*A Walk Through Acts: Jesus at Work*

*Part 86: Where is the Line? Part III*

**The Limits of Civil Authority**

*Romans 13:6-7*

* **Introduction**: Novak Djokovic disqualified from the US Open… how many of you follow tennis? This year Novak Djokovic had an opportunity to win the US open without even having to go through Roger Federer or Rafa Nadal. But he didn’t win the tournament… do you know why? Because he broke the rules. He overstepped his boundaries as a professional tennis player. He put the life of a line judge at risk by smacking a ball right at her. He didn’t mean too but he did and just like that his US Open and his run at his 18th Major Championship was ended. All because he stepped outside his jurisdiction/ his lane/where and how he should be functioning.
* Does a government ever overstep their line/jurisdiction and do something they shouldn’t be doing? Requiring something that is outside their particular authority? Yes, they do and they have in the past blurring the line as to what the civil authorities have been given the power to do
* A posture of submission usually demands that we obey the governing authorities over us. There are however, exceptional circumstances and situations in which we would not submit to the authorities over us because ultimately we are to submit to God before any other.
* What we are talking about here is submission to the governing authorities over us regarding ‘earthly’ matters. Or matters which we could term as occurring ‘outside’ the church rather than ‘inside’ the church. What kinds of matters are these ‘outside’ matters? These would be fire codes, parking zones, building laws and other areas which are expected to be followed because they represent laws enforced for the protection and well being of citizens. ‘Inside’ matters are those practices which we do as the body of Christ… our prayer together, our time of corporate singing, the preaching of the Word, taking of communion, baptisms… these would all be part of the church’s practice which are more spiritual in nature and not to be relegated by the civil authorities but by Jesus Christ and the governing authorities He has given to the church; namely, elders who serve as the under shepherds.
* We are called to submit but where’s the line? Today I want us to see the line represented in
* **READ ROMANS 13:1-7**

This morning I want to give you **4 Reasons why Submission to the State does not mean obedience to the State in everything. (The People, The Purpose, The Power, The Practice)**

* **READ ROMANS 13:1. The PEOPLE. (SLIDE 4). ( they govern)**

Paul is not speaking to a church, about a church or regarding a church. The church is nowhere in view here in this verse or in the remaining 6 verses. The Lord, through Paul, is talking to ‘every person’ not just to believers. This word for ‘person’ here really is the word ‘soul’. This is significant because God is revealing that the institution of civil government is given to everyone on the earth for the purpose of the good of society.

* As Paul starts off he goes with very general terminology in order to communicate that he is not dealing with how the Government relates to the Church but more how the individual should understand Civil authority. And those are entirely different ideas all together. Paul is not giving a how to manual for Church practice (orthopraxy). He is not saying: “Look, this is how every church should function under the government over them at all times”. He is saying this is how Christians should think about Governmental authority- as coming from God and being established by God. He is speaking of authority in general terms and he is speaking of who that authority is to govern over in general terms. So, to see these Scriptures as clearly and definitively spelling out how Christ’s church is to function under every civil authority and every situation is reading far too much into these verses.

* **READ ROMANS 13:3. THE PURPOSE. (SLIDE 6) (they exist for)**

What is the purpose of Civil Authority? The government is to punish evil and reward good. They are to uphold social morality for the good of society. We cannot get the Church and the State mixed up. The state or civil authority does not exist to glorify God in all that it does. That is the purpose of the church. *(If you are a teacher your purpose is not evangelism but education).*

* What happens when the State through its regulations and restrictions steps away from its ultimate purpose of punishing evil and rewarding good into the arena of the church adversely affecting the purpose of the church to Glorify God in all that it does? Even requiring believers in church to stop doing that what God has commanded (singing)? They are overstepping their bounds. The government was never created to tell the church or believers how they are to worship.
* Part of my argument for why Romans 13:1-7 is only dealing with civil authorities regarding civil issues and not spiritual, religious or items related to the church is not just the example that Paul lays down by speaking to “all people” and not believers or even believers in the church at Rome. It is not just the purpose Paul lays out for the civil authority of punishing evil but also the political climate of the day when Paul writes this letter. To understand that the church is not in view we must understand how Rome related with the church.
* When Paul wrote this letter Christianity was considered for the most part a subset of Judaism. As a result it was treated well much like the Jewish faith was safe-guarded by imperial law. They were protected to keep the sabbath law and their food-laws and also were given a prohibition of ‘graven images’ recognized by the government of Rome. It wasn’t even lawful to use Roman banners with imperial images attached to them in the holy city of Jerusalem. All this to say that Rome didn’t mess with the religious belief system of the Jews nor the Christians at least not at the beginning when Paul wrote Romans. Nor tell them how they were to worship. They left their worship alone and enforced civil issues not religious or spiritual items.
* I believe this is important in accurately assessing what our government is requiring of churches at this time and the steps they are taking to insure that the spread of the corona virus doesn’t go too far. They are indeed stepping into the religious freedom, rights and practices of Christ’s church and other religions. Is this a sword they are supposed to wield?
* **READ ROMANS 13:4. THE POWER. (SLIDE 9) (they wield)**

As we saw last week the governing authority has been given the power of the sword to punish wrong behavior. This of course does not mean they have been given a literal sword but the symbolism is used to communicate the power given to them to punish wrong doing. This has been the case throughout history. The state is to be careful how they use their power to punish but it is a power vested to them by God.

* The sword imagery is also used to describe a different kind of power. Not the power to punish but the power to transform and protect. In **Hebrews 4:12** we see

*“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

* God’s Word has been given to Christ’s church as an entirely different power. The sword of the Church is the Bible. The Bible is what is given to us to govern the church and through the use of the Bible done in preaching and teaching the Holy Spirit does His amazing work.
* What Christ does through the Word of God in His Church can have a far more impactful and lasting change in the lives of believers than the power of the sword used by civil authority to promote moral integrity upon a society. The Word of God works from the inside out and produces heart change which allows believers to submit to those over them for a much deeper reason to honor God in all that they do. Both swords work in different spheres.
* **TRANSITION**: So, who the Government is to rule as seen in Romans 13 speaks to all of humanity not the church in particular. The Purpose the Government exists to punish wrong and reward good also speaks to society as a whole not the church in particular. The power given to the government in the Sword to punish also speaks to society as a whole and not the church in particular. And finally, the Practice of what the government requires speaks to the whole and not the particular function of each of Christ’s Churches.
* **READ ROMANS 13:6. The Practice. (SLIDE 10) (they require) (What they require)**

What is the Practice of Civil authority? To require something of its citizens. Obedience. Obedience is required in order for the civil authority to govern, protect and care for its citizens.

* But why would Paul encourage the Roman Believers to pay taxes? The book of Acts gives us another answer. Think about what happened to Paul on every one of his missionary journies as he travelled from place to place—Opposition!
* Remember what was written on the cross of Jesus… Here lies the “King of the Jews”. Remember He was tried incorrectly for insubordination and leading a movement which claimed the sovereign claims of Caesar. Then in **Acts 17:6-7** as they go after Paul they claim that he is proclaiming another “emperor”. They were trying to make Christianity out to be political when it was not.
* So, now as Paul writes the believers in Rome he recognizes the tension that is happening with Rome and the possibility that Christianity could be misconstrued. So, he is encouraging the believers there to do everything within their power to be as loyal of subjects as they can be. The Gospel is at stake and their testimony will affect the future of how Christ received.
* **6 For because of this you are paying taxes** – This is what they were already doing. But what does the “this” refer too? Usually it is going to refer to the nearest noun which conscience. Because of your conscience. Because you know that God has ordained governing authorities and established them and given them the power to punish and that God is in this thing… you are paying taxes. That is what you should be doing!
* But why obey the authorities and support them?Because ***rulers* are servants of God,** - not the same word as minister (representative) but this word means ‘those who serve or work’. It was used for those serving as public officials. Because they serve for the good of the people.
* Therefore, **7 Render to all what is due them** - Fulfill one’s responsibility/To pay back what one has promised**.**
* **But what does all here mean? I don’t believe Paul is referring only to Civil authority in this verse. Notice the first 2 make sense:**
* 1. **tax to whom tax *is due;*** - this is more taxes to a nation for being it citizen such as property tax. Roman citizens would have been exempt from this kind of tax. This gives the idea that we are obligated to do this because of a debt we owe to the governing authority over us.
* 2. **custom to whom custom** - meaning indirect taxes such as customs duties and taxes on goods purchased much like we have state taxes in CA on our purchased items in stores.
* 3. **fear to whom fear; -** Fear is the attitude which is owed to the highest official which I think is more likely meant to be God, Himself. Paul has already told his readers to fear the civil authorities for they can wield the sword.
* See this same word ‘fear’ used in Ephesians 5:33 for how a wife is to ‘fear her husband’. This is a term of respect for someone in an authoritative position.
* 4. **honor to whom honor.**-the showing of esteem/respect/honor as a possession someone is endowed with.
* This reminds us very clearly of what Jesus’ response was in **Luke 20:25**: *“Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”.*
* **Peter in 1 Peter 2:17**-says “Honor all people, love the brotherhood, Fear God, Honor the King.”
* This verse is very similar to what we have in **Proverbs 24:1** but with some key changes. Proverbs says: ‘My son, fear the LORD and the king’. But here in 1 Peter 2:17 Peter uses 2 different verbs to catch the particular meaning for what we are to do to the king and to the Lord. Clearly in 1 Peter God is to be feared and the Emperor is to be honoured. There is clearly an understanding being presented that God is to be viewed in a different category all together then the state and governing authorities.
* Most often fear is not something commanded of a civil authority and what we saw earlier in Romans 13 was a fear of the punishment and the power the authority holds not so much the authority itself. Here this is different suggesting a commandment to Fear who should be feared.
* Paul’s argument here is a strong one for all Christians. We, as God’s people, of all the people in the world, ought to obey the laws, pay our taxes, respect the authorities over us. Period end. Why? Not because it will be worse for us if we don’t or because we will be fined and pay terribly but solely because the one way we serve is God. Going back to Romans 12:1-2 this is one way we present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God and give Him our spiritual act of worship… we submit to the civil authorities over us… we pay our taxes, we keep the laws and we honor the government that is over us knowing full well that as we do these things we will be honoring God.
* Notice this doesn’t say to honor and fear and give to the civil authority as you would give to God. This entire text is misunderstood if it is taken out of context and meant to be used in any kind of absolute way. This is not saying that believers must comply with the civil authorities in EVERYTHING no matter what is being demanded.
* This does not teach anywhere in these verses that there are no exceptions to the general principle given in these verses. The state does not have unlimited power.
* The state likewise stands under Christ in subjection to His desires and His purposes. His counsel and His will and ultimately to His Divine judgement.
* What we see here is that people should “normally” obey their civil authorities.
* These verses were never intended to express every scenario dealing with the relationships of believers to the state.
* It is a general exhortation communicating how submission to governing authorities is usually going to go.
* Paul is not saying that all governments are good, do what is right or never inflict serious evil upon the children of God… Paul knew full well what Rome had done to Jesus. Paul knew that back in the OT the nation of Israel had come under serious oppression at the hand of countless foreign authorities such as Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. He isn’t trying to clearly articulate every detail of how the government relates with the people of God nor the times when believers must stand against the authorities and chose to obey God rather than man.
* His intention is to give a picture of what normal/everyday relationships look like between believers and their government. You pay taxes why? Because God has given them to society for the better of all involved. Not that their perfect. Not that there aren’t times to stand against them. But that unless we are told to do something which goes against the will of God we should walk in submission to the government.
* **Conclusion**:

So what is needed to honor God and honor the government which He has placed over us? Balance and patience. We are not to run to submissive disobedience every time the government requires of us to do something we don’t like. The power and authority of the government is not absolute but it is clearly established by God and comes from Him. So, we must do 3 things: 1. Pray for the government as 1 Timothy 2:1-2 tells us. 2. We must be prepared to follow the orders of the government. 3. We must also refuse to give the government any absolute rights to rule over us in the spiritual affairs of our walk with Christ and in the worship of Christ’s church and be willing to evaluate what the government is requiring of us and at times say “No”.

* **Points to Ponder**

1. Consider how Paul addresses the people, purpose, power and practice of the civil authority in a way which clearly reveals that the church is not in view but citizens and how they are to relate with their government on civil issues. How does this help you to better understand when the government is overstepping its God given boundaries and responsibilities regarding Christ’s Church?
2. According to Romans 13:1-7 what authority does the government have over Christ’s church regarding spiritual disciplines and practices such as worship, singing, prayer and the preaching of the Word?