

Governing Authorities (Part 3)

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Date: 23 October 2016

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[0 : 00] I'd like you all to open up your Bibles again to Romans chapter 13.

! And so I would encourage you, if you weren't here for the last couple of weeks, or if you missed one of those weeks, to go back and listen to those sermons so that you can hear and understand what Paul has to say to us about our relationship to civil authorities, to civil governments.

All of us are citizens of this world and citizens of this nation. And so we need to know, how do we conduct ourselves in the places where God has put us?

How do we interact with the civil government that we have to deal? And Paul has a lot to teach us here in Romans chapter 13 about that. So we're going to read again this morning the first seven verses of this chapter, and I'll ask you guys to stand as we read God's Word.

Paul says, 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.

[1 : 34] 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.

Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then 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. 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, we give you thanks for these words, inspired by your Holy Spirit.

[2 : 35] And we ask that the same Holy Spirit would open our eyes to understand and see the many, many ways in which we can apply the truths of this past to our lives.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys sit down for a bit. I know that I've shared with some of you before that last fall, Nate and I went up to Boston for sort of a homeschool field trip.

And so while we were there, we walked what's called the Freedom Trail. You go past all these great historical sites. And so we got to go to the location of the Boston Tea Party.

They have a replica there. And we got to go on the replica boat. And Nate got to throw over some fake tea into the water. And then we got to go to the location of the Boston Massacre, to Bunker Hill, where, of course, the Battle of Bunker Hill was fought.

And so many other great places that we were able to go to while we were there in Boston. And it's fascinating. And it reminds you of the history that we have as Americans and of how we began, of how we began in such real places with real people.

[3 : 48] They're not just things written in textbooks, but real people were there and real people died in these places. And real people took a stand in these places. And if you're like me, as we've been going and talking about Romans 13 for the last couple of weeks, you've got to have the thought going on in your mind, how do the events of the history of our own nation, how do they square with what we're reading here in Romans chapter 13?

How do you square the American Revolution with Paul's command to let every person be subject to the governing authorities? Which, in fact, leads, I think, to a bigger question that bears directly upon our relationship to our government and to the civil authorities, whether they be on a national level or a local level, to our relationship to them today.

And that is, what precisely are the limits of the submission that Paul enjoins for us here? What are the boundaries? I mentioned last week that there are definite boundaries, that there is a time and

place where we say, I can no longer submit, I can no longer do what you're telling me to do, even though you are a person in authority over me.

I acknowledged last week that there are some boundaries, but this morning, before we turn our attention to the last verse, which we will do this morning, before we turn our attention to verse 7, I want us to answer as best we can by looking at the rest of Scripture, that very question, how do we know what the limits of our submission are?

Because I think all of us know sort of instinctively that there must be some sort of limit here. There must be a limit to the submission that we offer to those in authority over us.

[5 : 28] And we acknowledge that not only here in a passage dealing with civil government, but we acknowledge it in other areas, dealing with other passages of Scripture that command us to submit to those in authority over us.

So anytime that we cover something like Ephesians chapter 5, where wives are commanded to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord, we acknowledge that there is a limit to that submission.

A wife isn't just to render sort of obedience to anything that her husband says to do. There are limits to that. Or we consider a few verses later in Ephesians chapter 6, where children are commanded to obey their parents.

We know that there are logical limits to what a child is to do in obedience to their parents, so that if a dad tells his son, I want you to go next door and steal our neighbor's car, obviously we would say he shouldn't do that, right?

We all sort of acknowledge that. But when it comes to the civil authorities, are there some principles that we can glean from the rest of Scripture that help us to know precisely how to apply what Paul is saying here?

[6 : 32] Now in answering that question, I have to acknowledge up front that I'm going beyond the intent of the Apostle Paul in writing Romans 13, 1 through 7. Because I've told you from the beginning that Paul is not writing to us, telling us how things are always going to be.

We acknowledge that there are times when governments do not actually punish those who do wrong as they are supposed to do. They do not always ensure that its citizens are free to pursue doing good works as they are supposed to do as outlined here in Romans chapter 13.

We know that Paul is describing for us how things normally are and how things in fact ought to be. Much like we read the book of Proverbs where we're given wisdom on how things normally operate, Paul is telling us how things normally operate and how we as followers of Christ and broadly as citizens in the world should relate to the civil authorities that we have under normal everyday circumstances.

That's Paul's point here in the text. But we have to, I think, at times back up and ask a broader biblical question so that we can understand more clearly how to apply the text to our lives.

So I want to do that before we finish looking at this text this morning. So here's what I want to offer you. And I'm not going to get into too many specifics here because we could chase rabbits all day long.

[8 : 02] And honestly, that's part of what your fellowship groups are for. Some of your fellowship groups gather and discuss the passage of Scripture that we talk about on Sunday. And it's fun in those groups to chase a few of the rabbits, right? That's what you're able to do.

And I can't do that because we would be here all day long if I were going to cover every thought that I have during the week based upon the text. So we can't do that. But I want to give you some general principles for helping you to assess when to not submit to the governing authorities.

And those general principles can help you to assess historical events, whether you're examining our own nation's history and looking at the Revolutionary War or the Civil War or other events that have taken place, acts of civil disobedience in the civil rights era of the 1960s and 70s and you're assessing those events and those individuals and what they did.

You need to have biblical principles that can guide you so that you know how to relate to the civil authorities yourself and how to examine the way that others have related to them in the past.

So let me offer to you two basic principles for when not to submit to civil authorities. First of all, these are going to seem like a no brainer, but we have to say them and we have to see examples from Scripture.

[9 : 22] First of all, we have to refuse to submit to governing authorities when they command us to do things that the Bible itself expressly forbids us to do.

So if the commandment of the governing authorities contradicts the commandment of God, then we cannot obey those civil authorities. Let me give you two examples.

I'm going to give you two examples for each of these principles drawn from the Scriptures itself. So I want you to hold your place in Romans 13 and I want you to turn all the way back to the book of Exodus to an event that is fairly well known that's a great example of the people of God refusing to submit to the decree of the civil authority because it contradicted God's own will.

There in Exodus chapter 1, verse 15, we read this, that the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, when you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him.

But if it is a daughter, she shall live. So they're commanded to commit murder, infanticide. That's what they're commanded to do by the king himself, by Pharaoh himself. Verse 17.

[10:39] But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. And if you're curious as to whether or not God was pleased with that response, you can find the answer just a little bit further down in verse 20.

So God dealt well with the midwives and the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. So he dealt well with them.

He blessed them with families of their own. Why? Because their fear of God trumped their obedience to the king of Egypt when he commanded them to do that which God says you ought not to do.

But this is not the only place where we can see this. We see this happening in other parts of the Bible as well. There are several instances. I want to show you one more instance. So I'd like you to turn over to the book of Daniel. So still in your Old Testament, but turn this time to the book of Daniel, to chapter 3 of the book of Daniel, to another story that is really well known, one of the favorite stories to tell in children's Sunday school classes.

But what we're going to see is a clash between the will of God and the will of the human king. Daniel chapter 3, verse 1, King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth 6 cubits.

[12:00] So he created an idol. He made an image. We know what the Ten Commandments have to say about images and about idols. Verse 4, Harold proclaimed aloud, You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. So God's word says that you shall not bow down to idols. King Nebuchadnezzar says, Every time you hear these musical instruments, you shall bow down to this idol that I have built and created. How do the people of God respond? Verse 8, Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever.

You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music shall fall down and worship the golden image. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the burning, fiery furnace.

There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

[13:20] They do not obey the decree of the king. Which, in fact, as you know, the story makes the king very angry. And in verse 16, we see how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to the king's anger.

It says, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. We will not do it. We know that you have commanded it.

We know that you have the authority to command it. And yet, we will not do it. Even upon the threat of death, even if it costs us our life, we will not do it because our God tells us we cannot do that.

So that there will be instances in which we are told, either by local civil magistrates or those higher up in the chain of authority, when laws are passed and decisions are made that will require us to do

things that contradict what God commands us to do.

[14:30] And in those instances, we have to stand our ground and say, No. We cannot do that. We cannot obey your command because we have a higher command that comes to us from God himself.

These instances are going to grow more frequent. They are. It's the natural course of almost every nation. Nations grow more wicked as they move along.

Yes, there are revivals. Yes, God at times is merciful and gracious and turns things around. And we ought to be praying for that for our nation and other nations. We should always want that.

We should always want God to come and change the hearts of those who rule. We should always want God to come and do a great and mighty work through his people. But the truth of the matter is that on the broad picture of history, despite those lifts, despite those revivals, the general trajectory of human government is a downward spiral.

And that's why ultimately they all crumble and they all fail. Because the more you distance yourself from the moral will of God, from the moral law of God, the more precarious you become as a nation.

[15:46] The weaker your rule becomes. Until eventually the judgment of God comes and falls.

That's the course of human history. Which means that barring a great revival, then we will continue to see laws passed that will require us as followers of Christ to disobey God's word.

And in that moment we have to stand firm. There's of course another instance that we can see from Scripture in which we have to stand firm. And that's sort of the opposite situation. And that's when the civil government requires you to, or forbids you to do that which God commands you to do.

So there are instances in which you are commanded to do things that violate God's word, but there are also instances in which you are forbidden to do the things that you must do as a follower of Jesus.

Let me give you some examples of that. One of the most well-known examples, one of the easiest examples that we can turn to, is found in, of course, the book of Acts. Where the apostles were constantly being dragged before the authorities.

Whether they were Jewish authorities, or whether they were Roman authorities, they were constantly being dragged before them. And so I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts, chapter 5.

[16:59] In Acts chapter 5, some of the apostles have been arrested, they've been brought up on charges, because they have been told, they have been commanded, you are not to preach in the name of Jesus anymore in the city of Jerusalem.

Do not do that. Of course, they kept doing it. And so in verse 27, they're brought before the authorities. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council, and the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring man's blood upon us.

But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him. You see what they're doing here? Stop preaching in the name of Jesus. Sorry, we can't do that.

God commanded us to do it. And then what do they do immediately in the following two verses? They begin to preach the gospel to these leaders. Open defiance of their command. Why? Because they were commanded not to do that which God's word requires them to do.

[18:16] There are many places in the world today where it is illegal to publicly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. And what should the church do? Should the church shrink back and be quiet?

Should the church try to be sneaky and come up with other ways possibly? But there's no other way. No one is saved apart from the preaching of the gospel. We are commanded over and over in the scriptures to preach the word.

So that when governing authorities say, You may not say that. You may not bring those passages of scripture to bear. You may not proclaim that particular message. At that moment we stand firm and say, I'm sorry, but we have to do this.

We're supposed to do this, regardless of what you might say. It's not the only instance in which we see that. Turn back to the book of Daniel again. You all know the story, of course, of Daniel in the

lion's den, where Daniel defies a direct order of the king, just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had done earlier in this book.

This particular command, though, says that they are not to pray to any other gods other than those that are sanctioned. And Daniel is aware of that.

[19 : 36] Daniel knows the law. Daniel, in fact, is one of the civil authorities, just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were. He's fully aware of this particular command that has been issued. And here's what we find Daniel doing in Daniel chapter 6, verse 10.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber, open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously.

You are not to pray to your God, forbidden to do what God's word commands. And what does Daniel do? Does he find some secret way so that he can continue to, in his own mind, remain faithful to God while convincing the authorities that he's really doing everything that they want him to do?

He does not. He openly states before them and practices before them that which they have forbidden. He will not obey the decree of the king when the king says you cannot do that which the word of God commands you to do.

So those two principles ought to help us to understand the limits of our submission. They ought to help us to navigate because we live in a complicated world.

[20 : 59] That's the truth. We live in a very complicated world. And these examples from Scripture are fairly clear cut, but not everything is going to be as clear cut as that. There will be times when we have to take these principles and apply them to situations that are extremely complicated.

So this week, I thought I would set before myself the task of trying to understand the motives of the leaders of the American Revolution in light of Romans chapter 13.

I wanted to understand what they thought they were doing, how they interacted with the text. One of the things that I discovered as I sort of dove down into this rabbit hole was that among the printed sermons, and there are a lot of them, among the printed sermons from the decades surrounding the Revolutionary War, especially leading up to it, in the colonies, the most frequently quoted passage among all of those printed sermons is in fact Romans chapter 13.

I found that fascinating. I found that fascinating. And so I began to read some of those sermons. I began to read other people's interpretations of those sermons. I began to read about how those sermons had impacted those who would go on to become leaders in the American Revolution. And what I was hoping for was clarity. I know the biblical principles that I have in mind. I want to look and see the writings of these men, and I want clarity on this.

[22 : 28] And the truth of the matter is that they were kind of all over the map. All over the map in their reasonings and argumentation. So that sometimes there were, in fact many times, there were preachers arguing, and their sermons were far more political than any sermons I've ever heard preached, and I would ever dream about preaching.

That's one of the most fascinating things when you're reading these old sermons. They don't even read like an exposition of Scripture most of the time. They're just straight-up political speeches sometimes on Sunday mornings. And many of these sermons, though, as they dealt with Romans chapter 13, I found them not to be good, faithful interpretations of Romans chapter 13.

And that was confusing. How do you deal with their argumentation when I've just spent the last month digging into Romans chapter 13, really trying to understand the text, and then I see them saying things that seem to be twisting the text to say things that I have not found it to be saying. What do you do with that? It's not always cut and dry. It's not always simple. And you had some conservative, what we would call evangelical pastors, urging for revolution.

Many others arguing against revolution. You had many liberal pastors of the time, theologically liberal pastors, urging for revolution. And a few who were writing against the idea of revolution.

[23 : 51] You had some who offered better interpretations of Romans chapter 13. Some who appealed to other biblical principles outside of Romans 13 to either justify the war or to argue against the war.

And what I found was the application of these principles that are easy to understand, the application of them is not always simple. And sometimes we forget that when we're not embroiled in the moment where we have to decide, where we have to take a stand.

So to take a journey back and to read the writings of men who were forced to take a stand, of those who had to say something and had to take a side because things were quickly spinning out of control, helps you to realize just how difficult at times it can be to apply those simple principles when life is moving really, really quickly.

And the conclusion that I came to is that that if we're going to be prepared to apply not only Romans 13, but the larger principles that we find for the limits of our submission to civil authorities, if we're going to be able to apply those on the fly, when things arise in our nation and in our culture, then we're going to have to be people who have thought things out in advance.

We have to be thoughtful people. We have to be people committed to understanding the Bible and thinking ahead to all the variegated ways in which we might have to apply the text to our lives.

[25 : 24] In fact, I think one of the mistakes that we often make is we don't think about these things until the occasion arises. And when that happens, you are prone to twist the Word of God and to twist logic itself to support the ideas and the opinions that you already have in the moment.

So that what we have to do in order to assess history or to make decisions in the present and in the future is we have to be a people who are already devoted to digging into this book and thinking hard about this book and imagining the moments when it feels fuzzy and gray and thinking ahead about what we will do in that moment.

And we can't possibly imagine every situation, but what that will do is that will train our minds to apply the Word of God in ways that do not violate the basic principles laid out in the Word of God. So that even when you're confronted with a situation that you would have never thought of before, because you have trained your mind by the Scriptures, you are better equipped in that moment to make a decision that accords with the basic principles and commandments of the Scriptures themselves.

I think most of the time, our failure to put into practice what the Bible says is owing to our prior failure to have given time and energy and thought to what the Bible actually says.

[26 : 58] And so I want us to be a people of the book in every sense of the term. I want us to be a people devoted to understanding not just our favorite verses, not just our favorite passages, not just the issues about which we ourselves are passionate, but understanding the overarching broad story of the Bible, the principles that flow out of that story, and the ways in which the people portrayed in the Bible apply those principles in their situation.

So that we are thoroughly and fully equipped for whatever might confront us. See, the Bible is, in fact, God-breathed, and therefore it is, in fact, useful, it is profitable for training in godliness and for equipping us for every good work.

The Bible does, in fact, teach us everything that we need to know to live a life of godliness. Yes, it does do that. But it does it by way of telling us grand story and presenting before us great principles applied in the midst of those stories.

And it requires us to spend time meditating upon it and thinking about how those things play out in our own time, in our own culture, and in our own lives.

And you can't do that if you're not a person of the book. You can't do it consistently. You can't do it faithfully. So that when we think about the general principles that we've learned from Romans chapter 13, that God, in fact, is Himself sovereign over all nations.

[28 : 45] He is sovereign over all nations. He Himself institutes or appoints rulers. We have to think about that in the context of the whole Bible.

Because there have been those in history who have cited Romans 13 and said, well, if God institutes the authorities, then we must render absolute obedience to them because they've been instituted by God Himself.

And yet, in the book of Exodus, God says concerning the wicked king, Pharaoh, who, in the previous chapter, we see the midwives praised by God and by the word of God for their defiance of the king.

We see God saying about Pharaoh, for this purpose, I raised you up. We would be tempted to say, well, maybe this applies to good governments and not to evil.

And yet, God says, regarding a wicked king, He's already rewarded disobedience to the wicked king. I raised you up for a purpose. Now, the purpose was to display God's power.

[29 : 51] He's always at work to display His power and honor and glory. He says, I raised Him up. So that you have to understand that human responsibility is not negated by the sovereignty of God, and that applies to God's instituting of human governments.

We cannot say about any given human government, well, it's instituted by God, therefore, whatever they do is sanctioned by God Himself. We can't draw that conclusion any more than we can say that because God sovereignly appointed Pharaoh so that He might judge Pharaoh and display His power, that doesn't make it okay for Pharaoh to do all the things that Pharaoh did.

He still condemns them as sin. He still brings His wrath down upon Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. God's sovereignty never negates nor compromises human responsibility, even as we apply it to the appointing of civil authorities and human rulers.

So that that principle must be understood within the context of the broader biblical teachings about God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

How about the command to submit? It's clear. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. He says those who resist will incur judgment.

[31 : 11] He says that we must be in subjection. That's the second principle. God is sovereign over the appointment of rulers, therefore we are to submit.

God's sovereignty does not excuse the wickedness of human rulers, nor does it mean that He has not appointed them. And so in the same way, our submission to these human authorities, as we have just seen by looking at broader biblical principles, does not mean unquestioning allegiance to everything that the government said.

We have to understand these things within the broader context of the biblical narrative. And when we do that, we will be equipped to navigate the world, the complicated, murky, many times grayish looking world in which we live.

Now, turn your attention to the end of this paragraph in Romans 13 again. Because we have somewhat of a summary in verse 7 of what Paul was trying to communicate to us in this chapter. In verse 7 he says, Now, I want you to underline that word, owed, in your Bible.

[32 : 40] There is an assumption here made by the Apostle Paul as he comes to the conclusion of this paragraph that we owe things to others. We don't like that idea.

That runs counter to the way that we normally think. We usually think of the world as owing something to us. But Paul wants to turn that thinking upside down and he wants you to think about what do you owe to people around you?

What do you need to render to others? And he says, Whatever you owe, make sure that you pay it. Whatever you owe, whatever is right for you to do in regards to others, you ought to be about the business of doing.

And he gives us clear examples. He says, You pay taxes to whom taxes are owed and revenue to whom revenue is owed. These are a couple of interesting words here because the first word that's translated taxes refers to what we would consider to be sort of direct taxes upon people.

So, for instance, in the ancient world especially, the most common form of this direct tax was a kind of property tax that you would have to pay to the government for whatever land that you owed and sometimes for other pieces of property that you owed.

[33 : 56] Every year or every time the tax collectors came along, they would assess your property, they would assess the value of it, and then you would have to pay a percentage to them. You would have to pay that direct tax to the government.

And then this word revenue has to do with more indirect taxes. That is probably the most common form of this in those days and in our own day would be like a sales tax.

Or many times in the Roman world they had toll taxes. So if you wanted to travel down this road that the Roman government had built, there would be soldiers stationed periodically and you would have to pay them a toll tax.

You would have to do that. Or if you were conducting business in the market, sometimes there would be those there who were set to collect taxes on whatever it was that you purchased, a certain percentage, just like our system works today.

And those were the more indirect taxes. And Paul says, whatever the tax might happen to be, if it's a direct kind on your property itself, if it's indirect like sales tax or toll tax, you pay those.

[34 : 53] Just pay them. Don't try to fight it. Don't try to insist on things. Just pay to those who you owe things. Pay what you owe to them. But he doesn't limit it to money.

He goes on to say, give respect to whom respect is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed. Literally, it's fear to whom fear is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed.

When you translate this word as fear rather than respect, you can see that there's a slight difference. There's a nuance there to these words. So the first has to do more with a bit of a negative connotation.

And after all, we're talking about the government that has the power of the sword to punish those who do wrong. And you ought to fear them. You ought to have a kind of good fear that in the worst of times will motivate you.

When you don't have better motivation, it will motivate you to submit to governing authorities. And Paul says, you ought to fear those who have the right to make you fear. Be in fear of them. And he says, but you also must give honor, and this is the more positive side, give honor to whom honor is owed.

[36 : 01] Sometimes we, I think, struggle with these things. We struggle with things primarily because we are fallen people. We are sinful fallen people.

And we would rather have honor and homage paid to us than to give it out to someone else. We always want to come up with reasons why this particular individual or why this institution does not deserve what the Bible says we owe to them.

I'm not going to respect that person. I'm not going to give that person honor. Do you know what they're like? Do you know what they said? Do you know what they did to me? We have a tendency to want to hold these things back.

But Paul says, give to others what you owe to them. If you ought to fear them, fear them.

If you ought to honor them and praise them, then honor them and praise them. And the goal of all of this, I want you to remember the goal of all of this.

[37 : 03] Because the reason that we sometimes react negatively to Romans chapter 13, and the reason that we have to look more broadly and try to find the exceptions, the reason that we want those sometimes so badly is because we don't want to obey Romans 13.

But if you remember the goal of all of this, it's helpful. Take a look back up in chapter 12, a few verses. Verse 18, if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

That's the goal. The goal is for you, as far as it depends upon you, and sometimes it won't depend upon you, we know that. But as far as it depends upon you, you ought to seek to live peaceably with all, because in the midst of living peaceably, you are set free to proclaim the gospel and be about the business that God has us here to actually accomplish as the followers of Christ.

The instructions that we have in Romans 13, 1 through 7, are for everybody, Christian and non-Christian alike, let every person be subject to the governing authorities. And for the non-Christian, the only motive that they have is that they might not be punished, and that they might have a little bit of freedom.

But for the Christian, there's a better motive. There's a reason. We want to live peaceably with all so that we are free to pursue the proclamation of the gospel and the good of God's people.

[38 : 34] We have a great responsibility as citizens of this nation that we live in. We do.

We do. I said last week that the greatest form of government is in reality a monarchy. That's the best form of government when you have a perfect king and a purified people.

It's the best form of government because that's what's held out by God in the future. But we don't have perfect kings, do we? We are not yet purified so that we are blessed to live in a nation where there are checks and balances, where the sinfulness of our fellow citizens and even of ourselves is held in check by the way that our government is set up.

That's a good blessing to have. We ought to rejoice in that. We ought to be thankful for that because we know many, many times the only things holding both citizens and rulers back are the checks and balance, penalties and punishment that come.

But we have a better motive, do we not, as the followers of Jesus? We have a better motive. Live peaceably with all so that we might proclaim the gospel to all.

[39 : 53] And then in verse 8, O no one anything except to love each other. For the one who loves has fulfilled the law. We are a people set apart.

We are. We're still in this world. We still have to obey earthly rulers. We still have to try to live peaceably with all. But we are a people set apart with a mission and a purpose that transcends nations and empires and kingdoms and rulers.

Caesar was on the throne when the New Testament was written. And he is long since dead. And there have been kings and there have been nations and rulers and systems of government that

have risen and have fallen.

And many more will continue to rise and to fall unless God puts an end to it all first. Many will continue to rise and to fall and pass from the scene.

But standing at the end of it all, when every nation has fallen by the wayside, when they have all crumbled and disappeared, we'll be the church of God with the same mission and the same purpose and the same gospel that matters for us.

[41 : 21] Because listen, as you try to apply the principles of God's Word, you're not always going to come to the same conclusions as fellow believers. You're just, you're not going to. Now sometimes we don't, we live in, we live in isolated bubbles and so we assume because most of the people around us come to the same conclusions that we do based upon certain biblical principles that all Christians throughout all time have come and will continue to come to those same conclusions.

And that's not the case. That's not the case. You can simply travel to other parts of the country or go to other denominations and you will find that there are people who genuinely believe the gospel and believe in God's Word and yet, because of the context in which they find themselves and the ways in which they look at the world that are slightly different than the ways we do, sometimes they will apply the principles of God's Word in ways that are different than the way that you or I might apply them.

And if we think that the ways in which we interact and the political decisions that we make and the parties that we support and the candidates that we vote for, if we think that those things define who we are and determine the trajectory of our lives, then the church will fracture here.

It will fracture. And it doesn't even have to be as caustic a political environment as we're dealing with right now. It doesn't. History is full of examples of genuine followers of Jesus parting over political differences.

And so we need to be regularly reminded that we have these principles that are good guiding principles for us, but we have a purpose that should overshadow all the various ways in which we apply these principles so that even when at times we come to different conclusions from other followers of Jesus, we will be able to stand together at the end of it all and say, we serve a king.

[43 : 21] He sits on his throne. He has given us a mission. And we will not fail to accomplish that mission. All right.