

Dear Friends and Family,

The United States' Bill of Rights, the name given to the first ten amendments to the Constitution, was written to ensure individual liberty. Specifically, the 10th Amendment reads:

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.

This creates an important dichotomy in our country between the States and the Federal government. The question that has been posed recently is this: If the Federal government is prohibited from doing something which infringes on our individual liberty, are the States likewise prohibited? The first Amendment states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;

This states specifically that Congress may not infringe on the free exercise of religion, yet many, if not all, State governments called for the shut down of church gatherings in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Many churches and even whole denominations quickly complied with the order, citing Romans 13:1.

However, other church leaders pointed out the disparity between asking churches to close down while retail stores, fastfood and several other stores remained open. Still others asked if the State Government even possesses the right to do something absolutely prohibited by the first amendment.

One church leader remarked that he “never believed he would see the day that churches in America were forced to close. Turns out all they had to do is ask.”

How does this all fit into Paul's commands in Romans 13? What about those times when the laws of the government contradict the laws of God?

Day 1: READ Romans 13:1-2

The word used here, translated as *subjection*, means to subject or subordinate oneself.

This is an important key to understanding the value of Paul's message in this passage. We are self-subordinating to those in authority over us.

It is interesting to note the term *government* is not found in the original language. The term for *authority* is a metaphorical term for “one subject to a ruler or human magistrate.”

While this doesn't preclude government authority, it certainly does not single out government authority alone. This is certainly where government rule comes into the equation for us as well as later when Paul speaks of paying taxes.

The main point of this passage is this: God is sovereign. He is sovereign over those who are placed into positions of earthly authority. As Christians, we are called to self-subordinate to those authorities, as Christ Himself subordinated to His own death on the cross (Philippians 2:8). Though they may not know it, those authorities are being used by God to do His will (Exodus 9:15-17).

What does Paul instruct will happen to those who oppose authority?

Stay tuned for day 2, because this discussion is just beginning...

Day 2: READ Romans 13:3-7

Verse 3 is integral to answering an important question about this command:

*What about the times when authorities go against **God's** law?*

The recent Supreme Court ruling is a good example of this issue:

<https://www.thehour.com/news/article/Christian-conservatives-rattled-after-Supreme-15341933.php>

Paul writes that rulers do not cause fear for those doing good. But what if rulers are promoting evil? For those who continue doing good even though the rulers are evil, this clause of self-subordination is null and void. (See 1 Peter 2:13-20 & Acts 5:27-32). The believer gives first subordination to God. Think of a few Biblical examples of believers who followed God's law over the law of man. Whose wrath would it be better to endure?

Recall some passages we studied earlier in Romans.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." Romans 1:18

"But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." Romans 2:8

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Romans 12:18

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." Ephesians 5:6

How does verse 4, reiterate this?

Can we meet both requirements in verse 5, even if the authority is evil?

Yes, we can do good and be of clean conscience.

Paul again closes this section by restating that we owe our self-subordination to those in authority over us because God places them into their positions.

Day 3: READ Romans 13:8-10

It may seem as though Paul makes a major shift in theme here. How is loving one's neighbor the same as self-subordinating to authority?

How is it different?

Paul's transition statement is key, "owe nothing to anyone". What statement is Paul making here? READ Proverbs 22:7

What about taxes that we owe to the government? As Christians, how should we manage our finances?

Day 4: READ Romans 13:11-14

Paul wraps up this entire chapter with this context, "Do this, knowing the time..."

The end is near, Christ will return, Luke 18:8.

How are we called to live until his return?

How do Paul's commands here correlate with subjecting ourselves to authorities yet not contradicting God's law?

We live in a sinful world. Read Genesis 3:17-19 & Romans 8:19-22. How do these passages apply to this text of Romans?

We are called to be set apart from it, not conforming to the world and making no provision for the flesh. The closing of this chapter of Romans should sound familiar. Consider what we just studied in Romans 12.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
Romans 12:2

How are we to know the will of God? How are we to know what is good when living in an evil world? How are we to continue to do good? The answer, my friends, is simple. Read the Word of God. We have Scripture at our fingertips! This generation has more access to Scripture than in any other time period throughout all of history! Make the most of your time! Know the Word of God so that you may know the Will of God and do good for him!

"Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:15-16

Walking with you,

Pastor Matt

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*