

Instituted by God

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. - *Romans 13:1* (ESV)

Paul's instructions in Romans 13:1-7 provide the clearest teaching concerning how Christians are to relate to the civil government. This passage is essential to our witness and identity as we live in an age when the civil authorities are becoming more and more anti-Christian. Fortunately, Paul wrote Romans in an era when the civil authority, the Roman Empire, was not any more supportive of Christianity than today. Therefore, the principles that are outlined in this passage are closely applicable to our own day.

Paul begins by establishing the need for all citizens to submit. He is not giving a mere suggestion but a command as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Regardless of one's station or position in life, in order for any society to maintain civil order and peace, all people, especially Christians, must obey their authorities. It is for our own and society's good (1 Tim 2:2-3).

The governing *authorities*, to whom submission is due, is expressed in the plural. It is not just to Caesar, the chief authority in the Roman Empire at the time, but to all levels of authorities that Christians had to submit. As it was in those days, we also live in a republic with many layers of jurisdictions and rulers. Even as we travel from state to state across our nation, there are numerous institutions of civil authorities and with them laws and ordinances that correspond to their jurisdictions. Everyday, we live under various authorities as citizens of the United States, of the state of South Carolina, the county of Newberry (or whatever county you reside), and of the town of Newberry (or whatever municipality, if applicable).

Verse 1 continues giving us the ultimate reason and basis for the command to submit. This sentence as simple as it may seem, bears a significant weight in understanding not only the first sentence of verse 1 but the rest of the passage. The key to understanding this sentence is recognizing who is the primary source of government, namely God (*theos* is used twice in this sentence). Again, as obvious as this may appear, there is an underlying and an all-important principle regarding the function and purpose of all authorities as it will be spelled out in the following verses. But before we deal with those verses, it is foundational for us to consider the truth that the sovereign God who has revealed Himself in creation and more specifically in His Son and the Bible is the supreme authority over the cosmos, all the earth, and every civilization whether they acknowledge Him as Sovereign or not! He rules over and allows any and every governing authority to exist. At any moment, as He has demonstrated throughout history (ex. Nebuchadnezzar Dan 4:28ff, Belshazzar Dan 5:30-31, Herod Agrippa Acts 12:23), God is able to remove kings and rulers from their seat of authority. His authority is not bound to the nation of

Israel or the Torah. He is the holy, sovereign Lord who is not “served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:25). Regardless of an authority’s acknowledgement of, worship of, and submission to God, he is completely dependent upon God for even his very existence.

All authorities exist at God’s will and by His institution. It is God who has ordered history and all the affairs of men so that every authority exists for His divine purpose. The verb that Paul uses for *institute* is a divine passive, meaning that God is the one, the subject, who has established it and vested it with authority. For example, in Lk 7:8, the faithful centurion communicated to Jesus that, “I too am a man *set* under authority.” He recognized that the authority he had as a centurion was assigned to him by a greater authority. This word is also used to describe God’s foreordained election in Acts 13:48 where it says, “as many as were *appointed* to eternal life.” The significance of this truth is that all rulers are given authority by God for the purpose of **fulfilling His will**. Therefore, all authorities are either submissive to or rebellious against God. He is either acting in conformity to or in contradict to God’s will. Therefore, God will hold every ruler accountable for the manner in which he has stewarded the authority that was ordained to him. If not in this life, certainly at the judgement, every ruler will give an account to the Lord of how they served or resisted His purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Y.', located below the main text.

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