

## Submitting to Governing Authorities (Daniel 2:1-5, 14-23 & Romans 13:1-7)

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### **Daniel 2:1-5, 14-23**

#### **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream**

**2** In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled, and he could not sleep. <sup>2</sup> So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, <sup>3</sup> he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means."

<sup>4</sup> Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

<sup>5</sup> The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.

<sup>14</sup> When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. <sup>15</sup> He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. <sup>16</sup> At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

<sup>17</sup> Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>18</sup> He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. <sup>19</sup> During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven <sup>20</sup> and said:

"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;  
wisdom and power are his.

<sup>21</sup> He changes times and seasons;  
he deposes kings and raises up others.  
He gives wisdom to the wise  
and knowledge to the discerning.

<sup>22</sup> He reveals deep and hidden things;

he knows what lies in darkness,  
and light dwells with him.

<sup>23</sup> I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:  
You have given me wisdom and power,  
you have made known to me what we asked of you,  
you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

## **Romans 13:1-7**

### **Submission to Governing Authorities**

**13** Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. <sup>2</sup> Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup> For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. <sup>4</sup> For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

<sup>6</sup> This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. <sup>7</sup> Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.

### **Sermon: “Submitting to Governing Authorities”**

Please turn your Bible to **Romans chapter 13** – we’re looking verses 1 to 7.

There is an **outline** if you would like to take down some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

## Recap/Intro

### [Slide-Recap]

Last week in Romans chapter 12, the Apostle Paul told us - “*in view of God’s mercy*” in sending His Son to give people the opportunity to be forgiven of their sins and receive eternal life –Paul told us - what **Christian relationships should look like.**

We looked at:

- Our relationship with **God**
- Our relationship with **ourselves**
- Our relationship with **others**
- And our relationship with **those who are not so nice**

Now in **chapter 13** – verses 1 to 7

### [Slide-Intro]

The Apostle Paul describes what our relationship with the **governing authorities** should look like...

By governing authorities Paul means the “***government***” as opposed to the “***church***”. In our context - in Australia – the governing authorities is the “**Commonwealth Government of Australia**”

### [Slide-Intro]

Over the last 2000 years since Christianity began – **relationships between church and government** (or the state) have been **notoriously controversial.**

In summary, there have been **4 models** that have been tried:

1. **Erastian-ism** – the state controls the church
2. **Theocracy** – the church controls the state
3. **Constantinian-ism** – A compromise in which the state favours the church and church makes some accommodations with the state to preserve its favoured status
4. **Partnership** – church and state recognize each other, and they **each have distinct God-given responsibilities**, and **encourage and collaborate** with each other in fulfilling these roles.

It's the last one, that Paul is teaching in Romans 13

The **Church and Government have different roles**, and **Christians have duties and responsibilities to both God and the Government**.

### **[Slide-Intro]**

This **balance** is clearly **shown by Jesus** himself when He was **asked whether people** in His day **should pay taxes to the Romans** (Mark 12:13-17)

Jesus was asked this question by people (Pharisees and Herodians) to trap Him.

If Jesus said "*No, people don't have to pay taxes to the Romans*", He would be in trouble from the Roman authorities".

If Jesus said "Yes, people should pay taxes to the Romans", He would become unpopular with the people who hated the Romans.

Jesus wisely answered the question: "***Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's***" (Mark 12:17)

Jesus shows **there are two Kingdoms** that Christians are part of “***The World***” and “***Heaven***” and whilst on Earth – Christians must live and be citizens of both Kingdoms.

Another way to look at this is to see that **Christians live in two worlds** – the “***physical***” world and the “***spiritual***” world.

### [Slide-Intro-Headings]

So, here in Romans 13 – Paul expands on how - **Christians live in this world – under governments** - whilst at the same time obeying God and being citizens of Heaven!

We’ll look at this under **3 headings**:

The **Authority** of the Government – vv1-3

The **Purpose** of the Government – vv4, 6

The **Responsibility of the Citizens** of the Government – vv5-7

### [Slide-Authority]

#### The Authority of the Government (vv1-3)

1<sup>st</sup> then – ***the authority of the government***

Paul begins in v1 with a clear command – “***let everyone be subject to the governing authorities***”

He then goes on to give the reason for this requirement – and he affirms it three times

- V1b – *there is no authority except that which God established*
- V1c – *the authorities that exist have been established by God*
- And v2a – *Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted*

From this we can say – the Government is a divine institution with divine authority!

If you're like me – **you might struggle with this statement.** Especially when we think of governments led by Hitler, Stalin or Putin!

So, we **need to be cautious** in our interpretation of Paul's statements.

**Paul cannot mean** that leaders like - Caligula, Herod, Nero and Domitian in the New Testament times and people like Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussain, Kim Yong Un or Valdimir Putin – **were personally appointed by God** – and that **God is responsible for their behaviour** – or that **their authority is under no circumstances to be resisted.**

No! What Paul means is that **all human authority is derived from God's authority,** so that **we can say to rulers** what Jesus said to Pontius Pilate – when Pilate said he had the power to either free Jesus or crucify Him – Jesus said to Pilate: “**You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above**” (John 19:11)

You see, **Pilate misused his authority** to condemn Jesus, nevertheless the authority Pilate had to do this, had been delegated to him by God!

Having called people to submit to the government – Paul then – in v2 – **warns people that *rebellng against the government is rebelling against what God has instituted*** – which will only *bring judgment on them!*

Paul says it's right and wise to submit to the government – because – v3 – *rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended.*

The idea that rulers commend those who do the right thing and punish those who do the wrong thing is **not** always **true** though - is it?

Even though as a Roman citizen, Paul himself, received the benefits of Roman justice; **Paul knew only too well how authority can be misused** – as it was with **Jesus' trial and the kangaroo court He faced!**

So, when Paul here – describes the rulers of the government in such a good light – as commending the good and punishing the wrong – **Paul is stating this is - the divine ideal for governments – not the human reality!**

(pause)

So, if government authority is derived from God, it begs the question **what happens when the government abuses that authority?**

What happens if - the government reverses their God-given authority and **commends those who are evil and punishes those who are good?**

Does the requirement to submit to the government **still stand?**

**No!** Of course not!

We are NOT to submit - where obedience to the government would mean disobedience to God!

If the government commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands;  
then our Christian duty is - to resist and not to submit – our Christian duty is – to  
disobey the government in order to obey God.

For example, the Apostle **Peter** and some of the **other apostles**, were **told** by the Jewish council in Jerusalem – not to teach about Jesus. But Peter and the other apostles replied, “*We must obey God rather than human beings*” (Acts 5:27-29)  
 When a government enforces laws which contradict God’s laws – it is our Christian duty to respectfully disobey them.

**Examples of this in the Old Testament:**

- When the King (**Pharaoh**) of Egypt **ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn baby boys**, they refused to obey. In Exodus 1:17 it says: “*The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live*”
- When King **Nebuchadnezzar** of Babylon **ordered** all his subjects to **bow down and worship a golden statue of his image**; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to obey (Daniel 3) – they got a bit hot under the collar for a while!



- When King **Darius** of Persia **ordered** that **no one should pray** to any god or man except Darius himself, **Daniel refused to obey** (Daniel 6) – and almost became cat food!

In each case the **respectful disobedience** involved **great personal risk, including possible loss of life.** The people involved did not disobey to defy the ruler - but to **demonstrate their complete allegiance to the one true God and His authority over all things!**

To sum up then, **we are to submit to the government's God-given authority, but that authority has been given for good order and not for dictatorial or oppressive purposes.**

**[Slide-Purpose]**

### The Purpose of the Government (vv4, 6)

2<sup>nd</sup> then – ***The purpose of the Government***

Again, Paul affirms 3 times what the **purpose of the government** is:

- V4a – ***for the one in authority is God's servant for your good***
- V4c – ***they are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer***
- And v6 – ***for the authorities are God's servants***

The Greek word Paul uses for **servant** here is the same word used to describe **ministers of a church** – ministers are servants!

In government terms - that's why we often hear people working for the government referred to as **civil servants**.

So, the government's purpose is to **promote and reward good** [[we might see that with community awards and things like Order of Australia medals etc.](#)] – and the government's purpose is to also **restrain and punish evil!**

As Paul says in verse 4 the **government does not bear the sword for no reason.**

Their purpose is **to punish people** when they break the law.

Now of course, **we don't have capital punishment in Australia anymore** (ended in 1973 – death penalty for treason kept in NSW until 1985).

So, punishments these days are - **prison sentences** which can be for life – and **fines** – **compulsory rehabilitation programs** – **weekend detention** – **community service.**

These **punishments** are **meant to be a deterrent**, so people don't offend for the first time and so that previous offenders don't reoffend but rehabilitate.

### **[Slide-Responsibility]**

#### **The Responsibility of the Citizens of the Government (vv5-7)**

We've seen - **the authority of government** – and **the purpose of government**

Now 3<sup>rd</sup> – ***the responsibility of the citizens of the government***

That's us – and our **responsibility**

See v5 – we're not only to **submit to the authority of the government in case we get punished** (with jail or fines) but also **as a matter of conscience.**

What does Paul mean by a **matter of conscience**?

Well – if we only obey the government when there's a real possibility of getting caught and punished – but we don't obey the government when there's not much

chance of getting caught – **then we’re going against our Christian principles and going against our conscience.** And remember **God knows we’re breaking the law** – even if no one else knows – and even if we never get caught!

So, what Paul means by submitting to the government as a matter of conscience is actually – obeying the government - **out of obedience to God alone!**

Our conscience also protects us from obeying the government when they tell us to do something which is against God’s law. Our conscience won’t let us do immoral things and then say “well – I was only obeying orders!”. This sort of thing happened in WWI and WWII – and other wars, I’m sure.

In v6 – Paul also says we have **the responsibility to pay taxes to the government.** Sometimes there can be a fine line between tax evasion and inventive tax avoidance!

Sometimes we might even, **fail to declare all our income on our tax return to avoid paying tax.** Remember, all the facilities we use – like roads, trains, medical centres, hospitals, schools etc. must be paid for.

When I lived in Ireland – **many tradies were claiming the dole and working cash in hand – and didn’t pay any tax.** This sort of widespread behaviour meant it was only a small minority of honest taxpayers paying tax and supporting those ripping off the system! No wonder, VAT (like our GST) in Ireland is 23%!

Paul goes on to say in v7 – **we must make sure we pay all our debts** – whether that be **water rates, council rates, mortgages and loans and so on.**

And Paul says we are to **show respect and honour to those in authority.**

Even if we don't agree with the government's policies – we can disagree with them on their policies - without resorting to **name-calling** and **vicious insults** and **violent behaviour** and **aggressive language-** and **degrading and offensive social media posts**

If we think back to COVID – which we all agree was a terribly difficult time. Our state and federal leaders were handling something none of them had been trained for or ever experienced before. Many of them were on call 24/7 – and yet **the abuse and insults they copped were dreadful and totally unacceptable.** I can only imagine what **their mental health** was like! It's not surprising that **most of those state premiers** that were in power have all but left politics!

Yet Jesus gave us a **golden rule** in Matthew 7:12 - *So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.* We need to put ourselves in the government leaders' shoes – and ask – **how would we want to be treated? Then treat them that way!**

It's perhaps worthwhile this morning pausing:

- To **examine our conscience** as to whether we have **blatantly disobeyed the government**

- To repent of times, we have not paid the government taxes and other revenue due to them – and avoided or evaded these payments – or fiddled the books
- To be honest with ourselves – and **repent of the times** - when we have **disrespected our leaders with personal insults and comments** – rather than respectfully disagreeing with them

(pause)

### [Slide-Case Study]

#### Case Study – What if the Government goes against God's Word? (Daniel 2:1-23)

To finish up then – let's have a look at what we should do if the government goes against God's Word.

And we'll use our **Old Testament** reading from **Daniel 2**.

[Please turn there now]

The **context** is – King **Nebuchadnezzar** is King of **Babylon** (modern day Iraq) reigning between 605BC-562BC. At the time the **Israelites** from Judah were living in **exile in Babylon**.

We pick up the story in verse 1 where **Nebuchadnezzar** had a **troubling dream** and can't sleep. He **summoned** his **magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers** to a) **tell him what the dream is** and b) **what it means**.

It's hard enough to work out what a dream means without trying to guess what the dream was as well!

The **King's request** is **totally unreasonable**.

To make matters worse – v5 – **Nebuchadnezzar tells all these wise men – if they don't tell him what his dream was and interpret it – they will be cut into pieces** and their **houses** will become **rubble!**

What can we learn from the way **Daniel** handles an unreasonable governing authority?

Well – look at v14 – Daniel spoke to Arioch – the commander of the King's army – with **wisdom and tact!**

**Daniel didn't start a coup or organize a rebellion!**

Then – v15 – Daniel **went into the King and asked for more time**, so he could interpret the dream.

Application: We can learn from this.

When our government wants to implement policies which go against God's Word – **we can respectfully complain.**

We live in a **democracy** – so we **can vote them out!**

We can also **write or email** our local **member of parliament**

And we can also **start a petition** against the policy.

And don't forget being part of the **Presbyterian denomination** – you have representatives in the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church – who meet with the Prime Minister and his ministers from time to time - and **lobby them on policies which don't align with God's Word.**

For example, back in **2017** before the **"same sex marriage" referendum** – **church leaders met with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull – to get assurance that both sides of the referendum had the same amount of advertising** – and to also ensure

that - in the event of the referendum voting in favour of same sex marriage –  
**ministers and priests would not be forced to marry same sex couples!**

(pause)

Back to Daniel

V17 – **Daniel** also **explained** the unreasonable demands of Nebuchadnezzar to his  
**mates** – Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah

And v18 – Daniel **pleaded with them to plead for mercy** from the God of Heaven –  
in other words - **pray!**

Application – again, that’s something we can do too – **pray for our government  
 leaders** – *to not lean on their own understanding – and to not be wise in their own  
 eyes* – but to **submit their policies to God** and **implement policies that line up with  
 God’s Word.**

*Prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective* (James 5:16)

(pause)

I’d like to finish up though – with some **golden truths** that we can hang on to when  
 we are dealing with governments that go against God’s Word

Look at v21 – Daniel says:

*God changes times and seasons* – there was a season of WWI and WWII – they  
 passed - there was a season of COVID and severe restrictions and laws – and it  
 passed!

Still in v21 – Daniel says:

*God deposes kings and raises up others* – the Roman Empire is gone; Hitler's Third Reich is gone – Saddam Hussain's dictatorship is gone – Vladimir Putin's cruelty will end one day! **God is sovereign!**

I pray, **we gain comfort from this truth from God's Word!**

Let's pray...

*Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are sovereign in all things.*

*That you change times and seasons.*

*That you depose kings and leaders and raise up new ones.*

*Help us to submit to our governing authorities in good conscience.*

*Help us to respectfully disagree with governing authorities when they go against your Word – and help us to be diligent in praying for our government leaders.*

*In Jesus name. Amen.*