

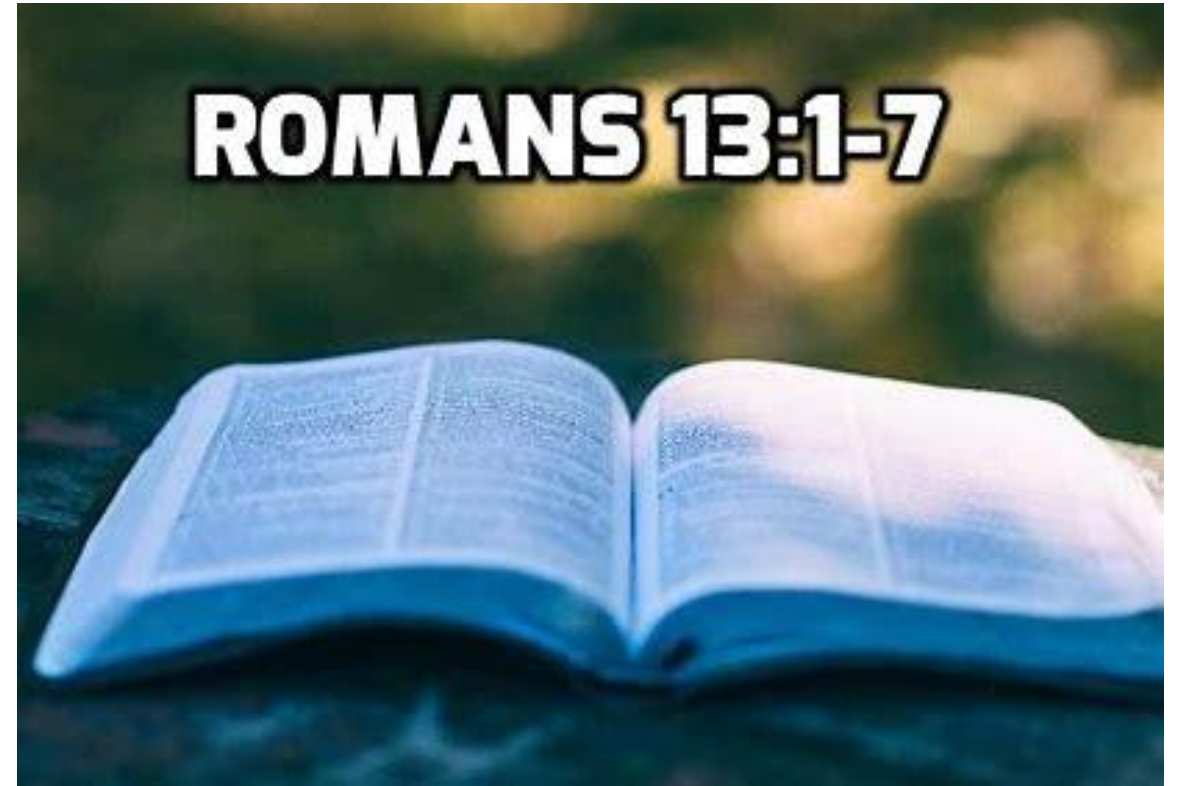
The SALVATION Series

Part 19 – Divine
Government



Introduction...

- We are now going to dissect and reflect on one of the most controversial passages in the Bible.
- During the Nazi reign in Hitler's Germany, to support their evil rule, church leaders were appointed to high positions of authority and they used Romans 13:1-7 to support their unjust legislations and government.
- Let us look at what it actually says before we unpack it in the light of Biblical truth.



One to Seven...

- *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God [granted by His permission and sanction], and those which exist have been put in place by God.*
- *² Therefore whoever [a]resists [governmental] authority resists the ordinance of God. And those who have resisted it will bring judgment (civil penalty) on themselves.*
- *³ For [civil] authorities are not a source of fear for [people of] good behavior, but for [those who do] evil. Do you want to be unafraid of authority? Do what is good and you will receive approval and commendation.*
- *⁴ For he is God's servant to you for good. But if you do wrong, [you should] be afraid; for he does not carry the [executioner's] sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an avenger who brings punishment on the wrongdoer.*
- *⁵ Therefore one must be subject [to civil authorities], not only to escape the punishment [that comes with wrongdoing], but also as a matter of principle [knowing what is right before God].*
- *⁶ For this same reason you pay taxes, for civil authorities are God's servants, devoting themselves to governance.*
- *⁷ Pay to all what is due: tax to whom tax is due, customs to whom customs, respect to whom respect, honor to whom honor*
Romans 13:1-7

Dangerous...?

- Brothers and sisters, this is one of the most provocative and, dare I say, *dangerous* passages in the New Testament.
- For centuries, Romans 13 has been wielded by both tyrants and revolutionaries, quoted by those who marched in lockstep with oppressive regimes—and also by those who resisted them in the name of God.
- But the true message of Romans 13 does not offer blind allegiance to any earthly power. Rather, it calls us to discern how God's sovereign authority stands over and above all human governments.
- So what does it mean, truly, to **submit to the governing authorities**? And how do we reconcile this with the Gospel's radical critique of empire and injustice?



All Authority...

- In Paul's time, to declare that **all authority comes from God** was to strike at the heart of Roman imperial theology.
- Caesar claimed divine authority. Caesar demanded worship. And yet Paul—writing from within the belly of the empire—dared to say, “No. God is the one who institutes power.”
- This is no flattery of Rome. This is a theological recalibration. Paul is not bowing to Caesar—
- he is reminding Christians that God is the true sovereign. Governments, even corrupt ones, are not outside of God's providence. But that is not the same as saying they are always just or good.



Submit...

- Paul's word "**submit**" (**ὑποτάσσεσθω**) is not the same as "**obey blindly.**" Christian submission is rooted in conscience, not coercion.
- Paul is asking believers to live peaceably where possible, to pay taxes, to avoid needless rebellion—not to become complicit in evil.
- If we read Romans 13 as a call to passive obedience, we have misunderstood Paul and misunderstood Christ.
- The same apostle who wrote Romans 13 also defied authorities, was beaten, imprisoned, and ultimately executed by the state.
- Submission means recognizing that all power is accountable to God. It means discerning when cooperation with the state aligns with justice—and when it violates God's law.



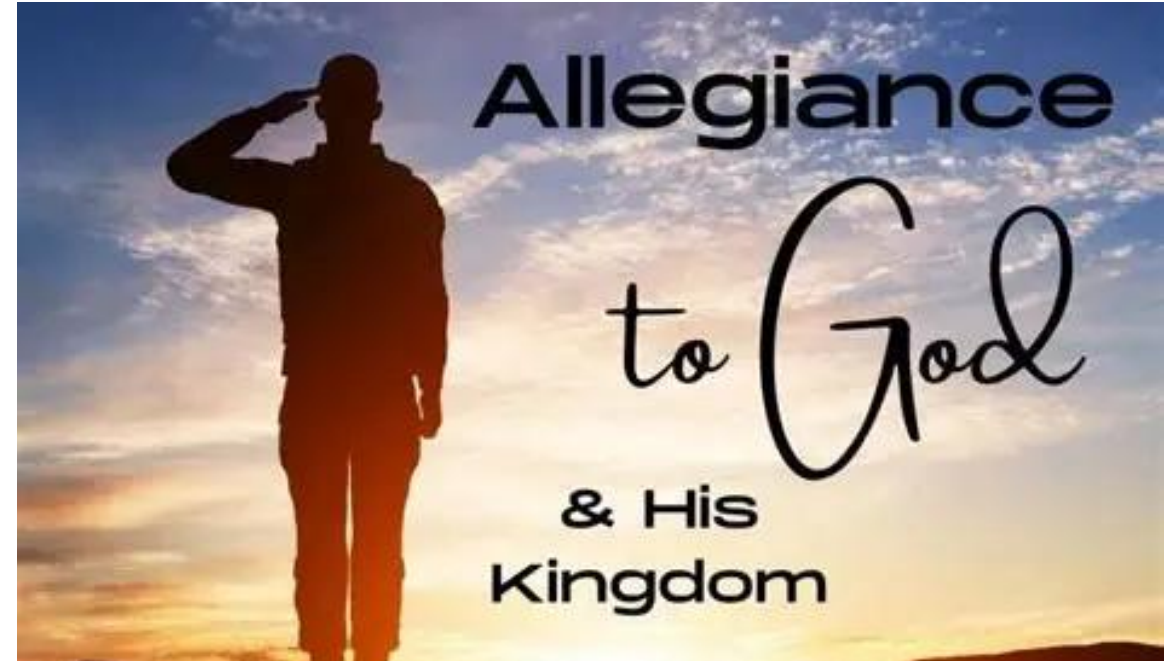
God's Servant...?

- Paul says that the ruler “**does not bear the sword in vain**” and is “**God’s servant for your good.**”
- But what if the state ceases to do good? What if the sword is used to silence truth, to oppress the poor, to exploit the vulnerable?
- Then the state no longer serves as God’s deacon (διάκονος)—it becomes an idol.
- Scripture is filled with stories of faithful disobedience: the Hebrew midwives who defied Pharaoh, Daniel who prayed under a ban, the apostles who said, “We must obey God rather than men.”
- So, we ask: Does our government serve the good? Or does it demand submission to something less than justice?



Allegiance...

- Romans 13 must always be read through the lens of Romans 12. Just a few verses earlier,
- Paul urged believers: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*
- And what is the world more than the power structures, the hierarchies, the empires that demand conformity?
- To be transformed means to recognize that **Jesus is Lord, not Caesar**. It means we honor the state where it serves justice—but we resist where it becomes unjust.
- Our obedience is not to flags or thrones or parties. Our obedience is to **the crucified and risen King**—whose kingdom is not of this world, but who rules even now, and who will one day judge all powers, great and small.



The Ideal...

- Romans 13:1–4 outlines a vision of government as:
- Instituted under God’s sovereignty (v.1),
- A servant (διάκονος) for the good (v.4),
- A punisher of evil and a promoter of good (v.3–4).
- This is an *ideal*, a theological framework. It’s descriptive of what government **should be**, not prescriptive of **what every government is**.
- So when government ceases to be “God’s servant for your good,” it is not fulfilling its ordained role—it is **rebellious against God’s design**, not acting in accordance with it.



Rom 13 vs Rev 13

- In Romans 13, authorities are “God’s servants.”
- But in **Revelation 13**, the state is a **beast**, empowered by the devil.
- This is not a contradiction—it is a tension.
- Scripture recognizes that **the same human institution (government)** can be either a **servant of God** or a **tool of the enemy**,
- depending on its alignment with justice, truth, and righteousness.
- We must discern which “chapter” we are living in.





Reflection...

