

BELIEVERS MUST SUBMIT TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

ROMANS 13.1-7

Translation

¹ Everyone must be submitted to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except [given] by God, and those [authorities] existing are appointed by God. ² Therefore the one who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive judgment on themselves. ³ For the officials are not a [cause of] fear for [those doing] the good deed but the bad. And you desire not to fear authority, [so] do good, and you will have approval from it; ⁴ for it [authority] is God's agent to you for [the cause of] good. But if you were to do bad, you should fear; for it [authority] does not bear the sword to no purpose; for it is God's punishing agent for wrath to the one doing bad. ⁵ Therefore [it is] a necessity to be submitted, not only on account of the wrath, but also on account of [your] conscience. ⁶ For on account of this [reasoning], you also pay taxes; for they [who are in authority] are servants of God being devoted to this same thing. ⁷ Fulfill [your] obligations to everyone, tax to the one due tax, customs duty to the one due customs duty, respect to the one due respect, honor to the one due honor.

Exegetical Idea

HOW THE ROMANS WERE TO RELATE TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES WAS TO SUBMIT,
INCLUDING PAYING TAXES,
BECAUSE THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES REPRESENT GOD'S AUTHORITY,
AND SO DISOBEDIENCE BRINGS JUDGMENT FROM GOD, THE AUTHORITIES, AND THE CONSCIENCE.

Exegetical Sentence Outline

- VI-D1. The group to whom believers must be submitted is the governing authorities [1a].
- VI-D2. The reason believers must be submitted is that the officials represent God in their authority [1b-2].
- a. The reason believers must be submitted is there is no authority not given by God [1b].
 - b. The reason believers must be submitted is that God appointed the existing authorities [1c].
 - c. The result of believers resisting authority is to oppose God and bring judgment on themselves [2].
 - i. The result of believers resisting authority is to oppose God's ordinances [2a].
 - ii. The result of believers opposing God is to bring God's judgment on themselves [2b].
- VI-D3. The reason believers must be submitted is to avoid punishment and appease the conscience [3-5].
- a. The reason believers must be submitted is to avoid fearing the authorities [3a-c].
 - i. The reason believers must be submitted is to avoid fearing the authorities [3a].
 - ii. The reason believers must be submitted is they do not wish to fear the authorities [3b].
 - iii. The method of avoiding fear of the authorities is to do good [3c].
 - b. The result of believers being submitted is the approval of the authorities [3d-4a].
 - i. The result of believers doing good is the authorities giving them approval [3d].
 - ii. The reason the authorities will give believers approval is they are God's agent for good [4a].
 - c. The result of believers not being submitted is fear and punishment by the authorities [4b-d].
 - i. The result of believers doing bad is fear [4b].
 - ii. The reason for the fear is that authority is powerful [4c].
 - iii. The reason authority is powerful is it is God's agent for punishing those doing bad [4d].

- d. The reason believers must be submitted is to appease their consciences [5].
 - i. The reason believers must be submitted is not only to avoid punishment [5a].
 - ii. The reason believers must be submitted is to appease their consciences [5b].

- VI-D4. The reason believers must pay their taxes is the same as for obeying authority [6-7].
- a. The reason believers must pay their taxes is the same as for obeying authority [6a].
 - b. The reason believers must pay their taxes is those in authority are servants of God [6b].
 - c. The reason believers must pay their taxes is those in authority are devoted to governing [6c].
 - d. What believers must do is pay taxes, customs duties, respect, and honor, to whom they are due [7].

Commentary

Introduction: In the beginning of this letter, Paul made clear that he was commissioned to bring the gospel [or “message of good news”] pertaining to how people could have salvation. This salvation [as explained later in the letter] involves God’s forgiveness of a person’s sin [impurity; going against God’s revelation], the consequent consideration by God that this person is righteous [pure] in his sight, and thus reconciliation of that person into a healthy relationship with God [I: 1.1-17]. Paul declared his mission to bring to the Gentile [non-Jewish] nations the gift of God’s gospel – promised in the Hebrew scriptures [our “Old Testament”] and centered on Jesus Christ, who is the declared Son of God [a name implying at least authority from God, and possibly deity], the human descendent of David, the resurrected Lord [a name implying at least authority from God, and possibly deity], and the provider of Paul’s mission – his desire to visit and establish a relationship with the church in Rome, and that he boasted in this gospel, which is the power of God to bring salvation for all who believe in its truth.

Paul then used an extensive argument to make clear that *nobody can attain righteousness and reconciliation with God by his own actions, that all need this gospel to be saved* [II: 1.18-3.20]. Paul summarized that all people are under judgment because all people are sinful [impure], and thus they are both alienated in relationship with God and incapable of mitigating this problem.

Paul’s next major section of the letter detailed in five parts that *only grace [an unmerited gift from God] could bring about this salvation* [III: 3.21-6.11]. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, which acted as a substitutionary payment for people’s sins, God gives people grace in the form of justification [being considered righteous by God], propitiation [mitigation of God’s anger through his forgiveness of our sins], and redemption [freedom from the power of sin, death, evil, and the Mosaic Law, (though this would not be fully explained until later in the letter)], as part of a salvation resulting in eternal life [resurrected life after physical death]. People appropriate this grace through faith [belief in God’s revelation] in the gospel message that God will save through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which leads to hope, and in fact grace-through-faith has always been the path to righteousness and reconciliation with God. Paul also explained that an experiential aspect of this salvation is that believers in this gospel have died to sin with Christ and with Christ are raised up to new life, free from the power of sin, and alive with Christ for God’s purposes.

This last thought provided the transition into the next major section, about how *believers must now identify themselves with Christ* [IV: 6.12-8.39]. Because believers are justified, they should seek to live pure lives in obedience to God. Knowing they will still struggle with sin and that attempting to obey the Law will not succeed in breaking sin’s power, believers must learn to realize their new identity in Christ by being empowered by the Holy Spirit to live and even suffer for God’s purposes.

Paul then explained how *God will bring Israel to respond to the gospel* [V: 9.1-11.36]. God’s promises to Israel have not failed; but he has mercy on whom he chooses, and it was his plan to bring in the Gentiles;

but most of the people of Israel failed to put their faith in the Messiah [Christ], to believe in the gospel. But a remnant of the Jews have responded, and it is God's plan to use the Gentiles to bring in the people of Israel, and thus allow the Jews to participate in the promises God long ago made to them.

The section which contains our subject passage exhorts that *believers are to be transformed to Christ-likeness* [VI: 12.1-15.13]. In a culminating exhortation derived from the theology of this letter, Paul wrote [A: 12.1-2], "Therefore I exhort you, Brothers and Sisters, through the mercies of God, to present yourselves to God as a sacrifice that is living, holy, and pleasing, which is your thoughtful service. Also, do not be conformed to this present age, rather be transformed by the renewal of the mind, so that you approve of what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." Paul explained some aspects of what a transformed life will look like, including how to live cooperatively and integrally as part of the community in the church [B: 12.3-16], how to relate to outside antagonists [C: 12.17-21], how to relate to the government [our subject passage; D: 13.1-7], the need for a perspective of devotion to God and love for others [E: 13.8-14], the need for an ambition of building each other up [F: 14.1-15.4], and the need for the ultimate goal of glorifying God in unity with one another [G: 15.5-13].

In our subject passage, Paul commanded believers to submit to governing authorities, including payment of taxes, because God has brought those people into authority and to defy them is to defy him, resulting in self-conviction, discipline from the government, and chastisement from God.

Integration of 13.1-7: Before we begin an analysis of our subject passage [13.1-7], we must note first that there is an asyndeton [a lack of grammatical connection to the previous section], which does occur sometimes, though not often [in Romans, only here and in 9.1 for section transitions; Robertson, 444]. Some scholars would see this as an issue, trying to argue this passage does not fit well into the letter, suggesting there also is little logical connection or stylistic consistency between this passage and its context and so 13.8 would better follow 12.21, that the seemingly positive attitude toward the governing authorities is surprising given 12.2 and 13.11-14, and that this passage seems not to reflect belief in Christ because it refers specifically to God the Father as creator [Cranfield, 651].

With respect to consistency and connection, in the previous section, Paul has brought up two related issues that might pertain to this section. First, he has mentioned blessing those who persecute you [12.14] and overcoming evil with good [12.21]. If Paul was aware of a present or pending wave of state persecution [or even exploitation; Barnett, 286], those verses would teach the necessary inward attitude, to be followed by the teaching of outward submission to authority in 13.1-7. Also, as part of the previous teaching, Paul took up the issue of not seeking justice for oneself, but rather leaving vengeance to God, which would feed nicely into the present discussion of trusting the authorities to carry out God's justice until Christ's return [Cranfield, 652; Barnett, 286; Morris, 457; Schreiner, 678; Moo, 792]. Looking forward, the integration of these verses with 13.8-14 is so smooth that it is hard to know where to break between the two: believers are to submit to governing authorities [13.1-5], and pay what is owed [13.6-7], owing nothing but love [13.8a; Cranfield, 652, noted the connection of owing in vv.7-8a], for the one who loves fulfills the Law [8b-10], which we seek to do because the end is near [13.11-14].¹

While the passage does not mention Christ, the logic of it is consistent with the presupposition of the reality of Christ. Saying the governing authorities are agents and servants of God presupposes they have a purpose in God's plan to make all things be submitted to Christ [Cranfield, 654]. And though the government might not acknowledge the deity, atoning death, resurrection, or ascension of Christ, and thus might be no more submitted to Christ – which they should be – than they were before, Christ's claim of authority over them is now more clearly asserted because of these historical realities and their evidence of

¹ Cranfield, 652-653, offered other arguments in defense of the passage, but they were not as convincing.

Christ's identity and manifest authority, and so all the more should the governing authorities seek to represent Christ well, and all the more will they be held accountable for not doing so [Cranfield, 655; Witherington, 307, notes this would represent a demotion in the minds of the Roman authorities]. Thus it is not that Paul is confident of the integrity and justice of the governing authorities,² but that he is proclaiming their role as Christ's representation in authority until Christ's return, and thus the need for believers who are being transformed into the likeness of Christ [12.2] to submit to them [Morris, 458-459; Barnett, 286; Witherington, 306, 308; Schreiner, 677; Moo, 791-792]. How one implements this teaching when the governing authorities fail to represent Christ well will be taken up in the discussion that follows.

VI-D1: Submitting to the governing authorities [13.1a]: Paul commanded, *Everyone* [Πᾶσα ψυχή;³ BDAG, 1099] *must be submitted* [ὑποτασσέσθω; BDAG: “be subordinated” or “be subjected,”⁴

² Witherington, 304-308, thinks at the time of writing Paul was hopeful of a just government in Rome, while seeing the need to fly under the radar, so to speak, for the sake of smoothly welcoming back Jewish believers into the churches of Rome. Such assumptions are not necessary for understanding the passage.

³ There is a textual issue with this first phrase. NA²⁷ reads, “Πᾶσα ψυχή ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω”; the variant [V¹] reads, “Πασαίς ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθε.”

External: NA²⁷ is witnessed by \aleph and B [two fourth century witnesses of the Alexandrian text-type], many old Latin manuscripts [which date back to the second century and represent the Western text-type] along with the Vulgate, and the Byzantine minuscules [which scholars believe reflect a fourth century archetype]. V¹ is witnessed by ρ^{46} [the earliest Greek Pauline witness, from early third century and Alexandrian in text-type], D [the primary Greek witness to the Pauline letters for the Western text-type, though from the sixth century], and many old Latin manuscripts. Thus, both readings have early witnesses. \aleph is considered to be the best Greek manuscript for the epistles [unless otherwise noted, evaluation of manuscripts is from Wallace, “A Brief Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism,” 54-55]. B also is considered to be a high quality manuscript. There are only a few old Latin manuscripts for Paul's letters, but it is significant when they agree, because the old Latin manuscripts were known for variety [Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 101]; however, in this case some agree for each reading. The Byzantine minuscules generally are thought to be lesser witnesses than the early witnesses of the Alexandrian text-type. NA²⁷ is a longer reading; characteristically, its Alexandrian witnesses would reflect the shorter reading, though the Western Latin witnesses and the Byzantine witnesses tend to be longer. ρ^{46} is a looser translation. D is the primary Greek witness to the Pauline letters for the Western text-type. V¹ is the shorter reading, characteristic of its Alexandrian witness, but not so of its Western. Thus, NA²⁷ has the better quality of witnesses, but its longer reading is more consistent with its weaker witnesses. NA²⁷ has good genealogical solidarity for the Alexandrian text-type [though this is weakened by ρ^{46} favoring the variant], and the Byzantine text-type. V¹ has genealogical solidarity for the Western text-type [though this is weakened by many of the old Latin manuscripts agreeing with NA²⁷]. NA²⁷ has the best early geographical spread, being represented in the Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine text-types, while V¹ is represented in the Alexandrian and Western. Thus, NA²⁷ has the best combination of genealogical solidarity and early geographical spread. In summary, while both readings have early witnesses, NA²⁷ is preferable because it has the best combination of quality witnesses, genealogical solidarity, and early geographical spread.

Internal: There are two changes, the omission or insertion of ψυχή and the change in the verb mood. It is unlikely an unintentional transcriptional error would occur in this passage due to visual or audio issues. It is possible such changes would have been made inadvertently by a hurrying scribe experiencing an error of memory or moment of carelessness. There is no reason to believe there were any influences on the scribes due to harmonizing tendencies, contextual parallels, common expressions, similar constructions in Paul's other letters, conflation, or doctrinal considerations. V¹ is the shorter reading, but NA²⁷ the harder: it is possible the scribes were trying to avoid the Hebraic idiom of πᾶσα ψυχή [Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 467], which is rare in the New Testament [only Acts 3.23; Rev 16.3; also seven times in the Old Testament of the Septuagint]. If V¹ were original, it is difficult to see any reason scribes would intentionally change the text to NA²⁷. In summary, it seems most likely a scribe tried to smooth out the passage from NA²⁷ to V¹, to avoid the strange Hebraic idiom, though it is possible an error occurred the other way inadvertently.

1042] *to the governing authorities*⁵ [ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις; BDAG, 1033]. The present tense of the imperative “submit” [ὑποτασσέσθω] suggests it is “a general precept that has gnomic implications” [Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 525; he cited this verse in the footnote], which means it is general and timeless in nature. In other words, this is a general principle for believers: be submitted to the governing authorities in your life. Paul will explain why this is must be so in the following verses, and then we will have the opportunity to consider the depth of this submission. One issue to keep in mind is the purpose

Overall: The evidence favors NA²⁷ [Metzger, 467; “A” rating in UBS4; Cranfield, 656, n1; Moo, 790, n1; Schreiner, 688].

⁴ I researched ὑποτασσω for a previous exegetical paper in NT104. In the middle-passive, ὑποτασσω in the Septuagint carried a meaning of being subject to, or submitted to, someone [LEH, s.v. #9258]. The word occurs thirty-eight times in the New Testament, twenty-five of those in Paul’s letters. BDAG’s analysis [1042] is that all New Testament uses mean to be subjected or to be subordinated to something or someone else. For the middle-passive form, Burgmeier [EDNT, 3:408] elaborated further, including the concepts of being submitted, subordinated, yielded, or obedient.

In the contexts that do not involve individual believers, the idea of obedience and total submission seems evident: all things to Christ [Heb 2.8; 1 Cor 15.27-28; Eph 1.22; Phi 3.21]; angels and other powers to Christ [1 Pet 3.22]; the child Jesus to his parents [Luk 2.51]; Christ to God the Father [1 Cor 15.28; note this submission can be functional subordination without loss of dignity or status; O’Brien, 412]; demons to the seventy-two Christ sent out [Luk 10.17, 20]; and the church to Christ [Eph 5.24] are all good examples. Two negative examples also serve: the fleshly mind does not submit to God’s law [Rom 8.7] and non-believing Jews are not submitting to God’s way of righteousness [Rom 10.3]. In contexts that do involve individual believers, we might get some illumination as to the form of this submission. Slaves are to submit to their masters [1 Pet 2.18; Titus 2.9]; the young in the church are to submit to their elders [1 Pet 5.5]; believers are to submit to God [James, 4.7; Heb 12.9], to those laboring for God in the church [1 Cor 16.16], and to each other [Eph 5.21]. Most of these suggest the same obedience and total submission. However, a couple of these relationships, most notably that in Eph 5.21, raise questions about whether this is always total submission/obedience or sometimes just humble subordination, which would still involve yielding place to the other, but not necessarily a slave to master relationship. However, if the submission in Eph 5.21 is illustrated fully by Eph 5.22-6.9, it too is apparently hierarchical in nature. Some think the command in Eph 5.21 to submit to one another means to submit to those whom you should within the church structure [Hoehner, 717]. In Col 3.18 and Titus 2.5, the instruction is simply for wives to submit to their husbands. However, Peter said slaves should submit to their masters even if those masters were not reasonable [1 Pet 2.18], and then said in the same way wives should submit to their husbands [1 Pet 3.1]. Eph 5.22 [with the verb implied from 5.21], says wives are to submit to their husbands as to Christ, and Eph 5.24 says wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. This certainly implies obedience and total submission [Hoehner, 746; Lincoln, 373], as unpalatable as that might be in today’s culture, particularly by the last phrase, ἐν παντί. The only limitation would seem to be that in God there is a higher authority, and so to God there must be a priority submission.

1 Pet 2.13 says [NASB], “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.” Titus 3.1 says [NLT], “Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good.” In Rom 13.1, NASB says “is to be in subjection” [weakens verb sense]; NET, TNIV, and ESV, “be subject” [makes stative]; NLT and CSB: “must submit” [makes active]; It seems reasonable to use “be submitted,” “be subordinated,” or “be subjected,” but “be submitted” gives the clearest meaning in modern English.

⁵ Cranfield, 656-659, provided the most thorough list of arguments for and against the idea of a double reference here, of not just human government authorities but also the supposed angelic powers supporting or acting through them [see also Moo, 795-796, fn 21-22]. Even were the angelic powers to exist in all cases of governing authority, and even had Paul kept in mind the double reference while writing, there is no need to complicate the teaching by elaborating on this, and indeed Paul himself did not. Whether angelic powers are behind the governing authorities or not, Paul called on believers to be submitted to those governing authorities.

for the present dispensation [time period in God's plan for history]: the gospel mission is far more important and urgent than civic reform.

VI-D2: Recognizing governing authorities as representatives of God [13.1b-2]: Paul continued, *For* [γὰρ; BDAG, 189-190] *there is no authority* [ἐξουσία; BDAG, 352-353] *except [given] by God* [ὑπὸ θεοῦ]... The first word, *For* [γὰρ], indicates this is a reason for the imperative just given. The reason believers must be submitted to the governing authorities is that there is no authority which was not given by God. The first “by God” [ὑπὸ θεοῦ] in v.1b indicates ultimate agency [Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 433]: in other words, that God was the ultimate source of this authority.

The flip side of this reason follows: *and* [δὲ; BDAG, 213] *those [governing authorities] existing* [αἰ...οῦσαι; BDAG: “those that exist,” 282-286] *are appointed* [τεταγμένοι εἰσίν; BDAG: “are put in place,”⁶ 991] *by God* [ὑπὸ θεοῦ]. The second “by God” [ὑπὸ θεοῦ] in v.1b indicates ultimate agency again. In this last sentence Paul might have been making a general statement to reiterate his point, or he might have been referring now to the specific governing authorities [those existing at that time] with which he and his readers were familiar [Cranfield, 663; Moo, 798]. Just as a government serves God, even if it is not aware of doing so, when it provides justice and mercy, so too the believer can honor God by honoring the governing authorities standing in for God [Witherington, 306].

Paul strengthened his argument by discussing the consequences of going against this imperative: *Therefore* [ὥστε; BDAG, 1107] *the one who resists* [ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος; BDAG, 90; takes an object in the dative] *authority* [τῆ ἐξουσία; used consistently] *has opposed* [ἀνθέστηκεν; BDAG, 80; apparently always takes an object in the dative] *the ordinance* [τῆ...διαταγῆ; BDAG, 237] *of God* [τοῦ θεοῦ], *and* [δὲ; used consistently] *those who have opposed* [οἱ...ἀνθεστηκότες; used consistently⁷] *will receive* [λήμψονται; BDAG, 583-585] *judgment* [κρίμα; BDAG, 567] *on themselves* [ἑαυτοῖς; BDAG, 268-269].

Therefore means what follows is an implication of what has already been stated. Thus, the logical consequence of believers resisting the governing authorities is to oppose God's ordinances, since the governing authorities were appointed by God [Morris, 462]. Wallace [*Exegetical Syntax*, 114] believes the “of God” [τοῦ θεοῦ] in v.2 is a subjective genitive: to be interpreted as “they oppose what God ordains,” with “what God ordains” in turn possibly meaning “what God ordains through the governing authorities” or the fact that God has ordained the governing authorities to have authority and he has ordained that everyone else must be submitted to them.

In any case, the result of believers opposing what God has ordained by resisting governing authorities is to bring judgment on themselves. There is some debate about what kind of judgment is in view here. Some see it as eternal condemnation [Moo, 799; KJV], others as judgment from God but not in the nature of eternal condemnation [Cranfield, 664], others as legal punishment, either as how the divine punishment is worked out [Morris, 462] or merely acting as a human punishment [Witherington, 313; Schreiner, 683, whose conclusion is based partly on his view that v.3 is subordinate to v.2b, not to v.1 (679-680, 683)]. Since the point of this part of the discussion [vv.1-2] is God's authority being delegated to those in government and the point of the next part of the discussion [vv.3-5] is that those in government are likely to punish those not submitting, it seems best here to consider this a judgment from God, though – as believers are Paul's intended audience – this is not to be taken as an eternal condemnation, but rather

⁶ BDAG, 991, suggests “are put in place” for the usage in this verse, but the other definition, “order, fix, determine, appoint,” seems to work just as well and sound better.

⁷ Witherington, 313 [following Dunn], argues this must refer to one who is “determined to resist,” as opposed to one who has resisted. However, I could not find anything in Wallace [*Exegetical Syntax*], Robertson, Burton, or BDF to justify that stance.

similar to the consequences of any sin by a believer, consequences which are real in the physical and spiritual realms, but which do not impact one's eternal salvation obtained by grace through faith [and thus not dependent on behavior].

VI-D3: Avoiding punishment and appeasing the conscience [13.3-5]: Next, Paul gave the second reason believers should be submitted to the governing authorities [Cranfield, 664; Morris, 462; contra Schreiner, as noted in the previous section]: *For* [γάρ; used consistently] *the officials* [οἱ... ἄρχοντες; BDAG, 140] *are not a [cause of] fear* [φόβος; BDAG, 1062, takes it as an intimidating entity: “terror”] *for [those doing] the good* [τῷ ἀγαθῷ; BDAG, 3-4] *deed* [ἔργῳ; BDAG, 390-391] *but* [ἀλλὰ; BDAG, 44-45] *the bad* [τῷ κακῷ; BDAG, 501]. Cranfield [665-666] took this to be a promise, but it more likely is a general statement of God's intention for government: just as the government is in place by God's agency and thus represents God, so – if it were representing God well – it would not cause fear for those doing good, but for those doing bad.

Paul continued: *And* [δὲ; used consistently] *you desire* [θέλεις, BDAG, 447-448] *not to fear* [μὴ φοβείσθαι; BDAG, 1060-1062] *authority* [τὴν ἐξουσίαν; used consistently], [*so*] *do* [ποίει; BDAG, 839-842] *good* [τὸ ἀγαθόν; used consistently]... This is an example of “Parataxis in place of conditional subordination” [BDF, 247], which means Paul has placed clauses one after another, without words [such as “so”] to indicate the coordination or subordination of the clauses [*New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd Ed., 1235]. Paul then gave the result if the believer does good deeds: *and* [καὶ; BDAG, 494-496] *you will have* [ἔξεις; BDAG, 420-422] *approval* [ἔπαινον; BDAG, 357] *from it* [the governing authority]; *for* [γάρ; used consistently] *it* [the governing authority] *is God's agent* [διάκονός; BDAG, 230-231] *to you for [the cause of]* [εἰς; BDAG,⁸ 288-291] *good*⁹ [τὸ ἀγαθόν; used consistently]. Wallace [119] indicated there is an objective genitive: the governing authorities collectively are “an agent of God” or “a servant of God” in that they serve God. In calling the governing authority “God's agent,” Paul again referred to the fact that when a government encourages righteousness or punishes wrongdoing [as in the second half of the verse], it is serving the cause of God regardless of whether it is aware of doing so [Moo, 801].¹⁰

Next Paul dealt with the converse situation: *But* [δὲ; BDAG,¹¹ 213] *if you were to do* [ποιῆς; used consistently] *bad* [τὸ κακόν; used consistently], *you should fear* [φοβοῦ; used consistently]; *for* [γάρ; used consistently] *it* [authority] *does not bear* [φορεῖ; BDAG, 1064] *the sword* [τὴν μάχαρην; BDAG, 622] *to no purpose* [εἰκῆ; BDAG, 281]; *for* [γάρ; used consistently] *it is God's punishing* [ἔκδικος; BDAG, 301] *agent* [διάκονός; used consistently] *for* [εἰς; used consistently] *wrath* [ὀργήν; BDAG, 720-721] *to the one doing* [τῷ... πράσσοντι; BDAG, 860-861] *bad* [τὸ κακόν; used consistently]. As noted above, there is an objective genitive [Wallace, 119], indicating the government is serving God by acting as his “punishing agent.”

⁸ BDAG, 290, indicates εἰς should be taken here as for result. I worded it for clarity with that meaning in mind.

⁹ There is some discussion as to what “good” is, but debating that question is not necessary for understanding the passage. Only Cranfield, 666, offered an idea significantly different from the others, that this referred to aiding the believer toward salvation. More likely, since Paul is using the same word as he used as a substantive for good deeds which would bring benefit to the community, the word here refers to the general good of the society or the promotion of those good deeds.

¹⁰ Cranfield, 665, viewed this somewhat differently, that the government played into God's purposes even when it punished the good or rewarded evil. We will not discuss this here, but later in this same section, when taking up the issue of what believers are to do in the case of an unrighteous government.

¹¹ BDAG, 213, does not indicate in this passage when δὲ should be translated as “and” and when as “but”; we could have translated as “and” consistent with earlier usage in the passage, but there is contrast, so we translate “but.”

There is some debate about the imagery of the sword, but the context seems to indicate that this imagery means the same as the whole thought of the verse, that the government has God's authority to enforce legalities [Moo, 802; *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 835; Witherington, 314; Schreiner, 684] or perhaps that it is not impotent when it comes to enforcing legalities [Morris, 464; Barnett, 288].¹² Here, obviously, there is an assumption for the sake of argument that the government is acting justly – else it would not effectively be God's agent [Moo, 802] and would be a cause of fear for those doing good [Schreiner, 683] – though that assumption need not always be in force for this entire passage, as we will discuss momentarily.

Paul concluded this thought: *Therefore* [διὸ; BDAG, 250] [it is] a necessity [ἀνάγκη; BDAG, 60-61] to be submitted¹³ [ὑποτάσσεσθαι; used consistently], not only [οὐ μόνον; BDAG, 658-659] on account of the wrath [τὴν ὀργήν; used consistently], but also [ἀλλὰ καὶ; BDAG, 44-45] on account of [your] conscience [τὴν συνείδησιν; BDAG, 967-968]. *Therefore* here indicates a forthcoming summary thought based on what Paul has said in the previous two verses. Anyone can see the incentive to submit to avoid judicial hassle [though Morris, 465, sees this as God's wrath, which also would be a good incentive], but Paul adds for the believer that a greater motivation [Moo, 803] is because of understanding God's will and purpose with regard to governing authorities [Cranfield, 668; Moo, 803; Schreiner, 685; Barnett, 289] and how those authorities represent and serve God. In regard to v.12.2, submission to the governing authorities thus is part of the sanctified life of the renewed mind, and rebellion against the governing authorities is not part of avoiding conformity to this present age [Moo, 803].

Now we come to a difficult question: What about when the governing authorities *are* a cause for fear to those who do good? A full treatment of this theological issue is beyond the constraints of this essay, but we must strive to understand Paul's meaning in these verses. Some scholars try to sidestep this issue with regard to this passage, noting that Paul is not dealing with every conceivable situation, such as when it might be right to rebel against tyranny, how to handle civil-church conflicts, how to handle rival claims to power, or what to do when the authorities ask the believer to sin [Morris, 459, 463]. Some assume Paul naively was hopeful that the government in Rome would remain just [Witherington; 306]. Others find it difficult to understand how Paul could be painting such an ideal picture in contrast to his realistic view of life elsewhere, and so form a theory that whether the government is good or bad, it will inadvertently be a part of what God is doing to bring about good for believers, based on v.8.28, such that even if the government punishes the good, by doing so it will somehow cause good for the believer, at least in an eschatological sense [Cranfield, 664-666]. While any of these views can be advocated with reason, we need not work so hard to make sense of what Paul is saying here.

On the one hand, we can note that Paul was writing in a context of a pagan, non-democratic government in Rome [Witherington, 313]. Furthermore Jesus himself submitted to Pilate's authority, despite the injustice of the charge and punishment [Barnett, 287]. Paul's point was that the authority of the government was given by God, and – though the government should act justly as God's representative [Morris, 458, 461, 463] – Paul did not discuss whether the government used that authority properly [Morris, 459], so the believer is to submit to the government despite its faults [Morris, 460].

However, we must ask, is submission to the government always to be equated with obedience? Our stronger submission is to our higher authority: God. Jesus said, "Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" [Mark 12.17; NET]. The context of this statement was in

¹² Cranfield, 667, suggested it meant the government's possession of military power, but this seems less likely than the other options.

¹³ According to the grammars, it is not unusual for words like "necessity" [ἀνάγκη] to appear without an stated subject for the following infinitive [BDF, 70, 210; Robertson, 1084].

answer to a question about paying taxes, but the logic in the answer could be used to argue that one must not let the government deprive God of what is his, including obedience. In the earliest days of the church, the Sanhedrin held some authority over the Jews delegated from the Romans, at least in regard to religious matters. But when they arrested Peter and John and commanded them to stop teaching about Jesus, the reply of the apostles implied continued open disobedience because their submission to God was foremost [Acts 4.18-19]. A short time later, when many of the apostles were arrested and commanded to stop teaching about Jesus, they replied, “We must obey God rather than people” [Acts 5.29; NET].

So, to be consistent with teaching elsewhere in scripture, we can assume that Paul was not asking believers to sin: if the government were to exceed its delegated authority to the point of going against the known will of God, then believers should conscientiously resist by continuing to obey God [Morris, 461-462; Barnett, 287; Cranfield, 660, 662; Schreiner, 688; Moo, 809], even to the point of openly disobeying the government [Cranfield, 662; Moo, 809]. However, this would not include seeking to overturn the state, and would include being prepared to face the consequences of that opposition as Jesus and the apostles were when they faced legal difficulties [Barnett, 287]. After the apostles were arrested, while continuing to openly be disobedient to human authority because of their priority submission to God, they did not deny the authority of this governmental entity and did submit to its punishment of flogging, and even rejoiced at being thought worthy by God to suffer for the sake of the gospel mission [Acts 5.40-42]. A believer could be civilly disobedient to an unrighteous law while submitting to the governing authorities’ right to punish such disobedience, and thus still be submitted to the state [Witherington, 312]. Thus we are not formally equating submission with obedience. The believer should obey all laws which do not go contrary to the instruction of God’s Word, but should continue in obedience to God when the law is at odds with God’s instruction.

VI-D4: Paying taxes [13.6-7]: Paul shifted focus a little with the next two verses: *For* [γὰρ; used consistently] *on account of this [reasoning], you also pay*¹⁴ [τελεῖτε;¹⁵ BDAG, 997-998] *taxes* [φόρους; BDAG, 1064]; *for* [γὰρ; used consistently] *they [who are in authority] are*¹⁶ *servants* [λειτουργοὶ; BDAG, 591-592] *of God* [θεοῦ; used consistently] *being devoted to* [προσκαρτεροῦντες; BDAG, 881] *this same thing* [αὐτὸ τοῦτο; BDAG, 152-154].

When Paul said, “on account of this,” he could have been referring to all that he had said in vv.1-5 [Schreiner, 685-686, who included v.6b too] or just to what he said about the conscience in v.5 [Cranfield, 668; Morris, 465; Moo, 804-805]. As the argument in vv.1-4 would support the need to pay taxes quite well, it probably is best to consider all the logic of the passage as the basis for why people paid their taxes.¹⁷ In any case, Paul’s point was that when the Romans paid their taxes, they were acknowledging the government’s legitimate authority as derived from God. Paul used the existing custom of paying

¹⁴ The spelling would be the same for an imperative, but this seems to be an indicative, because otherwise the γὰρ doesn’t make sense [Cranfield, 668; Moo, 804], and “Paul almost always uses γὰρ to introduce the ground or explanation of a previous statement” [Moo, 804].

¹⁵ BDAG, 997-998, shows a transition in thought among the three definitions. The most usual definition is to complete something; from that is derived the concept of carrying out an obligation; and from that in turn is derived the concept of paying an obligation, such as a tax.

¹⁶ This sentence could have a paraphrastic construction [“the servants of God are being devoted”], but “the importance of the designation of the rulers as ‘servants’ makes it more likely that εἰσιν is independent” [Moo, 805, fn.75].

¹⁷ Actually, I think the γὰρ subordinates this sentence to v.1a: because we must submit, we do pay taxes. But differentiating this idea from the one which suggests the whole passage is relevant is not necessary for understanding the idea.

taxes as support of his argument about recognizing the legitimacy of governing authorities [Cranfield, 668; Moo, 804], but what he said also implies believers should continue paying their taxes, as evidenced by the next verse and the term he used here for “servants,” which implies the collection of taxes itself is a service to God [Schreiner, 686; Moo, 804-805].

Paul often used the phrase “ἀπὸ τοῦτο” [Robertson, 705], but here it is unclear to what he was referring. He could have been saying the governing authorities are being devoted to being servants of God [Moo, 805], are being devoted to the actions in vv.3-4 of being supportive of good and punishing of evil [Schreiner, 686: “governmental function”], or are being devoted to the collecting of taxes [Cranfield, 669; Morris, 466¹⁸]. Realistically, the third option would be the most applicable for every government over all time, but the other two – particularly the second – would match up well with the emphasis of the passage as a whole: the governing authorities are being devoted to governing as described in this passage, and so – just as we must submit to them for the reasons given in this passage – we must also pay taxes as part of the just demand of the government, as payment for their services, and to keep them operational.

Paul concluded this passage with a summary statement: *Fulfill* [ἀπόδοτε; BDAG, 109-110] [your] obligations [ὀφειλάς; BDAG, 743] to everyone [πᾶσιν; used consistently], tax [φόρον; used consistently] to the one due tax, customs duty [τέλος;¹⁹ BDAG, 998-999] to the one due customs duty, respect [φόβον; BDAG, 1062] to the one due respect, honor [τιμὴν; BDAG, 1005] to the one due honor. In listing two kinds of taxes, the probable meaning is to pay “all taxes” [Morris, 466]. Paying taxes is one of the most central aspects of submission to the governing authorities [Moo, 793]. The similarity of this teaching to that of 1 Peter 2.13-17 suggests this was a widespread understanding in Christian churches [Moo, 793], no doubt based on the teachings of Jesus himself, as in the story recounted in Mark 12.17; Mat 22.21; Luke 20.25 [Cranfield, 669; Schreiner, 686].

Some scholars believe Paul is summarizing vv.1-6 and thus must be saying that believers need to fulfill their obligations to everyone with a governing authority, including showing respect and honor as well as making payments of taxes or fees [Morris, 466-467; Schreiner, 687; Moo, 805]. However, we must note the context of the following passage, in particular the transition in v.8, which says, “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another...” That suggests Paul might have had more in view than just the governing authorities when he said, “Fulfill [your] obligations to everyone...” in v.7.

A related question is whether Paul could have meant governing authorities as the recipient of “respect” in this verse, because it seems odd that Paul would ask believers to give “respect” to governing officials using the same Greek word [φόβος] that he used to say the governing authorities were not a cause for “fear” to those doing good [Cranfield, 670]. In Peter’s teaching of 1 Peter 2.13-17, he concluded with four commands, the latter two of which are to fear/respect [φοβέω, as in Rom 13.4] God and honor the king, suggesting that in our passage Paul might have meant for believers to give fear/respect to God and honor to the governing authorities [Cranfield, 671] or other people so deserving. Even though the theme of vv.1-6 is to submit to governing authorities, God is part of the discussion throughout, so it would not be surprising to find him mentioned in v.7 [Cranfield, 672]. As there is no harm in broadening the

¹⁸ Morris, 466, apparently did not realize that the NIV translation he was using concluded that ἀπὸ τοῦτο referred to governing. In discussing this verse, he quoted the NIV text to say those in government “give their full time to governing,” but then gave his own conclusion that ἀπὸ τοῦτο referred to collecting taxes.

¹⁹ LSJM, 1772, suggests meanings which in turn suggest a derivation from the meanings of completion to fulfillment to fulfillment of a duty to fulfillment [payment] of dues/taxes. Moulton-Milligan, 630, suggested multiple possible derivations for the word, perhaps independent of each other, but the LSJM usage is more compelling. Louw-Nida [s.v. 57.179] suggest the meaning of customs duty or indirect tax, which is clearly supported by the Septuagint usage in Numbers 31.28 [LEH, s.v. 8838].

context of the command, it probably is best to do so, and so the believer will keep in mind in all situations to give money, respect, and honor to those to whom they are due.

Conclusion: Paul's emphasis in this passage is that part of the sanctified life is to be submitted to governing authorities, including the payment of any required taxes. First of all, in his sovereignty, God has appointed those in positions of governing authority, and so a believer's submission to those in governing authority is by proxy a submission to God, and a believer's resistance to government ordinances is by proxy resistance to what God has ordained. The exception to this would be when the government mandates behavior inconsistent with scriptural teaching, at which point the believer's priority submission is to God, who has primary authority. Second, refusing to submit to those in government authority results in self-conviction, discipline from the government, and chastisement from God. This passage is placed in a broader discussion of how a believer relates to others, and flows nicely between the discussion of not taking justice into one's own hands and learning to live in love for one another.

One specific application would be to pay all taxes and duties: not cheating on the income tax or Social Security tax by not declaring cash income or exaggerating deductions; not cheating on the sales tax by withholding it from out of state, on-line, purchases or under-the-table cash purchases; not avoiding customs duties by not declaring items; not avoiding fees by circumventing the permitting process for house renovations; et cetera. Another specific application would be to obey civil authority in all things, even such things as seem contrary to reason, inopportune, and easily subverted, such as speed limits and other traffic laws; the restrictions of the fire marshal for apartment buildings [which restrict use of the space above cabinets and shelves and reduce the usable space in the largest cabinets by over fifty percent]; copyright laws [which require payment of licensing fees by financially strapped churches]; laws which limit one's freedom, such as land use laws, seatbelt laws, and vagrancy laws; et cetera.

As mentioned in the commentary, the question is what to do when the law conflicts with scriptural teaching. In such cases, one should openly oppose the law, but willingly submit to punishment. Thus, for example, if the government were to legislate that all churches must be willing to marry any two people seeking that service, pastors should refuse, but then submit to the penalty. Fortunately, in a society like in the US, we can also work to change the laws without failing to submit to the system of law.

- 13.1 Everyone must be submitted to the governing officials.
For there is no authority except [given] by God,
and those [authorities] existing are appointed by God.
- 13.2 Therefore the one who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God,
and those who have opposed will receive judgment on themselves.
- 13.3 For the rulers are not a [cause of] fear for the good deed but the bad.
And you desire not to fear authority,
[so] do good,
and you will have approval from it;
- 13.4 for it [authority] is God's agent to you for [the cause of] good.

But if you were to do bad,
you should fear;
for it [authority] does not bear the sword to no purpose;
for it is God's punishing agent for wrath to the one doing evil.
- 13.5 Therefore [it is] a necessity to be submitted,
not only on account of the wrath,
but also on account of [your] conscience.
- 13.6 For on account of this [reasoning], you also pay taxes;
for they [who are in authority] are servants of God
being devoted to this same thing.
- 13.7 Pay to all [your] obligations [to them],
tax to the one due tax,
customs duty to the one due customs duty,
respect to the one due respect,
honor to the one due honor.