

Governing Authorities (Part 1)

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[0:00] And I would like you to take your Bibles and open up to Romans chapter 13.

If you're using one of the Bibles that we have sort of scattered around in the chairs, just sort of out there, then you can just open your Bible up to page 948. You don't even have to find Romans or know where it is.

Just open up to page 948. Otherwise, find the book of Romans, which is going to be just a little bit after the Gospels in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and then the book of Acts.

And now here we are in Romans, the first of the epistles of the letters recorded for us in the New Testament. And we've been spending quite a bit of time in this letter. If you're just now joining us, if you've only been with us a few weeks, we have been in Romans for over two years now because we believe that this book, more than any other in the Bible, really systematically lays out the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul teaches us and shows us and defines and defends the Gospel. And now we are in the midst of a section of the book of Romans in which Paul is showing us how we're supposed to live in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

[1:18] What should our lives look like? Surely if we believe these things that he's proclaimed in the first 11 chapters of Romans, surely we should be different. Surely we should not be like the rest of the world.

And surely we should be different than we were before we came to believe these sorts of things. And so we're going to see this morning, as we enter into chapter 13, that Paul has much to say to us about the practical, everyday events of our lives, so that he's even going to begin this morning to teach us and show us what our relationship should be to the governing authorities that we have in our lives.

Because regardless of where you live or when you live, there are governing authorities over you. There is always a state to which you belong, and the Christian has to ask, what's my relationship to the state?

How should I think about their role, and then how should I think about my life in light of their role? And so we're going to spend this week and probably the next two weeks unpacking the first seven verses of Romans 13 so that we can really understand this, so that we can have a biblical view of the government and of our relationship to it.

And there are going to be some things in here that are difficult for us to stomach. And that's the truth, regardless of where you locate yourself on the political spectrum. It doesn't really matter how you identify yourself.

[2:44] The word of God comes in like a double-edged sword. And it will teach you, and it will correct you at times. And I'm excited to see what God has to show us about this particular issue for the next few weeks.

So I want to ask you guys, as we read together, to stand to your feet, and we will read Romans 13, 1 through 7. Apostle Paul tells us, Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.

For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do what is good, and you will receive His approval. For He is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid. For He does not bear the sword in vain. For He is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

[3:52] Therefore, one must be in subjection. Not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this, you also pay taxes. For the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

Pay to all what is owed to them. Taxes to whom taxes are owed. Revenue to whom revenue is owed. Respect to whom respect is owed. Honor to whom honor is owed. Father, thank You for putting these words in the Bible.

Thank You for sending Your Spirit even now to teach us and show us how to rightly understand and apply these truths. We pray in Christ's name.

Amen. You guys take a seat. Last week's message at the end of chapter 12 was at least for me, even if not for you, it was difficult.

Because it was direct. Because I don't find myself at times having a heart that lines up with the Apostle Paul's instructions at the end of chapter 12.

[4:58] I want to remind you before we jump into 13 of what he said, because seeing the connection between these two chapters is essential for us to understand chapter 13. Because what he told us and what we saw last week was that we do not, as individuals, have the right or the responsibility to exact vengeance on those who do wrong to us.

So that if you look in verse 17 of chapter 12, we are commanded very forthrightly, repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

He says in verse 19, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

And then he goes on to make it even more difficult for us, because he says, don't seek vengeance, but to the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink.

This runs counter to all of my natural inclinations when somebody does something wrong to me, when somebody harms me, when somebody slanders me, when they do something, whether it's something small to hurt my feelings, or when they do something larger to actually hurt my person, then I don't want to obey these commands.

[6:12] And I don't want to obey these commands, not merely because I feel, well, I could get even with them, but I think sometimes I don't want to obey these commands because I have within me this deep-seated attitude and desire to make sure that I set everything right.

You've done something wrong. It doesn't appear to me that anybody else is going to do anything about it, so I've got to do something about it. And we sometimes, at least in our hearts and in our minds, if not in our outward actions, we place ourselves in the role of the avenger.

And yet God says, I will take vengeance. It belongs to me. The bringing of justice to those who have done wrong is my right. I will do that, not you.

And when you come to realize that and recognize that, it's hard at first, it's difficult at first, but when you finally, eventually lay down the burden of trying to be the one to set things right and make others pay and make sure that justice is ensured, when you lay down that burden and let God pick up that burden which rightly belongs only to Him, then you find yourself at rest.

You find yourself relieved. But I feel, though, and I think probably some of you have some of these thoughts, too, that there's still a part of me thinking, I get it, God.

[7:34] You're the just judge. I know that ultimately you're going to set everything right. I know that ultimately your judgment will come. I get that. I know that. I know there's going to be an end to this world.

I know that the Bible says that. I get it. I know there's going to be a judgment day someday, and I believe that. But what about now? Do I have to wait until that day, which could be millennia away? I mean, do I have to put on hold a desire for justice to be done until judgment day? Is that the only time when justice will ultimately be meted out?

And the answer, according to Romans chapter 13, is actually no. Now, of course, sometimes the answer is yes. Sometimes justice is not meted out in this world, and we just have to trust God is righteous, and ultimately He will set it right.

But that's not always the case, and I would argue that's not even the case most of the time.

Because God has set in place means by which He actually distributes justice in this world and in our lifetimes.

[8:40] And one of the primary means that He has set up for the distribution of justice in this life is human governments. That's His way. That's His means. Now, you can see that very clearly taught

in Romans chapter 13, but we get hints of that even back in Romans chapter 12.

When Paul puts in quotations, or he didn't put quotation marks, but the translators did, but when Paul quotes, vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay, he's drawing that from the Old Testament.

He didn't invent that. He didn't say that because it sounded good. He's drawing that actually from the Old Testament law. And if you can understand and see the context out of which that is coming, you can see the tie-in with chapter 13 much more clearly.

So I want you guys to hold your place in Romans 13 and turn all the way back to the Old Testament, back to the book of Deuteronomy. All the way back to Deuteronomy, which would be close to the beginning of your Bible.

If you're using one of the Pew Bibles, turn back to Deuteronomy 32, which is page 175 in the Pew Bibles. But we find in Deuteronomy 32, 35, we see the words that Paul uses in Romans 12.

[9:50] Vengeance is mine. That's where Paul draws those words from. Vengeance is mine and recompense. And then he goes on. For the time when their foot shall slip for the day of their calamity is at hand and their doom comes swiftly.

This is God speaking, saying, I will bring righteousness into the world. That time is coming. And then if you move down to verse 39, he's even more explicit. It says, See now that I, even I, I am He and there's no God beside me.

I kill and make alive. I wound and I heal. And there is none that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear as I live forever, if I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me. God is saying, I will do this. I'm going to set things right. And he uses language that Paul is going to use in Romans 13. He says, If I take up my flashing sword, if I sharpen my flashing sword, he's going to bring justice into the world.

And he uses the metaphor that would have been common in their day of the sword. He's going to bring the sword to bear upon those who have done wrong. That is, he's going to judge them. It's going, it's going to happen. And then we turn to Romans 13 and we see that's not merely going to happen on judgment day in the future, but that sword of God's vengeance is going to be wielded and is wielded by human governments.

[11:24] Take a look at what Paul says in Romans 13 again. Turn back there. In verse 4, we read this about governments. He, that is the government or the government ruler, is God's servant for your good, but if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain.

What sword? The sword of Deuteronomy 32. The sword of God's vengeance. That's the role of the government. God uses human governments to execute His justice and indeed His vengeance in the world and to set things right.

God does that. How does He do that? How exactly does that work? How can we have any confidence that that is going to work?

Just as the foundation, I think, for holding off and not executing vengeance on our own is believing in God's righteousness to set things right, I think now, believing that God can actually use human governments to bring about righteousness means that we have to trust in His sovereignty.

We believe that He will ultimately set things right because He's righteous and that's what He's going to do, but we believe that He's capable of setting things right many times through sinful, fallen human institutions because He's sovereign over them.

[12:46] He's the ultimate King and He is in control. And that's something that Paul emphasizes throughout this passage. Notice, I want you to notice how Paul talks about these human governments.

Take a look through the text. We can just see a few places. He says in verse 1, there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God.

They're in place because God puts them in place. Verse 2, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed. God has put them in place.

God has appointed rulers and governments and authorities. He does that. Verse 4, the rulers are called God's servant. And then again, toward the end of the verse, again, He is the servant of God. And then in verse 6, we are told that the authorities are ministers for God or of God so that the governments that we have scattered around the world exist because God wills that they exist.

[13:49] This is not new here. This is not something that Paul draws upon simply to kind of offer us a little bit of encouragement. This is foundational, fundamental, biblical truth that God is sovereign and in control of human kingdoms.

In fact, in the book of Acts, we read that God has set up boundaries for every nation. He Himself has done that.

God has determined the boundaries and the allotments of every nation on the face of the earth. That's what we are told. Every nation on the face of the earth has their boundaries sovereignly determined by God Himself.

Now, if you're thinking right now, if your brain is at work, I hope it is, alright? Don't ever check out. If your brain is at work right now, the question that ought to be coming up in your head is, but they do some pretty bad things.

I mean, you're telling me that God is in control and He sets up and He decides who the rulers are, but some of the rulers are themselves incredibly wicked, evil, and horrible, and nasty individuals, and evil, and horrible, and nasty institutions exist in this world under the label of governing authorities.

[15:12] That has been true throughout human history. That's not something new in the modern era. If you know anything about history, history is very much the story of various evil dictators and kings and rulers rising up and causing trouble until they fall.

And so, to hear the Apostle Paul say that whatever authorities exist have been instituted by God leaves us scratching our heads. that we don't even have to look, say, around the world or through history to the Hitlers and the Stalins and others throughout history.

We don't even have to do that. I mean, we can, on a smaller scale certainly, and not to the degree that some of those rulers have done, we can see, even among our own leaders in our own nation's history, that there have been some pretty sinful people in positions of leadership, and at times, our own nation has done some pretty sinful things.

It doesn't mean we have to live our whole lives in shame of our country. God has done great things through our country as well as He has through many other nations, but nevertheless, open eyes require us to go, yeah, there's some pretty bad people in the government.

That's just the truth. There really are. And there are even institutions that are sometimes so infiltrated by sinful individuals that the system itself at times can tilt toward the mistreatment of its citizens.

[16:42] We know that that is true. We know that that is true. We see it. We see it in history books. We see it even today. And so, if God is sovereign, how are we to account for all the evil within the governing authorities that we are told to submit toward?

How are we to account for those? The Bible is not silent on that. It's not as if it's kind of a, oh, well, we got you there, Paul. I bet you didn't think of that. No. I mean, Jesus Himself, the one Paul is proclaiming, was officially crucified by the Roman authorities.

The Jewish leadership, they cried out for His death, but they didn't have the power to put Him to death. Only Pilate, the Roman appointed governor, had the power, and He's the one who did it ultimately. Paul himself would eventually be beheaded by a Roman emperor, at the order of a Roman emperor.

Many of the apostles would be killed, and some of them by governing authorities. Paul is not ignorant of the evil that is among those governing authorities.

But not only is he not personally ignorant of those, Paul knows his Bible. And Paul knows that the Bible teaches us over and over and over that even when there are sinful rulers in place, God remains sovereign over them.

[18:05] Let me give you a great example. I will try not to make us turn to too many other places, but I want to give you a really good example of this. Turn back to Isaiah, if you will. Because we need to see this and we need to understand this if we're going to know how to apply the commands of Romans 13.

In Isaiah chapter 10, at this point in the nation of Israel's history, they have become wicked enough. They have run after false gods.

They have gone headlong into disobedience to God's law. And it's time now for God's judgment to come upon them. And it's going to. He's going to judge the nation of Israel.

And that's what Isaiah is telling them. He's warning them about it. He's saying it's coming. And God, speaking through Isaiah, says this to the people of Israel in verse 5. He says, Ah, Assyria. Now, Assyria is a powerful world, power at the time, to the north of the nation of Israel. And they've been on a rampage throughout the Middle East.

[19:09] They've been conquering small nation and city-state after city-state. And they've been brutal in their execution of their conquests. Brutal.

But God says, Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger. The staff in their hands is my fury. Against a godless nation I send him.

And against the people of my wrath I command him to take spoil and cease plunder, to tread them down like the mire of the streets. So God intends to use this wicked nation that He says is the rod of my anger.

I'm in control of them. They belong to me. And I'm sending them against my people to judge them.

That's what God is going to do. That's the extent of God's sovereignty over sinful nations.

Assyria is as wicked and as bad as any other modern nation. Anything that we can imagine.

Horrible things they did. And God says, I'm sovereign over you. You will execute my wrath on my people at my command.

[20:12] But there is a bit of a catch. The next verse, verse 7, But he, and that's a reference to Assyria, But he does not so intend and his heart does not think so.

But it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off nations not a few. In other words, it's not the intention of Assyria to carry out God's plan.

It's not the intention of the rulers of Assyria to execute God's plan of wrath upon his people. No.

They just want to destroy. They just want to plunder.

They just want to wipe people off the face of the earth. So that what we're seeing here in these verses is a concept that we've got to try our best to wrap our minds around because it permeates the scriptures.

It is the idea that God is sovereign over sinful human beings and even sinful human institutions in such a way that though they remain responsible for all of the evil that they do, He is capable of using them and directing them to accomplish His own purposes, many of which we do not understand and do not see ever in the course of our own life.

[21:23] So when you ask the question, is God sovereign over sinful nations? Is this, I mean, does Romans 13, these being instituted by God and our having to submit to them, does that only apply to really good nations?

No. all of them across the face of the earth. All of them. He is sovereign over them. Now there's a related question that I think that we need to get a handle on before we can come to ask, how do we submit to these nations?

How do we submit to these rulers and how do we react to them when they do evil? And that related question is, granted that God Himself sovereignly appoints them in some mysterious way.

But how did these types of governments, how did human governments come to exist in the first place? Now we can answer that in a couple of ways. We could do like a historical, sociological study of human groups and patterns and how they gel together over time to create institutions and that would give us some insight into how it came to be that now we are a world full of all these individual nations that govern the people underneath them.

We could look at it that way and that would be illuminating, but that's not really my job. My job is to open the Bible and teach you from the Bible and I don't know those things very well, but I'm charged to open this book.

[22:51] And so I want to ask it from another perspective. From a biblical perspective, how did we get to the point to where these human institutions exist, obviously God's sovereignty, but practically in the history of the world, how did this happen?

And so how are we to understand our relationship to them in light of that history? Now we can't delve into everything that the Bible has to say about this because throughout the Bible we are dealing with various governments and nations and all sorts of things.

It's not just the nation of Israel, though that's the focus of the Old Testament, but we come into contact with many, many nations and so we can't cover everything the Bible has to say, but I think we can do a quick survey and come to understand how did it come to be that we have the kinds of governments and nations that we have around the world today.

But to do that you have to go all the way back to the book of Genesis. You have to go all the way back to the beginning. Now of course early on in the history of humanity, and this is true whether you look to the Bible as your source of history or whether you look to outside sources for history you can see this, but in the early history of humanity we were gathered more or less into family groups. Rather large family groups but family groups. And as those family groups grew, they came to be known as either clans or tribes or various sorts of things. So that throughout time these families were growing larger and eventually morphing into these institutions as they incorporated other family groups into them.

[24 : 23] But at the very beginning when you have one family upon the face of the earth and I don't mean Adam and Eve I mean Noah and his family after the flood. When you have one family on the face of the earth there are commands given to them that remain in force for all of humanity.

Let me show you what I mean. If you want to turn back to Genesis chapter 9 you can't otherwise it will be on the screen. But in Genesis chapter 9 after the great flood the waters have subsided Noah and his family and the animals have left the ark and now God has some things to say to Noah and to Noah's family.

His wife his three sons and their three wives they're going to repopulate the earth but he has something to say to them that's going to apply to all their descendants and therefore all of humanity. We can't look at everything he says but there's something that's particularly important for us this morning. Take a look at verse 5. He says for your life blood I will require a reckoning from every beast I will require and from man from his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. This sounds like the kind of vengeance that we're seeing in Romans 12 and 13 and it is a reckoning a setting of things right. Verse 6 whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed for God made man in his own image.

[25 : 44] This is the application of the sword of God's wrath. Is it not? This is the earliest stage of something we saw last week eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

The idea that people ought to be punished in accordance with the sin that they have committed the wrong that they have done. And of course the ultimate wrong among human beings is murder itself. And so God gives this command that whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed. Now for our purposes what is important is the application of that command throughout human history.

What we see early on in the biblical record is that that command was carried out by immediate family. That's the way that it worked. So that if you killed me you would have to deal with my older brother if we lived back in those days.

And you don't want to deal with Curtis. Okay? You just don't. That's what you would have to do though. That was the case back then. But as families grew and morphed into nations some of that responsibility began to shift.

[26 : 50] And we get a glimpse of that in-between period that shifting of responsibility from immediate family to the community at large. We can actually see that happening in the law that God gave to Moses for the people of Israel.

I want to show you one place. It's in a few different places but I want to show you one place where we can see that fairly clearly and it's in the book of Numbers. In Numbers chapter 35.

I don't know how long it's been since you've been in Numbers. Probably a pretty good while since most of Numbers is a list of people and names. But here in chapter 35 there are some aspects of the law that are given to the people.

How can they govern themselves? How can they deal with one another now that they are moving toward the land that God promised them? How are they going to live in that land? Here are some of the instructions that God gives them in chapter 35 verse 9.

The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you that the manslayer who kills any person without intent may flee there.

[28 : 01] The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger. Now, who's the avenger? He's the brother, right? Or the cousin or the father, whoever. He's the family member charged with bringing justice and taking the life of a person who has taken the life of one of his family members.

That's the avenger. That's his job. And now God is saying, Just in case someone accidentally kills somebody else, you're going to set up these cities in the land when you get there that we're going to

call cities of refuge so that a person, if he's out working, Deuteronomy gives a great example. If two men are out in the forest working, cutting down trees and the axe head of one, this is very specific, and the axe head of one of them comes off and strikes the other one in the head and he dies and it's an accident.

It's unintentional. Yet, who else is there to see it, right? So the family member is thinking, My brother went out into the woods with the neighbor and he didn't come back and he was killed with an axe and they both took axes.

So it appears as though my brother has been murdered and now someone in the family has to play the part of the avenger. They've got to carry out the command given to Noah and passed on to all of Noah's descendants all the way down to the time of Moses.

[29 : 12] How are they going to do this? And how is the person who committed the accident and actually is not a murderer but as we read here in the text, a manslayer, he killed a man but he's not a murderer. What is he supposed to do?

God says to Moses, I want you guys to set up these cities of refuge and they can run to the city of refuge and in that city of refuge they will be safe and there they will get a fair trial. They will get a fair trial.

So now we're seeing a little bit of the shift from it's just a family member carrying out vengeance, no trial, no nothing. You killed my brother, I find you, I kill you.

That's the way it worked. Now there's a little bit of a shift here. There's still the possibility of the avenger catching that guy before he gets to the city of refuge and bringing swift justice. But if he makes it to the city of refuge, trial, right?

Right? Right. So that there can be some sense of fairness and equity even for the person who has committed the crime. But then it goes even further when you move further down in Numbers chapter 35.

[30 : 12] In verse 19, really you have to jump up to verse 18. We read at the end of verse 18, here's the general rule and it's reflecting the rule given to Noah. The murderer shall be put to death.

The end of verse 18. That's what's got to happen. That's the rule given to Noah. But listen to this. Verse 19, the avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death.

When he meets him, he shall put him to death. That's clear. That's old school family vengeance.

But as you move through the text all the way down to verse 30, listen to this.

If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses. But no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness. So we're at this in-between time where if someone kills a person, they can flee to a city of refuge if they make it.

If they don't make it and the avenger catches up, it's over with for them because we haven't yet arrived at the time where that's off the table. But if they make it there, they get a trial to find out was it an accident?

[31 : 15] Was it somebody else that did it? And even if they are the murderer, if they get a trial, there needs to be at least two witnesses. You can't have just one witness. They might be a liar.

And because we're considering the death penalty here, we need to have at least two witnesses. So you're seeing this little bit of a shift here that's still hanging on to the idea of the family, kinsman, avenger who can come in and execute justice personally.

But a shift to... But now there's a community-wide responsibility and there ought to be a process in place for dealing with crime. And even the worst of crimes, murder.

As you move forward, and we won't look at every text, we won't look at all the texts, but as you move forward through the history of Israel, you see that the role of the avenger becomes less and less central and less and less important. And the people of Israel, as well as other nations around them at this time, but the people of Israel in particular, develop a much more highly organized structure for justice within their communities.

So you have judges who sit at the gates of every town and every city. And even small cases are brought before these judges who are sometimes called the elders of the city. And they weigh them and they decide.

[32 : 27] And if they can't come to a decision, then they'll create a council of the older, wiser judges from some other cities and they'll come to a decision. Ultimately, it can go all the way up to the king and he can render a final verdict.

So there's this system that's being built up and put into place within the nation of Israel to move them further away from the idea of individual vengeance taken by a family member. That's the direction that things are heading. But never is the command to Noah disregarded. It's always in place throughout all of human history for all of descendants of Noah that justice should be meted out.

The question is, who has the right to mete out justice? And at least within the people of Israel, there is a shift from the immediate family members of that person to the systems put in place, what we would call governing authority.

Now, there's one more step that we need to take before we can get to the New Testament and fully understand Paul's instructions, I think. The nation of Israel did not endure as a political entity forever.

[33 : 34] It did not. In fact, it didn't even make it to the end of the Old Testament. If you know the story of the Old Testament, you know that the people of Israel were not actually constituted as a whole single nation for all that long in the land.

They were not. They had three kings that reigned over all twelve tribes. Saul, David, and David's son Solomon. They had only three. And then the nation split into two.

The portion of the nation to the north was wiped out, and later on the portion of the nation to the south, was put in captivity, and hauled off to Babylon. All of their leaders and all of their nobles and anybody of influence was taken off to Babylon, and large numbers of the Jewish people were exiled outside of the land that God had given them.

They did not live long in the land before, as God had promised, His sword of justice came to them by means of other nations. But while they were in those other nations, they faced a unique situation. One that I think is much more analogous to our situation. See, we might look at the nation of Israel and go, well, sure they could operate that way. Well, sure they could trust their governing authorities. They were ultimately a theocracy.

[34 : 49] They had a king who was required to memorize the entire law. Their leaders were held accountable by prophets to whom God spoke personally. Of course they were able to do that.

Of course the people of Israel had to obey. their governing authorities. They were a theocracy. That makes a whole lot more sense. But what about us? Israel finds itself in a situation much closer to ours when they're exiled to the land of Babylon.

And there they sit under foreign rulers. They have no authority. They have no power. They have no great influence except for a few of them that are included on the king's royal court.

And what's their responsibility there? Is it subvert the government? Do everything that you can to say, I'm an Israelite and I don't have to submit to you?

I've seen that attitude even in some Christians. Their attitude is that I belong to another kingdom. I don't have anything to do with the kingdoms of this earth. They do all they can to avoid any sort of entanglements with that and they oppose it at every turn.

[35 : 59] But that's not what God told Israel to do in the land of Babylon. In fact, what He told them to do was you're going to be there for a while. I'm not taking you out immediately. You're going to be there for 70 years.

That means everybody that was exiled there, you're all going to die. So you're there for the rest of your life and a good chunk of your children's lives and some of your grandchildren's lives will be lived in Babylon. Here's what I want you to do while you're there.

Seek the welfare of the city of which God has sent you. Seek their good. Follow their laws as much as you can. Obey them.

Submit to them. That's the situation that Israel face and those are God's instructions to them. And that did not change for the people of Israel for the rest of her history, really.

When you enter into the New Testament, yes, the Jewish people have come back to their land. God, exercising His sovereign control over King Cyrus, sent His people back into the land.

[37 : 01] But never again did they have political control of their own land. They did not have it. They've been ruled by the Persians and the Greeks and at the time of the New Testament, they are ruled by the Romans.

And when Jesus is questioned, because there was very much a feeling of we need to throw off the yoke of the Romans. We don't need to submit to them. We're the people of God. We need to get rid of them.

And when Jesus is questioned about their relationship to the Roman government, mainly via taxes because that's how their authority was expressed, Jesus simply said, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar's.

Give them their money. Give to God what belongs to God. The situation for Israel had not changed much from Babylon to being back in the land but under foreign rule. And the situation of the church, of God's new covenant people, mirrors very much the situation of Israel in Babylon and Israel at the time of Jesus under Roman rule.

And the standing orders are not rebel. The standing orders are not subvert. The standing orders are not pretend as if you don't live in this world but just keep your head up in the heavens.

[38:10] Those are not the standing orders. Not for Israel in Babylon. Not from Jesus for His disciples. Not from the Apostle Paul for us. They are not. Standing orders are submit to your government leader.

And your power, your ability, your willingness to submit to them is rooted in your confidence in the sovereignty of God over all things.

God Himself sent the people of Judah into Babylon. He did that. That was His doing. He was in control. God Himself put the Romans in charge of the Mediterranean world and of Israel at that time.

There are a lot of reasons for that. So there could be a common language in the world so the gospel could spread. Many, many reasons for that. But we see God's sovereign hand at work in all of those things.

And God is still sovereign today over the nations in which we find ourselves. He is still in charge. He is still in control. And our standing orders remain the same. Submit to the governing authorities.

[39:18] Because God's in control. Absolute, total sovereignty at all times. And to the degree that we believe and trust in His sovereignty, to that degree will we be able to resist the temptation to become an avenger, to become the one who sets things right, and trust in God Himself to work through sinful, fallen human institutions to accomplish His will.

There are a lot of questions I'm leaving unanswered. I get that. That's why we're spending three weeks in this. Because I don't want to spend three hours this morning. There are a lot of things rolling through your minds right now and you're thinking, but what about this? But what about that? But what if this happened? What if this person became the president? Or what if these people were put on the support? What if this? What if these laws were passed? And there are probably a lot of things going through your minds right now.

And I have bad news. You've got to wait a week. Or maybe two weeks for some of those questions to be answered. But I have good news. Because here's a word for us, for me, and for you, when the first thing that comes to our mind when we hear this is, but what about?

Here's the word that we have. Stop trying to think of all the exceptions to the general rules of how God has set up the world and live your life according to the pattern that you know is clear to you.

[40:40] What we're going to see is that Paul's instructions about our submission to the government and about the government's role as one who rewards those who do good and punishes those who do evil.

Those are not ironclad promises from God that that's always going to happen. No. Paul's instructions in Romans 13 are very much like the book of Proverbs. Have you ever made the mistake of reading through the book of Proverbs and taking a proverb and treating it like it's a promise of God?

This is an absolute promise of God to me. And then to find out later on, wait, that wasn't a promise. That was just a general observation about how the world works. Probably the one that's most often abused is train up your child in a way that he should go and when he's old he will not depart from it. And sometimes we hear that as a promise. Aha! If I will just train my child up, if I'll have them in church, if I'll teach them the Bible, and if I will disciple them, then when they get older, when they're a grown up, they will be a Christian and they'll live the kind of life they're supposed to live.

But it's not a promise. It's an observation. A wise observation about life. Here's how life works. If you neglect your kids and you don't pass your morality on to them, you never know.

[41:52] But if you devote yourselves to them and train them and disciple them, generally speaking, your morality becomes theirs. And you can pass on the truths that you hold so dearly.

But it's not an ironclad promise. And what we're going to see as we walk through this text is that we're not dealing necessarily with ironclad promises about how things always work, but with general observations about how they usually work.

And when they don't work, when God does not execute vengeance toward those who have done wrong to you through the government, when that doesn't happen, we fall back on the gospel.

We always, always return to the gospel. Because all sin, yours, mine, and your neighbor's will be punished. It will either be punished on the cross for those who have trusted in Jesus so that all of their sins are paid for for all of eternity.

And justice has been rendered or they will be punished on judgment day. But justice will never be left out. Let's pray.