

Romans (13:5-7)

Obedient Disobedience

Part 76 - July 16, 2006

ROMAN REVIEW

We're wrapping up this three-part series on our relationship with the government by talking about: Civil Disobedience. And I've never felt more inadequate going into a subject!

So far (to sum up *very* quickly) we've seen that:

1. Believers must submit to their governing authorities.
2. Governments must submit to God's sovereign authority.

Q: But what do we do when your government fails to submit to God? Is submission appropriate when the government allows for the killing of innocent, unprotect, (unborn) strangers?



If the unborn are equal to born children, why don't we declare a holy-war and firebomb abortion clinics?



If we say, "That violates God's command to submit," then do we condemn those who hid the Jews (from the Nazis) or those who betrayed Hitler and undermined his authority?



How about those who defied *our* government, and broke *American* laws helping slaves escape? Were they sinning?



And come to think of it, how do you Biblically justify the American Revolution (a war of *independence*)? Should we still be part of the kingdom of Great Britain?

Q: And should we at least pull tax support from an un-submissive government?

Let's answer all these questions ... we've got 25 minutes!

Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. - *Romans 13:5-7 NIV*

BECAUSE OF CONSCIENCE

Paul sums up: "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities". Notice that he *doesn't* say: "*Not because of possible punishment*". He says: "Not only because of possible punishment".



Punishment is a crucial component in a fallen world. There's a necessity and legitimacy to appropriate punishment for sin-prone people (such as ourselves). However, it would be pathetically out-of-balance, if we weren't motivated by both internal as well as external forces.

[Submit] not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience (13:5b)

Have you ever driven past a Speed Monitoring Trailer? There are only three basic mechanisms at work: electricity, radar, and *your Conscience!*



These machines don't make arrests. They don't issue tickets. They don't even photograph or document what you're doing. They just ... blink! Oh, I hate the blink! Law breaker! - Law breaker! - Law breaker! "I slowed down! I'm *only* going *one* mile an hour over the limit!" Law breaker! - Law breaker! - Law breaker!

The "blink's" power to persuade is inversely proportional to how calloused and cold-hearted my conscience really is.

Q: Does it say: "**Law breaker!**" Or, "Law breaker!"?

If my conscience is spiritually healthy, it will condemn me when I violate a law, because I'm breaking God's higher moral code.

The IRS received an anonymous letter that said: "I haven't been able to sleep for two years because I cheated on my taxes. And so, I'm enclosing \$500. If, after this, I still can't sleep ... well ... I'll send you the rest!"

RENDER UNTO CAESAR

Now Paul gets specific ... about taxes:

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing (13:6)

The IRS says unpaid taxes reach \$300-billion yearly! And *most* of the gap is due to individuals who report less than they earn. \$300-billion! About the same amount spent on Medicare each year!

Some believers “justify” their underpayments because part of the funds will go to programs that violate their faith. But Roman taxes were used for blatantly ungodly purposes, like pagan-temple upkeep; colosseum entertainment; and persecution. And yet, Paul says to the believers in Rome:

Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue (13:7a)

Withholding tax money is *not* a justifiable civil disobedience.

- A. “Taxes” corresponds to our income tax and property tax.
- B. “Revenue” corresponds to government fees and sales tax.



This is twenty years after Jesus coined the famous phrase:

Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s. (Luke 20:25; Mark 12:17)

We don’t render for fear of an audit. We render as submission to the command of Christ ... which means, and here it comes: Paying taxes is worship. If you have a guilty conscience, go back and amend your return. Worship (and sleep!) with a clean conscience! Paying taxes *as worship* is a lot more difficult than tithing *as worship* ... ‘cause the Lord only asks for 10%!



Roman taxes also built the greatest network of roads (to this point in history), instrumental for spreading the Gospel. Who could’ve realized their little denarius would pave the way for Paul to reach the ancient world? We can’t know how God may use bad government for good.

And Paul doesn’t end with taxes and revenue:

If [you owe] respect, then respect; if honor, then honor

Even if we can’t stomach the person or the personality, we are commanded to respect and honor the position of office they hold.



A soldier salutes the uniform, not the body that occupies it. He might detest the sergeant, but he recognizes and respects the position of authority that rules over him.

- We must honor the outfit and respect the office.

How do you tend to speak about those you didn’t vote in? Are your words mostly Christ-honoring, or condescending? Respect given to those in authority is respect given to God.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Q: But, what do we do when our conscience tells us to *disobey*?

- A. We agree we can speed ... to rush someone to a hospital.
- B. We agree we can jaywalk ... to help a stranger in peril.

A minor moral infraction is outweighed by a greater moral imperative. We have to establish a hierarchy of values.

There's a great example of this dilemma in Acts 5:27-29 where the Apostles were ordered *not* to teach in Jesus' name.

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!" - Acts 5:29 NIV

When the laws of man call us to violate the laws of God, we must disobey the governing authorities; yet, with respect.

The prophet Daniel served under a king who decreed that those who worshipped God would be thrown into the lions' den.

[Daniel] went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God ... - Daniel 6:10

In front of an open window, on his *knees*, on an elevated floor, three times a day! He made his civil disobedience very visible. Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were ordered to bow before false gods, or be thrown into the fiery furnace.

[They replied], "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods ..." - Daniel 3:16-18 NIV

When God says to submit to authorities, He isn't saying to obey when they forbid what He commands, or command what He forbids. Daniel was forbidden from doing a thing; his friends were commanded to do a thing. They committed *nonviolent* civil disobedience, and were willing to suffer the consequences.

In Nazi occupied Europe some chose to hide Jews, because Hitler was commanding direct disobedience to God's commands to protect the innocent. If instead of this nonviolent civil disobedience they'd gone into the streets and shot at the Nazis, few if any Jewish lives would've been spared.

Those who committed treason against Hitler were siding with the allies in a “just war” declared by God-ordained governments.

- What they did was like Rahab the harlot who betrayed her rulers by helping Joshua’s Israelite spies. (*Joshua 2:1-24*)

In the South some chose to help run-away slaves escape through the Underground Railroad. If instead of this nonviolent civil disobedience they’d firebombed plantations, few if any slaves would’ve been spared. Once a “just war” was declared by the commander in chief, they had the right to fight as agents of a God-ordained institution.

In post *Roe v. Wade* America some choose to help conflicted women afford and embrace pregnancy, birth, and adoption. If instead we all started shooting abortionists and firebombing clinics, few if any babies’ lives would be saved.

- Violence only begets further violence.

To protect the rights of its citizens, the government would build fortified clinics, protected by the National Guard. And all of those who would work to help our society understand the sanctity of human life would invalidate their message, and find themselves imprisoned.

- Violence is too weak a weapon against the evil of abortion.

As long as abortion is legal, we won’t be able to save babies without becoming loving servants of hurting mothers.

And thank the Lord for our nation, because we can do this without having to commit civil disobedience.

Oh, and about the American Revolution ... that one split the church in the 1700’s.

- Many argued that it was a cause of pure and undefiled religion against bigotry, superstition, and human invention.
- Others argued that it was in direct violation of Romans 13.

I think I’ll let you argue about it over coffee and cookies!