**Romans 13:1-7**

Introduction

I. Why does Paul talk about the governing authorities?

We are called to lives of radically non-conformity to the pattern of this world (Ro 12:2), but the question arises: what does that mean regarding our relationship to the structures and authorities of this world? How do we respond to this world’s governing authorities as citizens of heaven?

II. Why does Paul speak so unconditionally about government and our response?

Paul is addressing what our default posture ought to be towards government as a general rule of thumb (even though he would acknowledge there are exceptions to this).

The Passage

I. The command: Submit (v. 1, v. 5)

Paul’s answer is that even as citizens of heaven, we are not called to revolt against or undermine the authorities, but rather place ourselves under them and obey

II. The Reason for the command

A. Government has an authority that comes from God (v. 1-2)

1. Three times Paul says this in v. 1-2

1. Negatively: no authority that hasn’t been established by God

2. Positively: the authorities that exist have been established by God

3. To rebel is to rebel against what God has established

2. Have all authorities (even evil ones) truly been established by God?

In an ultimate way, yes! God is ultimately sovereign over all things

-Daniel 2:21: “God sets up kings and removes them.” He is ultimate one

-Romans 9:17: “I have raised you (Pharaoh) up for this very purpose”

-Nebuchadnezzar: (Jeremiah 27:6): “Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant.” (same as v. 4)

B. Government has a ministry that comes from God (v. 3-5)

1. “Servant” 3 x (v. 4-6)

2. Government has a twofold service

a. to promote and protect what is good (v. 4a)

b. to punish, bring justice to what is bad/wrong (v. 4b)

Whereas we as individual Christians do not have a God-given right to bring justice, but are rather called to mercy and grace (see Romans 12:19-21), government clearly does have the God-given right and responsibility

III. The command again with two motivations (v. 5)

A. submit “because of possible punishment”

Practical: submit so you aren’t punished

B. submit because of “conscience”

Deeper: submit but because you know in your conscience that God established government, so out of your submission to him, submit to the authority

IV. Practical applications (v. 6-7)

Pay your taxes, give respect and honor to whom it’s due

V. Considering this passage from two different angles

A. Angle 1: this passage strongly affirms government’s authority

The gospel is so revolutionary, so when it comes to the structures of society, why is Paul so shockingly non-revolutionary (government, slavery, woman’s rights, etc.)?

John Piper: “Because Paul is more concerned with our humility and self-denial and trust in Christ, than he is with our civil liberties. Because in Paul’s mind, faith and humility and self-denial are vastly more important for the Christian than that we be treated well by the government. Because the danger to our soul from unjust governments is nowhere near as great as the danger to our soul from the pride that kicks against submission. Because being persecuted unjustly is not the reason anyone goes to hell. But being unbelieving and arrogant and self-indulgent is why most people go to hell. So, Paul risked being misunderstood on the side of submission because he saw pride as a greater danger to Christians than government injustice.”

B. Angle 2: this passage relativizes (and therefore minimizes) government’s authority

1. Consider what this passage would sound like to Caesar

a. There is no authority except that which God instituted

Caesar, your power is not ultimate; you are only in power because God has allowed you to be and he can remove you whenever he wants

b. You are God’s “servant”

Caesar, you are not the ruler, you’re just a servant, and your role is to simply acknowledge God’s moral standard and be faithful to carry it out

2. Jesus himself both affirms and relativizes government authority

See Mt 22:18-22 and John 19:10-11

3. Our submission is ultimately not a submission to the government for its own sake, but for God’s sake, and therefore we are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God and then we must say, “We must obey God rather than men”

Conclusion

I. We are to act as law abiding citizens whenever possible

Pay your taxes, etc.

II. We are to honor and respect our political leaders

A. How do you talk about our government leaders?

With humility, gentleness, kindness, self-control, patience?

This does not mean we don’t speak our mind but we do it in a respectful way

B. We all have areas where we compartmentalize our faith, and politics is often one of them

C. A good place to start is to pray for our leaders: 1 Timothy 2:1-2

III. What is our role within a democracy where we have a vote and where there is a separation of church and state?

One possible direction based on this passage:

We consider the government’s role in v. 4 of promoting good and restraining evil, and we seek to vote and influence so that our government increasingly promotes and restrains what is in line with God’s universal moral law. Therefore, we are not trying to convert our nation to Christianity through politics, but we are absolutely allowing our Biblical worldview to shape our political convictions because ultimately we believe that God’s truth is the Truth and will, therefore, lead to human flourishing.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What was the most helpful idea from Sunday’s message? What was the most challenging or concerning idea from Sunday’s message?

2. How have you understood Jesus’ enigmatic statement in Matthew 22: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God?” What are the practical implications of that verse?

3. Do you feel called to do anything differently or stop doing something as a result of Sunday’s message?

4. Consider the final point from the conclusion above. Do you think that is the right perspective when it comes to our role as Christians in a democracy? How would you articulate your perspective if it is different from that?

5. As a case example: should we obey the speed limit? Why or why not?