

ROMANS 13 - Submission to authorities

Warm-up: How do you think that the attitude of people to governments has changed? What has that change been and how does it show itself? Is this change good or bad?

Read: Romans 13:1-7

Background

Recall the situation in Rome. Many slaves were held by Romans – they had no freedoms, some of them were Christians. Christians, in general, were persecuted for their faith – they were seen as different and subversive. Caesar was a dictator – whose word was absolute. There was no democracy. Rome ruled every aspect of people's lives, as well as most of the world that these people would have known. While Pax Romana signalled a period of relative peace over 200 years (27BC to 180 AD), it also meant that all conquered nations were subject to whatever terms and conditions that Rome imposed. One of these was crippling taxation.

Paul wrote Romans in about AD57, 3 years after Nero became emperor and about 7 years before the great fire of AD64, which destroyed a large part of Rome. Nero was a brutal dictator.

1. What do you think it would have been like to have been a Christian in Rome, given the situation there?
2. Why do you think Paul told the Roman Christians to submit to the governing authorities? How might that be linked to proclaiming the gospel?
3. Look carefully at what Paul says about governments in v 1-5. What is their role? Where does power come from? Read what Jesus said in John 19:11.
4. What do you think 'submitting' would have entailed? What does it mean for us to day to submit to governments? Read verse 7, Mark 12:17, 1 Peter 2:13-15 & Titus 3:1-2.
5. How does this type of submission differ from how many people treat governments, honesty and paying taxes today? Can you share any examples of situations you have met? Pastor Paul summarised this by saying that "A good Christian is a good citizen for the sake of our gospel witness".
6. What should we do when we disagree with government decisions? For example, on abortion, euthanasia, justice, climate etc. Proverbs 31:8-9. How should we stand up for truth in these situations? Are we as Christians too passive?
7. Look at some of the examples of disobeying authorities in the bible. What motivated them?

- When King Darius forbade everyone to pray to any other god except him, Daniel kept praying to God three times a day. He was thrown into the lion's den for his defiance. (Daniel 6:7-10)
 - When King Nebuchadnezzar ordered all his subjects to bow down before a golden statue in his image, three young Jewish men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—openly defied him and suffered punishment. (Daniel 3:12-15)
 - When Peter and the apostles were forbidden by the high priest to preach about Jesus, they strongly declared, "We must obey God rather than men." They were beaten up for their disobedience. (Acts 5:29)
8. Is there a time for civil disobedience? v5b – keeping a clear conscience. What happens when government violates God & his laws? Matt 4:10
 9. The assisted dying bill is currently before NSW parliament. Is this an issue we should be engaged with? The Baptist Union information on euthanasia is at the link, including how to write to your MP. <https://agooddeath.org.au/influence/>