

June 7, 2020

Speaker: Eric Naus **Series:** This I Believe – The Book of Romans

Passage: Romans 13:1-7

Community Group Questions: “The Freedom of Submission”

Read Romans 13:1-7 aloud as a group and then work through the following questions.

1. Verses 1-2 make the important claim that God’s authority is supreme over every human form of governing authority. How does this reality give Christians the wisdom to know when civil disobedience or protests are called for? (for examples of Biblical resistance, see the Midwives in Exodus 1; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3; Daniel’s resistance in Daniel 6, and the Apostles in Acts 5:29)
2. Verses 1-2 also instruct Christians to submit to governing authorities (insofar as any given government does not contradict God’s law), and to see governing authorities as established by God himself. In fact, to resist them is to resist what God has appointed! Interestingly, Paul gave this instruction to Christians living in Rome during the first half of the pagan Emperor Nero’s reign. How would you apply these instructions to our unique situation of living in a democratic republic? Is it appropriate to submit to even those governing authorities we dislike, or even those in political parties we disagree with? What does it mean to “submit” appropriately, and biblically, in our context?
3. Verses 3-5 describe governing authorities as “servants” of God for approving good and avenging the wrongdoer. They “bear the sword” as an expression of God’s just wrath, and therefore, they have the responsibility of enforcement. How would a proper understanding of these verses increase our appreciation for those who govern in our country, including legislators, civil servants, judges, and those working in law enforcement? How should Christians working in such professions understand their work before God?
4. Romans 12:19 instructed Christians never to take personal revenge, but to leave vengeance to the “wrath of God” on the final day. However, Romans 13:4 suggests that God’s wrath against evildoers is carried out even now, as the state rightly administers criminal justice (uses “the sword”). In light of this seeming tension between Romans 12 and Romans 13, when should Christians let offenses go (turning the other cheek – see Matt. 5:38-42), and when should they appeal to the legal system? (Note Paul’s appeal to his Roman Citizenship in Acts 22:25 and his appeal to Caesar in Acts 25:11)
5. Verses 6-7 insist that Christians must pay what is owed: whether taxes, revenue, respect, or honor. How does this teaching convict us of evading taxes, bending the rules, or taking matters into our own hands? In your opinion, how do these verses apply to the way that Christians often engage in demonizing political opponents with whom they disagree? What is the difference between healthy political discouragement that “honors” those in government, and the hateful scorn that we often see in the media, on Facebook, and see Christian believers engaging in? How should these verses correct us?

Prayer suggestion: Take time to pray for our government at all levels. At the same time, pray for those who are protesting the abuse of authority. Pray that peace and justice would prevail. Take time to repent of any patterns of behavior where we've been guilty of maligning those in governmental authority. Thank God for his provision of the rule of law in our nation, and repent of those times when we've felt justified in bending the rules for our own advantage.