

**III Level of Delegated Authority**  
**“Civil Authority”**  
**Part 2**

**Week 10**

**Romans 13:1-3**

**Introduction:**

**Romans 13**

Scholars agree unanimously that what the Apostle Paul is describing here is “Civil authority”. And it is written as instructions for those of us who are to submit to that civil authority. We will be looking at our role and our involvement in living under civil authority especially as followers of Christ.

But this week we want to look at these verses and others in order to confirm one thing. That **delegated, civil authority, ie: “government”, is ordained of God.**

It is obvious that this subject that Paul has raised was a very big, even very controversial issue at that time. I think you would all agree that this aspect of government in our lives, especially as Christians, is a huge issue with people today as well.

Last week I read you a quote about the mindset of many Christians living back in the day under Roman dominance. How many of them considered submission to civil authority as being, “*treason towards God to acknowledge allegiance to any earthly government*”.

We looked at how such a mindset may have got started. The church began to reason that as had Peter taught, since we are the “very people of Almighty God Himself”, we don’t have to submit ourselves to the edicts and demands of a secular, Godless, non-believing king.

That’s what the Apostle Paul is dealing with here **Romans 13**. It is also what Peter was dealing with in **I Peter 2**. We’ll look at both teachings.

**Romans 13:1a**

**Here in verse 1, what is the foundational truth Paul wants all believers to understand about delegated civil authority?**

Every person, believer and non-believer alike, is to be in “subjection to”, **NAS** or to “submit themselves” **NIV**, to the civil authorities that govern our lives.

Is there any aspect of that sentence that is vague or ambiguous in any way?

You can't say it any plainer. Again, Paul is addressing all types of delegated authority here, but the context of the passage is obviously dealing specifically with "**civil**" authority. He makes it clear that each one of us is to submit to that governing authorities.

Now, before we get into Paul's reasons **WHY** we are to submit, I think it's important, even essential for us to be of the same mindset of this great Apostle as he espouses this teaching.

### **What is the context of Romans 13? What larger issue is the Apostle expanding upon here?**

#### **Romans 11:33-36**

The context for Romans 13 is the same as it is for chapter 12 and chapter 13 and in fact, the rest of the letter. The context for everything the Apostle will reveal to us is based on this:

It's based on: "*The depth and the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God and the unsearchable judgements and unfathomable ways of our Lord*".

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul has he is being shown the tremendous truths of how God has moved and acted throughout the entire existence of man by the Spirit of God? That's what chapters 1-11 have been all about.

Can you even imagine how overwhelming it must have been for him at times?

As God opened up his mind to see how He had ordained and orchestrated the entire history of mankind in order to bring about the fulfillment of a plan that would provide forgiveness and salvation for the entire world.

How overwhelming that must have been for him and the other New Testament writers as well. And it almost as if all of a sudden, because of the tremendous things Paul had been shown, he bursts into praise in tribute to the wisdom and insight of God that had been revealed to him.

After Paul's amazing summary of the greatness of God, here at the end of chapter 11, almost ever translation you look at starts off chapter 12 with the word, "*Therefore*".

Everything he has to say from this point on, including **Chapter 13**, is prefaced and guided by his understanding of the greatness and majesty of God.

The Apostle Peter, guided by the same Spirit and the understanding of the greatness and majesty of Almighty God, validated Pauls' instructions here in Romans 13.

### **I Peter 2:13-14**

As we go along in our study in Romans, we'll refer back here to I Peter 2 and see how closely the 2 teaching virtually parallel one another.

### **Romans 13:1b**

**What 2 reasons does Paul give as to WHY we are to submit ourselves to all governing authorities?**

- (1) Because there is NO authority in this world except that which comes from God
- (2) And because those authorities that exist have been established (**KJ** – “*ordained*”) by Him

1<sup>st</sup> Refers to the general “*concept*” or “*reality*” of **all authority**, including civil authority. In other words, there is such a thing as “authority” in this world. And Paul is making it clear that the origin of this concept or reality known as “authority” is Divine, meaning it has come “from God”.

2<sup>nd</sup> That authority, again in this case civil authority, has been ordained and sanctioned by Almighty God Himself.

So the source of all authority is God and it is He who has ordained and sanctioned it to exist.

We can only conclude that since all authority has Almighty God as its source and its blessing, then any type of authority in this world, including Civil Authority, has a purpose and role to fulfill in the lives of men and women who must live under those authorities.

It means God has a purpose and a plan for government. A reason for it to exist. God doesn't ordain or set in motion anything without a very good reason.

And that's why everyone, including and perhaps especially believers, are to submit themselves to these governing authorities, including civil authorities.

### **Something interesting:**

King James translation actually helps us to grasp this concept of authority having Divine origins. **Verse 1** starts, “*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers*”. It translates the term “*governing authorities*” as “*higher powers*”.

It goes on to say, “*For there is no “Power” but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God*”. Although it’s 16<sup>th</sup> century English, it does a pretty good job of communicating what Paul is saying here.

### **What does the term “*higher powers*” indicate about governing authorities to the average citizen?**

It means that this entity, government, possesses a level of power and authority over and above that of the average or common citizen. And that that power or authority, over the common or average citizen, has been entrusted to them by God Himself.

### **Who all is Paul referring to here when he uses the term, “*governing authorities*”?**

Peter actually lists some of them.

**(1) Any individuals involved in the creation of laws** for a society at any level of government. (Lawmakers, representatives, senators, councilman, board members, etc.) Peter mentions kings. They would fall under this category as those who would “*create laws*”.

**(2) Any laws enacted by these individuals**. (Laws, statutes, torts, charters, bills, constitutions, etc.)

**(3) Any individuals involved in the enforcement of these laws**. (Sheriffs, deputies, policeman, constables, national guard, etc.)

**(4) Any individuals involved in the judging** or sentencing of individual who are in violation of these laws. Judges or magistrates. Again, Peter also mentions “*governors*” back in **I Peter 2**. They would fall under this category. He points out that these men are in charge of “*punishment of the evil doers*”.

**J.W. McGarvey**, noted New Testament scholar, wrote that the injunction in verse 1 asserts that, “*there is no inherent or essential (fundamental) conflict between the claims of God and those of the state*”. Now that is a lot to chew on.

### **Does this verse mean God has selected every individual who sits in a seat of civil authority?**

Not exactly!

However, what it does mean is that God has ordained or established that every nation have some form or type of governing civil authority. We are “not given in the scriptures any exact structure or design as to what this governing body is to look like.

Apparently each nation is to establish their own system of government. And each nation has done just that. They have setup their own structure or design of what their governing body is to be.

So back to our question, God has not specifically selected every person who sits in a particular seat or position of power.

However, because He has Divinely established and ordained the concept that every nation have a “system of government” by which the peoples of that nation must submit, He has in essence sanctions not only the system that is in place but each of the seats or positions that make up that governing body.

In essence, whatever governing authority is in place, and what ever seats or positions or levels of power have been setup in a government, each of those is ordained of God.

Paul follows up what he has just said about the authority being divinely ordained, by addressing anyone who would choose to oppose those in positions of governing authority.

### **Romans 13:2**

#### **To whom is Paul addressing here in verse 2?**

Those who would defy and or “*resist*” **NAS**, or “*rebel*” **NIV** against the system of government established in the country in which the person lives.

What better way to make the point about the importance and essentialness of understanding the role civil authority in a person’s life.

Now, both Paul and Peter will eventually get around to giving sound, positive reasons for why God has ordained and sanctioned civil authority in our world and why we are to submit to them.

But Paul intends to make very sure that believers understand that when it comes to the law, there is a whole lot more involved here than just a magistrate or district court.

## **What is his 1<sup>st</sup> warning to those who would rebel or resist against the law?**

*“He who rebels against the authority (referring specifically here to all aspects of civil authorities) is rebelling against what God has ordained and instituted”.*

But it's saying more than that. What the verse is saying specifically is that any law, established by a civil government that is broken, is not just a “law of the land” that's been broken, but is in essence a law of God that has been broken.

Rebellion against any law of man is not only rebellion against the authority of the state, it's a rebellion against the authority of God.

Any questions?

Now, Paul continues:

## **What's Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> warning to the rebellious?**

Anyone who rebels against the civil authority in place, in a nation or state, will reap the wrath of “*condemnation*” **NAS**, “*judgment*” **NIV** upon themselves.

Again, Paul will get to the positive reasons as to why God has sanctioned civil authority in our world. But I think it's significant that he starts off his teachings here with warnings against those who would defy the civil laws of a country. And part of that warning involves condemnation that will come upon the lawless.

## **Quick question here, who's doing the condemning?**

When you get arrested for something and are found guilty and receive a sentence, who's doing the sentencing?

Obviously, it the judge or the magistrate in the case, right? But Paul wants us to know that it's not just them.

If it is God who has ordained civil authority, and it is God who has entrusted a level of authority to that judge or magistrate, and it is God who has sanctioned the laws that govern a particular society, then when a person who breaks those laws is condemned for it, his sentence has NOT just been handed down to them by a judge, but by the Ultimate Judge.

Now, let's tackle the "gorilla in the room", as they say.

**What about governments that institute laws and statutes that oppress and even enslave its people? Has God ordained and sanctioned them?**

According to this verse, apparently He has.

However, each system of government in place throughout the nations of the world, and the laws and seats or positions of authority in that government, have, indeed, been instituted and sanctioned by God.

But, when it comes to the discussion about civil authorities gone wild, we need to go back and review the 4<sup>th</sup> thing that all persons with authority need to remember.

*That, "every individual endowed with any degree of authority, will one day stand before God to give an account on how they used that authority".*

Do you see how important this study is? Do you see how essential it is, and always has been, that the world grasps the teaching of the scriptures here concerning authority in our world?

How vitally important it is for the world to understand that no one in this world has any authority what-so-ever other than that which has been ordained and sanctioned and entrusted to them by Almighty God Himself.

If only every person in history who has ever had some degree of Civil Authority in this world would have understood that, then hi-story would have an entirely different story to tell.

If the basic truth from the Word of God would have been understood, that every individual with any degree of civil authority will one day stand before God to give an account on how they used that authority, I believe with all my heart that there would never have been a Nero, or a Hitler, or a Maduro or a Fidel Castro.

What suffering and chaos has been inflicted upon mankind by those in authority who actually thought that 1<sup>st</sup> of all they had the authority to do and 2ndly that they thought they would never be held accountable for it.

Even in our fallen state, what a different world this would be if those in authority understood this basic of all principles of leadership. That all those in authority will, one day, be held accountable for their actions.

The strangest thought crossed my mind as I typed that last line. The thought was that if Pontius Pilate would have understood that, he would most likely never of had our Lord crucified.

The very next thought that crossed my mind were the words of Paul,  
*“Oh the depth and the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God and the unsearchable judgements and unfathomable ways of our Lord”.*

There is SO MUCH we don't understand. SO MUCH that we just have to trust God and trust in His Word.

**At this point has the Apostle given us any reason or justification for limits as to how far we are to submit to the civil laws and edicts of our government?**

A resounding, No!! Nor will we find any as we look at the rest of Paul's teachings here in Romans 13 or Peter's teachings in his 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle.

Every scholar I read has come to the same sobering conclusion of this great Apostle's teaching. They all conclude that yes there are limits, but they are very, very cautious as to when those limits are to be applied.

Phillip Y. Pendelton

*“Every revolt for a time shakes public confidence in this divine institution. (Referring to government). There must be no resistance until the demand for it becomes practically unavoidable., Otherwise we incur the resentment of God. For our conduct has tended towards anarchy and confusion. We should therefore exhaust all legitimate expedients, such as protests, political actions, etc., before we resort to revolutionary extremes”.*

Now, these scholars also ALL agree that there is a limit when a Christian says, *“We must obey God rather than men”.* And we have 2 examples of that in the scriptures.

These give us a standard of when **revolution maybe justified.**

**Acts 4:18-20, 5:28-29**

**What was the circumstance behind both of these instances where the Apostles revolted against the government?**

The government demanded they stop preaching and teaching about Christ.

The same author who wrote the paragraph I just read to you goes on to say, "*Allegiance (to the state) ceases when the law of the land seeks to subvert the law of God*".

### **Romans 13:3a**

**As Paul expands on this idea of our responsibility to submit, what is the only thing we have to fear from those in authority over us?**

From the context of **verse 2**, the only thing we have to fear from those in authority over us is judgement or condemnation for those who oppose the ordinances of man? No the "*ordinances of God*" (**verse 2**).

**And how does Paul describe the "*behavior*" of those who fail to submit to the rulers of authority?**

**NIV** - Describes them as those who "*do wrong*"

**NAS** - Describes them as those who "*do evil*"

Evil – (Gr) = ka – kos’ – whatever is "*evil in character*". It denotes whatever is "*useless and base, destructive and injurious*".

According to this verse, government exists to not only promote the good but also to suppress the evil. But we all know that at times that’s not what happens.

And Paul certainly understood that. Interestingly enough, is the thought that the Apostle Paul himself, the author of this very text, had once been involved in the government NOT promoting good but just the opposite.

In **I Timothy 1:13**, he describes his role in his service to the state:

*"For I was formally a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief"*.

Remember we learned that a person with authority, defined as, "*the right to command and enforce obedience*", also has the responsibility to use that authority to do what’s right? That basic truth is the standard God will use when He judges each of those He has entrusted with authority.

However unfortunately, God is going to use that same standard on those of us under ones authority. For we too have the obligation to do what's right as well, by submitting ourselves to them as we have been instructed in the Word of God. Here in **verse 3**, to not submit is described as that which is "*evil*".

**Do you know what Peter calls those who defy and fail to submit to civil authority?**

**NAS** - "*Evildoers*"! **NIV** - "*those who do wrong*".

### **Romans 13:3b**

**What should be government's response to faithful, obedient subjects?**

The scripture uses words like, "praise" and "commendation". These are normal expressions of appreciation and gratitude for its people.

But remember, just as those who resist authority are condemned not just by man but by God. So also those who faithfully submit to the laws of civil authority will receive praise, not just from man, but from God Himself.

The Apostle Peter's teaching on submission to civil authority literally parallels Paul's instructions here in Romans 13 and reinforces everything he has said.

### **I Peter 2:14**

Peter mentions governors sent by the king to punish "*evildoers*". But these same governors were to also "*praise those who do right*".

Next week, Paul continues to explain **Why** we're to submit to the civil authorities that govern our lives. He is going to, in fact, give us a job description, if you would, of those in authority over us and our further responsibility towards them.