

THE PRESENT AGE OF SUBMITTING TO IMPERFECT AUTHORITIES

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Romans 13:1-14 (Mark 12:13-17)

Who among us has read “Lord of the Flies”? An individual by the name of Murray Chapman gives a helpful summary of this classic novel. “A group of young boys are stranded alone on an island. Left to fend for themselves, they must take on the responsibilities of adults, even if they are not ready to do so. Inevitably, two factions form: one group (lead by Ralph) want to build shelters and collect food, whereas Jack's group would rather have fun and HUNT; illustrating the difference between civilization and savagery.” I would like to read some excerpts to highlight how things turned out in the novel and to gain some insight into the author's, William Golding's, own thoughts.

READ pages 180-181, 204-205

Would you rather have bad government or no government? God is a God of order, but Adam's transgression halted the proper ordering of our world and introduced disorder. Governments, like individual human and heavenly beings, have God-ordained authority, and, as human and heavenly beings can abuse and misuse that authority, so can governments and institutions. Nevertheless, as it would be incomprehensible to say that, because some human and heavenly beings rebel and abuse, it would be better if there were no imagers of God to serve Him in His Creation, the same can be said about government authorities and civic institutions; just because they can and do go astray and often fail to serve God and protect people, we should do away with them. That would be nonsense. “Lord of the Flies” illustrates consequences when there is no governing authority. The fundamental purpose of Government in God's providence is good, and God will work all rebelliousness and evil for good in the end.

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Simply to be left without God-ordained government would result in anarchy and chaos, and Beelzebub would be pretty satisfied to see our societies degenerate into a me-first, survival-of-the-fittest, every-man-for-himself mode of operation. That is what the Devil wants; disorder due to the absence of our recognition of authority. That is what he instigated in the Garden, and that deceptive serpent would first tempt us to defy our parents, then defy our community's teachers/educators, then our police force and governing authorities, then the elders of the Church, and, then, ultimately the Sovereign Lord God Himself. But that would be to our own detriment.

This section in Romans is sandwiched between Paul's urging us to sincerely love one another by using our God-given gifts in *Romans 12:9-21* and his articulation of how our love for our neighbor fulfills the Law in *Romans 13:8-10* which we touched on last week. So, it appears that Paul's urging us to submit to the governing authorities is 1.) with a view to God's mercy, and 2.) an expression of properly worshipping God by sincerely loving others through our humble and empathetic service. For me, this makes sense; because, it is impossible to submit to God and to other Christians in humble service with our gifts out of sincere love if we can not even submit to civil authorities who threaten to punish us for disobedience that harms either other individuals or the society at-large. Do we see how government is a means of God's mercy to protect us from others who do not sincerely love God or their neighbor?

It is very easy to complain about what we have, and we, in the West, are very good at this, but at least we get to openly complain. Perhaps, rather than being so critical of the imperfect government officials we have, we should give God thanks for His mercy; not just for

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our own democratic form of government, but for all forms of government, as imperfect as they may be. This should be easy for us as Christians: because, we look forward to the time when King Jesus will return as Just Judge. Then, He will right every wrong, and we will rule with Him in all righteousness with no more Satan, sin and death to cause disorder. So, today we will look at **The Present Age of Submitting to Imperfect Authorities**, which is a means of properly worshipping God.

In *Romans 13:1-7*, Paul gives us a command to submit to governing authorities with two reasons for such submission and consequences for our refusal to submit. Then, Paul concludes with particular examples. Let's start with...

1. **The Command (READ Verse 1a)**

- a. We are to be subject to the governing authorities.
 - i. This means we are to be good citizens of our society and to avoid civic conflicts.
 1. This does not mean blind and uncritical obedience, and we will briefly touch on exceptions. Nevertheless, as an overall general rule, we are to submit to authority that is exercised by government officials. Why?

2. **The Reasons**

- a. God governs by and through governments.
 - i. **(READ Verses 1b)**
 1. Rebelling against government is rebelling against God, and those who do that bring judgment upon themselves [in the form of being punished by the government; because...].
 - a. **(READ Verse 2)**
- b. ...God uses government to restrain evil for our protection
 - i. **(READ Verses 3a)**

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1. Those who abide by the law of the governing authorities have nothing to fear, but those who break the law should fear the punishment government can rightly bring as an agent of God's wrath.
 - a. **(READ Verses 3b-4)**
 - c. Knowing that our government is God's servant and an agent of His wrath to punish evil and protect us, we should submit to governing authorities.
 - i. **(READ Verse 5)**
 1. Submission and obedience to the laws of our government at all levels is the right thing to do. It is a matter of conscience. It is properly worshipping God who established our governing authorities.
 - ii. **Examples (READ Verses 6-7)**
 1. We do these things; because, we understand that the governing authorities are God's servant of wrath for our good.
3. **The Exceptions**
- a. Because governing authorities are God's servants, these authorities ought to submit to God and His righteousness by commending good and punishing evil.
 - i. But we all know this is not always the case. Similarly, we, as individuals, often fail to properly submit to God and His authority. Only by God's mercy and enabling grace are we able to sincerely submit and serve according to God's good and perfect will. This is when it comes down to the individual.
 - b. Because we are also individual servants of God through Christ our King, we too must submit to God and His righteousness. This is of utmost importance in proper worship.

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- i. Therefore, if governing authorities command us to disobey God by commending evil and punishing good contrary to God's righteousness, we do not submit to them.
 1. Yet, we may still be subject to the consequences for rebelling against the governing authorities, but we trust that God will commend good and punish evil even when other servants of God fail to do so.
 - a. This is as aspect of living in this present age while awaiting the future age to come when King Jesus Returns as Judge.

And, that "day is near". **READ *Romans 13:11-14***. Christ's Return is closer than ever, and, until then, we cloth ourselves in His righteousness by faith through God's overflowing mercy. If we, being proudly conceited, think more highly than we ought of ourselves without sober judgment, then we will be preoccupied with asserting our rights and neglect serving others' needs. If we love our selves too much, then we leave room for Beelzebub's bluff that deludes us into thinking we are better, stronger and smarter than others. By this, the Devil builds up our pride, which fuels our desire for autonomy, and ends with our refusal to submit to anyone except our own foolishness. Paying our taxes and filing our returns honestly is proper worship; because, it is our submission to the authorities God has placed over us for our good. This is very difficult for rebellious and individualistic U.S. Americans. BUT government does have authority, even to execute the death penalty, as a means of God's present wrathful restraint pointing to the future Coming Day of the Lord in Final Judgment when Jesus Returns as Judge. In His mercy, may we learn to submit to God-given authority now for our good, the good of others, and the glory of King Jesus. AMEN