to carry out personal vengeance because he was a family member. That was instead someone authorized by the court that had found the person guilty and authorized that person to take the life or to bring back in custody that person. So, it had to be done under governmental authority and according to Paul, those in government who participate in the execution of justice are ministers of God. Carrying out His wrath against evil doers. So that's the first ethical issue.

There's a second ethical implication in this text that we need to consider and that is, does the Bible teach the idea of a just war. Does government have the right to engage in war with other nations or another way to ask it is, is there such a thing as a just war. And the Biblically I believe is yes and let me tell you why. Let me give you some biblical arguments for a just war.

Now I'm not going to give you the standard philosophical arguments that you can find out on the internet, you can go search those if you want. Some of them are helpful, some of them are debatable and run contrary to even what is taught in Scripture. Rather what I want to examine are some biblical arguments. These aren't all the biblical arguments, just a representative sample.

Number one, war is not inherently evil. Why would I say that? Because God wages war with Satan and at times with other humans. In Revelation 12:7 there was a war in heaven between the holy angels and Satan and his demons. God describes Himself as a warrior,

Isaiah 43:13, “The Lord will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies.” And of course, I think the most powerful example is Revelation 19:11 where you have Jesus returning. John says, “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.”

In addition to that God commanded Old Testament Israel to go to war with other nations. Joshua 8:1, “...Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to Ai” God says. In Numbers 21:14, you have a reference to the Book of the Wars of the Lord. That is, the wars that the Lord had commanded and authorized. So, war is not inherently evil.

Secondly, war is part of the God ordained role of government. That’s what we are seeing in Romans 13:4, government bears the sword. As we saw last time, it bears the sword to protect its citizens in two ways. By punishing its own citizens who practice evil and by maintaining armed forces that guard against outside threats. That is implied in the statement that government bears the sword. Paul is teaching that government has the right to use force for the protection of its citizens. It is logical that if that includes enemies within it also includes enemies without.

A third argument I would give would be this, war is a legitimate application at a national level of the law of self-defense. In Exodus 22, if you want you can turn there but you don’t have to. In Exodus 22 you have the law of self-defense. Exodus 22:2 “If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account.” So, if you’re sleeping in your house at night and a thief breaks in a struggle ensues and you kill that person in that struggle God says you are not guilty of a crime. Now don’t misunderstand alright, because he goes on to say in verse 3, “But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account.” In other words, if you can see who it is, and you know you are not immediately in danger then you shouldn’t take his life. And you will be guilty of taking a life if you do so even if he’s in your own home. You need to call for help and do whatever you can to protect yourself. Short of killing.

This runs contrary to Texas we're here in Texas and you know over at Babe's Chicken Dinner House they have a pistol on the wall and underneath it says, "And we ain't callin' 911." I know that's kind of the Texas mindset or you know there's a little place up North White Chapel, a ranch up there that says, "Trespassers will be shot" and then underneath it in smaller text there's a line that says "And survivors will be shot again." That may be the Texas way but that's not God's way. Yes, you can defend yourself even to the point of taking a life, but you should pray that never has to happen and you should do everything you can to keep that from happening. But if it does have to happen then you are not guilty before God.

So, that's the law of self-defense. Jesus, here's an interesting one, Jesus accepted and authorized his disciples carrying swords for their self-defense. Luke 22:36 and 38, again you can turn there if you want. Luke 22:36 and 38, Jesus says I sent you out before and I told you not to take anything with you people are going to provide for you. But now I'm sending you out again and this time it's different. I want you to make preparation. So, he says "But now whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one." And then the disciples say, "They said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' And He said to them, 'It is enough.'" Now some take that and say you know Jesus when he said it's enough, He's saying enough of that kind of talk, that's not what I mean. I don't think so. Because in context the money belt and the bag are real things that they are to take with them. There's no reason to believe the sword isn't. And they are obviously carrying a couple of swords already. Why? In self-defense, if you travel in the ancient world you ran a very real risk of being attacked by bandits, by thieves and you needed to protect both yourself and your possessions, your family. And so, Jesus authorized that. And if that is true for individuals, follow the logic, if that's true for individuals, the same holds true for governments. They are authorized to use force to defend their people against both threats within and threats without.

So, what are the just causes then for a just war. What constitutes a just war as opposed to one that is evil. Well, first of all, you need to know that God doesn't condone all warfare. In fact, Scripture condemns wars of aggression. If I had time, I would take you to Amos

1, Habakkuk 2, places where countries are denounced for their violent aggressive wars. Psalm 68:30, "...He has scattered the peoples who delight in war." Habakkuk 2:8 and 12, "Because you have looted many nations, all the remainder of the peoples will loot you – because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, to the town and all its inhabitants. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with violence!" God doesn't approve of wars of aggression.

So, what does God approve of? What are the valid causes for government to engage in war? Scripture allows God's people to engage in war for three reasons. There may be more, these are the main three.

Number one, you are allowed to engage in war to obey God's explicit command to go to war. God gave that to His people in the Old Testament. Numbers 31:7, "So they made war against Midian, just as the Lord had commanded Moses." Now folks that is not happening today. God is not personally authorizing any wars so that one comes off the table. That's not a valid reason. I just wanted to throw it up there because it was when God was leading His people.

Secondly, to defend their own land and people. This is a just war. God authorizes this for His people Israel in Deuteronomy 28:7 God says, "The Lord shall cause your enemies who rise up against you." You see it's a war of aggression against the people. He will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you. In other words, you are going to defend yourself, you are going to fight back. And God is going to fight on your behalf. He says to Israel, "they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways." In so doing God authorizes self-defense for a people, for a land.

Thirdly, I would say that God authorizes war to defend other innocence against evil. The example there is in Genesis 14. You remember when Abram, he sees that Lot and his relatives have been taken captive and he fields an army and he goes and captures them, returns them back to their land.

Now that may not be an all-inclusive list, but those are the main concepts that constitute, I think, biblically a just war.

The point is that government legitimately bears the sword in part to protect its citizens even from outside threats.

A third ethical question we need to deal with and I'm running out of time so let me do it very quickly. Does the Bible teach Christian passivism? Passivism has to do with the morality of violence of any kind but often it has to do with Christians joining the military, participating in a war in any way and especially taking another life in war. Does the Bible teach that those things are forbidden for Christians? I think the answer is no. Let me give you several biblical arguments against Christian passivism, particularly pertaining to war. Again, I don't have time to develop them, I'll just give them to you, you can just jot them down or you can see the slides online later.

First of all, the commands that passivists typically cite, commands like, loving your neighbor, like turning the other cheek. They are not given to nations but to other individuals. And even with individuals they are forbidding revenge not self-defense. We already saw self-defense is allowed by God.

Secondly, the Hebrew word that is translated murder in the sixth commandment is used 49 times in the Old Testament but never of taking a life in war. That's a different word altogether.

Thirdly, God blessed and empowered individuals who participated in just wars. Read the blessing by Melchizedek on Abraham after he returns from warfare in Genesis 14. Or David, David says in Psalm 18:30. "As for God, His way is blameless" and four verses later he says, "He trains my hands for battle, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze."

Fourthly, I would say soldiers who became followers of Christ were not told to leave their occupations. In fact, in Luke 3:14 you remember soldiers want to repent the Baptism of John the Baptist and it says some soldiers were questioning him saying, "What about us? How do we manifest the fruit of repentance?" Verse 13 "And he said to them, 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.'" He doesn't say, you need to throw your weapons away and you need to withdraw completely from military service. He says, you need to be better soldiers. And

of course, you have the example of Cornelius in Acts 10, no indication in becoming a follower of Christ he ever left his role of a centurion. There are other examples as well.

So, to summarize, it is legitimate for Christians to be in the military, to participate in just wars, and even to take the life of an enemy.

Now folks I understand that all three of those ethical questions deserve their own sermon or perhaps series, but for today's purposes I'm going to leave it without overview.

So, the sixth reason, back to our study of Romans. The sixth reason to submit is if you refuse to submit you will justly suffer God's wrath through government.

A seventh reason to submit to government, and I'm just going to touch on these because they're simple and easy to understand. You should obey government because it's right and reflects God's great plan for humanity.

Look at verse 5, "Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake." Therefore, because of everything you have learned about the role of government in the previous verses, it's necessary to be in subjection. In part because of fear verses 3 and 4, fear of punishment. But not only because of wrath. As Christians there's a higher motivation. Notice what he says, "...also for conscience' sake." That word conscience here isn't the idea of your own sort of subjective understanding. Here it means the knowledge that you gained. When you understand how government fits in to God's structure of society, as we have learned in this passage, you will want to submit for conscience' sake because you understand God's purpose and the role of government in that plan. The way Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2:13, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution."

There's one final reason for submitting to government. And that's the authorities are God's servants, devoted to fulfilling His purposes in society. Notice verse 6, "For because of this" again that probably refers back to everything we've learned so far in this paragraph. When you understand that government is a divine institution because of this you also are paying taxes. What he's saying is listen, you already pay your taxes and in

paying your taxes there is an implicit acknowledgement that government has a rightful authority over you. And he goes on to say, "...for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing." For the third time in three verses Paul refers to those in positions of authority and government as ministers of God. The first two times he uses the word from which we use the word deacon. This word is a different word. This word is used widely in secular Greek of public servants of various kinds. But here Paul says they're not just public servants they're servants of God. And they are notice," ...devoting themselves to this very thing." That's not just for collecting taxes. They're devoting themselves to all of these responsibilities that I've enumerated in the first five verses of this chapter.

You see, we understand that rulers are ministers of God, fulfilling His purposes in society. And we are willing to contribute in taxes whatever is required that will allow them to fulfill their roles. Because we understand that larger picture and because of that we should subject ourselves to government.

So, there you go. Paul has given us plenty of reasons to submit to government. Did you notice that many of those reasons have to do with the blessing and benefit that government is to us?

So, I have just one sobering question that each of us should ask ourselves. I'd like for you to ask yourself this question. In light of what we've learned from Romans 13:1-6 and all of the benefits and all of the blessings that God uses government to accomplish. Is that how you think about our government and our government officials? Be honest the Lord knows your heart. Is that how you think about our government and our government officials? However much you may disagree, however much you may doubt the wisdom of some. Is this the mindset you have? If it's not then let me just remind you, in fact, just look back again at Romans 12:2, Paul says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Let me just tell you. What that verse taught us is that your mind, listen carefully, your mind belongs to Jesus Christ. That means you don't have a right to have your own

opinions about anything. Your opinions about everything that's in this book should be the same as Christ's opinions. And so, one of two things is happening. Either you have bought your own ideas or more likely, you bought into the influence of the culture around you and it's conformed you, it's shaped you, it's pushed you into it's mold, it's way of thinking. Or you're letting this book and specifically the passages we just studies, shape your thinking about government. Those are the only two options. We need to ask ourselves do we really understand that our mind, including our thinking about government, belongs to Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. Father thank You for these great truths. Forgive us for being swept along, for being shaped and molded by our own thoughts and even more frequently by the culture we live in. Lord help us to extricate ourselves from that and by Your grace let Your word, let what You have taught us in this passage, reshape our thinking. Renew our minds so that we reflect Your perfect will that's revealed here in the pages of Your word. Lord may our response to government be a gospel response to government. And not that of all of the unbelieving culture around us. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.