

## The State & the Believer – Romans 13:1-7

### I. INTRODUCTION - 1 Pet 2:13-17

#### A. *The Coliseum*

1. A door opens & they come out by 2's & 3's as though shoved from behind.
2. Having spent days in a dungeon's gloom, their eyes blink rapidly in the mid-day sun of the arena floor.
3. They huddle in a group, 3 dozen men, women & children.
4. Slowly they make their way across the sandy bloodstained ground to the center.
5. Not too far away, slaves are dragging the lifeless body of a defeated gladiator off the field.
  - a. That portion the day's entertainment is completed.
  - b. A new one is about to begin.
6. The gladiatorial combat was the 3<sup>rd</sup> spectacle of the day's show; *they* are the 4<sup>th</sup> & final.
7. They lift their gaze to the sea of faces peering down at them.
  - a. It's a busy day at the Coliseum; the stands are nearly full.
  - b. And thousands of eager eyes now watch with anticipation.
8. A trumpet is blown, and all turn to Caesar's box.
9. He holds out his hand & everyone stops breathing to see what the verdict would be.
10. With a smile & quick snap of his wrist, he gives the crowd what he knows they've come to see; *blood*.
11. His down turned thumb seals the fate of 36 innocent souls. The crowd roars its delight.
12. An iron gate drops & several lean-looking lions bound onto the floor of the arena.
13. Mothers picked up their little children; fathers put their arms around their wives & teenage sons.
14. As the lions circle, one man begins to sing.
  - a. It's a hymn of praise to the Savior they all know.
  - b. One by one they join the song till they form a choir.
  - c. The jeering, cheering stands grow silent till all that's heard is the song of the saints.
  - d. Even the lions are suddenly wary.
16. The words they sing speak of Jesus' victory over death, of His love & promise of eternal life.
17. And as they sing, their fear of the lions is *consumed* by their hope of glory.

18. For a brief moment, every person in that Coliseum realizes the *true victors* here are not the lions but the Christians – for who else can sing in the face of death?
  19. The moment passes, & the lions renew circling, even as singing rise louder.
  20. A few minutes later, it's all over; the lions are no longer as lean as they'd been & 36 souls have entered the glory of heaven.
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21. What enabled that little band of believers, & the hundreds of thousands of others who gave their lives in the 1<sup>st</sup> century & a half of church history, to stand & praise God instead of hurling angry words of hate at Caesar & the crowds who came to watch them die?
  22. The answer is found in our text today.

### **B. LS w/RM**

1. As we come to ch. 13, remember that the chapters & verses were added much later.
2. What we find here is a continuation of what Paul began in vs. 1 & 2 of ch. 12.
3. He continues to describe what a living sacrifice with a renewed mind looks like.
4. In this passage he deals with something that was the subject of much discussion in the early church:
5. What's **the believer's relationship to the State?**

### **C. Citizens**

1. As the followers of Christ, we are *citizens* of the Kingdom of God.
  - a. As such, we have both rights & responsibilities.
  - b. Jesus is our King to Whom we owe unconditional loyalty & obedience.
2. But we're also *citizens* of the United States of America.
3. This earthly citizenship carries its *own* rights & responsibilities.
4. Because of our *dual-citizenship*, there'll be a tension,
  - a. When loyalty to one realm *conflicts* with loyalty to the other.
  - b. This conflict is *inevitable* because both realms have different agendas.
5. Here in ch. 13 we find how as Heaven's Citizens we're to relate to Human Government.

### **D. Romans**

1. Keep in mind that Paul knew he was writing to people who faced a daily challenge of living at the center of world power.
2. Rome was the capital of the world & the headquarters of a far-flung empire.
3. Though the Romans were fairly tolerant of the *traditional* religions of those they conquered,
  - a. They were highly suspicious of *new* religious movements.

- b. Christianity made them uneasy because it *looked new* but its followers claimed it was really just the purest form of *Judaism*, a religion Rome had already approved.
- c. *Opponents* of the Gospel stirred up a lot of trouble for the church by trying to get the Roman officials to put a *ban* on the followers of Christ.
- d. Sometimes those officials came down in favor of the opponents, other times in favor of the Christians.
- e. But Paul saw that the *trend* was toward increasing hostility toward believers.
- f. So he wrote this to instruct the Roman believers on their relationship to government.

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 1-2

**{1} Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.**

- 1. *Authority* is the *right* of an author to *rule* what's made.
  - 2. As Creator, God is **THE** *Author* of all, so He has the right to *overrule*.
    - a. As the ultimate authority, God *delegates* some of it to others to accomplish *His* ends.
    - b. The main areas God delegates authority is in civil government, the home & the church.
    - c. This passage deals specifically with the authority of civil government.
  - 3. Now, we see the *delegation of authority* almost every day.
    - a. At *work*, the owner gives authority to the supervisor, who delegates a portion of that authority to the foreman, & so on.
    - b. In the *military*, generals gives the officers below them a measure of authority, & they in turn portion out some of that to the officers below them.
  - 4. Paul says if you follow the trail of authority *backward*, you find God at the top.
    - a. President Truman had a sign on his desk that read, "The buck stops here."
    - b. That's not quite true. From the Christian perspective, the buck stops at God's throne.
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5. Paul's point in v. 1 is that because God authorizes government, it's the duty of His people to submit.
- {2} Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.**
6. To go against the authorities God's ordained is to resist God because they're His agents, even if they don't recognize it.

7. When someone *resists* authority, they bring judgment on themselves, which in this context refers to the *hostility* of those earthly authorities.

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8. Paul speaks here of government *in its God-ordained role*, when it's is a manifestation of His grace to keep order, enforce justice & protect peace.
  - a. That's the *legitimate* function of human government & what it's *authorized* by God to do.
  - b. Paul doesn't deal here with *corrupt* governments who *defy* their mandate.
  - c. That's a subject for another time & one that would take us far afield.
  - d. So as we read on, remember this deals with the believer's relationship with government as it operates in its proper sphere –
    - 1) Keeping order
    - 2) Enforcing justice
    - 3) Protecting peace.
  - e. That's made crystal in the v. 3 -

### **B. Vs. 3-4**

**{3} For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.**

1. Evil *perverts* justice & *disrupts* peace, so governments are *authorized* to resist evil through the use of *force*.
2. You see, there's a difference between authority & force.
  - a. Authority is the *moral & legal right* to rule.
  - b. Force is the *ability* to rule.
  - c. *Authority w/o force* is useless because there's no ability to implement rule.
  - d. *Force w/o authority* is tyranny & injustice.
  - e. A police officer is a good example of both authority & force.
    - 1) An officer is an *agent* of the State, *authorized to use force* to protect the peace & enforce justice.
    - 2) Their *badge* is a symbol of *authority*,
    - 3) Their *gun* is a *symbol* of *force*.
3. Good government is *both authority & force* employed in restraining evil while promoting good.
4. So Paul gives sound advice –
  - a. Want to stay out of the cross-hairs of justice?
  - b. Do good, not evil.
5. Now, in our system, most of the activity of government, specially the law enforcement side of things, concentrates on restraining evil.

- a. What we don't see a lot of is the last part of v. 3 – Praise of those who do good.
- b. If there was more of this there might be more emphasis on good in our culture than attention given to evil.

**{4} For he is God's minister to you for good.**

1. See? Paul is speaking of the *God-ordained role* of government.
2. And notice that he says officials are actually *agents of God*.
3. This pretty well ruins the argument of the *anarchists* who want to wipe-out all human government & law.

**But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.**

4. So far, Paul's concentrated on government's *authority*.
5. With his mention of the sword, he turns to government's *power*.
6. Our symbol of justice is a blindfolded woman holding a set of scales.
7. The Roman symbol was a sword surrounded by a bundle of rods.
  - a. The *rod* was used to inflict *non-lethal punishment* on wrong-doers by *lashing* them.
  - b. The *sword* was used for *capital punishment*.
  - c. It stood as the symbol of the State's authority to *go all the way* in its administration of justice.
  - d. The sword was *lethal*; it was the *sharp edge* that was used, not the *flat side*.
  - e. You didn't *spank* with the sword – you *killed*.
8. In Genesis 9:6 the *original mandate* for human government is given in the words  
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**Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.**

- a. The founding premise for all human government is the *sanctity of life*.
  - b. Life is *so special*, God grants to people the *duty* to remove from among them those who deny & defy that sacredness by killing the innocent.
9. Here in v. 4, Paul reminds us God has commissioned the state to wield the sword, meaning He's given the power of capital punishment to civil government.
    - a. It's the ultimate manifestation of the state's authority to enforce order & protect peace.
    - b. When someone shows a callused disregard for authority or the sanctity of life,
      - 1) And his/her *continuation in* society *threatens to harm* these things -
      - 2) God authorizes the State to remove him.

- c. *How* a government carries that principle out is the *subject for another time*.
- 10. But Paul's *point* is that God *delegates* to civil government that authority.
- 11. Twice in v.4, Paul refers to government officials as “God's ministers/servants.”
- 12. Like any other servant, *they must give account* to God for *how* they've used the authority & power God gives them.

### C. Vs. 5-7

**{5} Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.**

- 1. Right here is where the real truth Paul's teaching comes across.
  - a. He's not saying believers are just to knuckle under government because they have authority.
  - b. He's calling for a submission that goes beyond our actions all the way to our hearts.
  - c. Submission isn't merely a behavior, it's an *attitude*.
- 2. Our submission must not be based just on a *fear of government's power*,
- 3. But because as believers *we* have an *understanding* of what authority & submission are all about.
- 4. Our conscience isn't based on mere opinion, it's shaped by the Word & Spirit of God.
  - a. For the believer, defying civil authority isn't just breaking man's law, it's a violation of the moral law of God.
  - b. This has probably happened to most of us –
    - 1) You're toolin' down the freeway, oblivious to how fast, when all of a sudden you realize you're passing other cars at a pretty good clip.
    - 2) You look down to see you're going 75.
    - 3) Ooo – that's speeding; but, it *feels* safe; there aren't many cars on the road – you just passed most of them.
    - 4) So the thought comes to keep the speed up.
    - 5) Straight stretch, can see there's no HP (Highway Patrol) – know you can get away with it.
    - 6) But then there's that voice, “The HP IS watching – Higherway Patrol.”
    - 7) Conscience tells us breaking the law is *wrong*, even if we don't get caught.
- 5. We don't *obey government* because they say so & *have the power* to make us.
  - a. Rather, **we submit to God, & do what He says** – and He says, “Submit to them.”
  - b. The Law of the land is not our standard & rule – a conscience informed by the grace & truth of God is.

6. If they're our guide, 24/7, then we'll not only keep the man-made rule of law, we'll *surpass* it at every turn.

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7. But what do believers do when their government *isn't keeping within* it's God-ordained bounds & requires them to do something against their conscience?
  - a. What do we do when *instead of restraining evil* government *promotes* it?
  - b. What do we do when we're forced to choose between obedience to God & State?
8. Peter & John found themselves in exactly that place in Acts 4 & 5.
  - a. They'd been arrested for preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem, something Jesus had commanded them to do.
  - b. Now they stood before Israel's Supreme Court.
  - c. The officials *demanded* they stop preaching in Jesus' name.
  - d. Peter said to them, "We ought to obey God rather than men."
  - e. But there was *nothing* in Peter's speech or demeanor of defiance or rebellion.
  - f. While he could not obey their commands, he knew he was called to respect their authority.
9. What made the *difference* for Peter & John in that moment was their *conscience*.
  - a. They knew that their heart's desire was to submit & obey those officials –
  - b. The problem was they COULDN'T because to do so would have been sin.

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10. One day about 600 years *before* that time, the king of Babylon came up with a loyalty test for his subjects
  - a. He built a golden statue & commanded everyone to bow down & worship it.
  - b. 3 of his best counselors were young Jewish fellows named Shadrach, Meshach, & Abed-Nego.
  - c. Devoted to the God of Israel, they would not bow to an idol, so the king angrily warned them they better or they'd be burned alive.
  - d. When they refused to bend their knee a 2<sup>nd</sup> time, he ordered their execution.
  - e. God preserved them. But the point is – throughout their ordeal, they were *never defiant* or rude to the king, though what he was doing was terribly cruel & unjust.
  - f. They made it clear while they were submitted to him, they *could not obey* his command.
11. Consider Jesus before Pilate.
  - a. As God, Jesus gave the governor his authority.
  - b. But as a man, He submitted to that authority, even though it was being put to an unjust end.

- 1) In frustration at Jesus' silence, Pilate asked, "Don't you know I have the power to execute you?"
- 2) Jesus replied, "You have no power but what's given you by My Father in heaven."

**{6} For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.**

**{7} Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.**

12. Paul now gets to the thorny issue of taxes. His instruction is, "Pay them."

13. Many balk at paying taxes because they disagree with the things government does.

- a. The *pacifist* thinks it's immoral to support the military.
- b. *Isolationists* think it's wrong to give foreign aid.
- c. Many think it *criminal* that federal & state funds are used to pay for the murder of the unborn.

14. But consider Paul, the man who *wrote this* & the situation he was in.

- a. The armies of Rome occupied his homeland.
- b. The taxes he paid were being used to support pagan temples & their hideous rituals.

15. Yet he says, "Pay your taxes," because there are many *other* services government provides we *benefit* from - roads, utilities, defense, & the justice system.

16. You may have a hard time with government, but consider the option.

17. John Lennon liked to *imagine* a world without government, but the idea scares the bejeebers out of me.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. The Heart of the Christian**

1. Listen to these words: 1 Pet 2:13-17

**Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the praise of those who do good*. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.**

2. This was written by Peter *as he sat in a prison cell in Rome*.

3. The crazed lunatic Nero was Caesar.



4. And Christians were being routinely rounded up & executed under his insane rule.
5. Nero was so evil, he dipped Christians in tar, tied them on poles around the palace gardens, then set them on fire so he could drive his chariot at night.

**B. More!**

1. Let me read a couple more passages which speak about our relationship with government.

**1 Tim 2:1-2 • I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.**

**Titus 3:1 • Remind [the believers] to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.**

2. A hundred years after the Apostles, a Christian leader named *Justin Martyr* wrote a letter to the Roman emperor explaining why he ought to repeal his policy of persecuting Christians.
  - a. This was at a time when Caesar was worshipped as a god & people gave an ancient form of a pledge of allegiance by ascending a platform in front of an official, dropping a pinch of incense on an altar & saying, “Caesar is Lord.”
  - b. Which of course was something Christians *could not do*. There was only one Lord, one God – Jesus.
  - c. Because of this, hundreds of thousands of believers were rounded up & either sold into slavery or executed.
  - d. So Justin Martyr wrote, “Everywhere we, more readily than all men, endeavor to pay to those appointed by you the taxes, both ordinary & extraordinary, as we have been taught by Jesus. We worship only God, but in other things we will gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, & praying that, with your kingly power, you may be found to possess also sound judgment.”
  - e. Justin Martyr went on to explain that Christians made the best citizens of the Roman empire because they obeyed the civil rulers as an act of Worship & Obedience to Christ.

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3. Politics & government are on a lot of peoples’ minds right now because this is an election year & the primary is this Tuesday.
4. As issues are debated & passions aroused by the varying positions let’s remember that our citizenship in heaven ought to make us the best citizens on Earth.
5. Let’s ask ourselves if we’re complying with what Paul says here.

- a. Do we submit to the civil government & its law out of a fear of its power?
- b. Or because by doing so, we're obeying God?