

“It’s the Law!”—Romans 13:1-5

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “It’s the Law!”, is Romans 13:1-5 → *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

You are driving on the highway cruising along with the flow of traffic. You know you are exceeding the speed limit but have justified breaking it because you’re all moving along smoothly at the same pace. Besides,

if you were to go slower it would be dangerous and could cause an accident. All of a sudden the pace slows down and continues well below the speed limit for quite some time, making you more and more frustrated by the minute. “What’s holding everyone up?” you utter in frustration. You meander your way ahead of others as best you can only to encounter a patrol car that only a few dare pass. Is it the patrol car holding everything up or something else?

Interesting how the speed limit sign is the law but doesn’t seem to exert as much influence to obedience as the presence of a highway patrolman seems to do. Well, in all fairness, it does make sense. A sign has no power to catch you breaking the law. All it can do is inform you of the established principle designed to provide for your well-being and protect you and your neighbor (i.e. those around you at a given moment). It’s almost as if those laws are viewed kind of like guidelines, put in place just in case you need them at some given moment, not absolutes to govern your activity.

Thus, breaking the law is defined not as an infraction of an absolute but **getting caught** when you don’t obey that absolute. We can see how sin turns one’s perspective of God’s good and perfect laws, designed to provide for and protect us, into something to be disobeyed. I’ve even heard it expressed in the adage, “laws were meant to be broken.” It will do the same with civil laws intended to bring about civil obedience so we

can live civilly with each other. When carried to its extreme, sin has absolutely no respect for the law or any of its representatives and even strives to do away with them.

Verse 1 of our text instructs *every person to be subject to the governing authorities*. This is a very curious statement by Paul in light of his experience with *the governing authorities* of his day. Many times while speaking about Jesus to the crowds unbelievers would drag him before the magistrates and rulers who would beat him and then throw him in prison (cf. Acts 16:22-24). During the first century of the Christian Church the Roman Empire viewed an infraction of Roman law as rebellion against the Roman gods. Since the Christians denounced those false gods many of these *governing authorities* in various areas across the empire made efforts to torture and kill Christians, sometimes setting them on fire to light up the streets of Rome. How could Paul instruct these Christians in Rome to *be subject to the governing authorities* under such terrorism?

The Christian has a different, sanctified perspective of *governing authorities* in this sin-tainted world. Living in the confession that Jesus is Lord allows one to see God's hand in establishing *the governing authorities to serve His purposes*. Thus, verse 1 of our text goes on to say: *For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God*. There is no particular form of government which

has God's "seal of approval," and even the monarchy of Israel grew out of sinful desires, which Yahweh still used to point to the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus. Instead of pointing us to a form of government Scripture points us to the purpose of *governing authorities*.

God has appointed . . . governing authorities in order to keep sin in check in civil obedience. They not only include those in authority in civil government but also parents, supervisors, teachers, and so forth, to keep people accountable to a set of rules so they can function properly together. *Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists **what God has appointed**, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad and if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword (i.e. a symbol of punishment) in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer (i.e. is to make sure justice is served) (verses 2-4).* It is actually proper to have a fear of law enforcement especially if you are breaking the law.

This understanding that God has established the governing authorities to uphold civil obedience **alongside of** establishing His Church in the world to hold out the Gospel of Jesus Christ, provides a sanctified motivation for obedience. Paul states it in verse 5 of our text: *Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath (administered through civil authorities) but also for the sake of*

conscience. Because you serve the Lord Jesus first and foremost you are conscientious about obeying His will for your life. Instead of obeying the law in order to avoid punishment (i.e. a human motivation) you do so because of who you are as Christ's servant to your neighbor (i.e. a divine motivation).

This will affect the way you deal with an infraction of the law. There is no "getting caught" because you're already caught by the LORD, as Psalm 139:2 say of Yahweh: *You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar*. When the conviction of your guilt comes because of breaking the law you recognize it as it is—sin—in the sight of God first and foremost. You will take responsibility for your disobedience and confess to the LORD with the words of Psalm 51:4 → *Against You, You only, O LORD, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment*. Thus, we seek to obey *for the sake of conscience*.

Because of who you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit moves you to pray, intercede and give thanks *for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way* (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-2). 1 Peter 2:13-15 says that by being **subject for the Lord's sake** to . . . *the emperor and governors as sent by Him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good . . . by doing good in this way you . . . put to silence the ignorance of foolish people*. When

they observe your obedience it will open up opportunities to share the proper motivation of faith in Jesus as Lord and share the Gospel with them. As 1 Timothy 2:3-4 says: *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, we pray for the governing authorities to do their proper work of keeping civil obedience so that the Church can flourish peacefully in the world, bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people as they live godly and dignified lives, in hope that they will repent and be saved by faith in Jesus!

Yes, there were times when the Christians did not obey the *governing authorities*. It happened when they told the Christians they were not allowed to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In one instance, Acts 5:29 tells us that *Peter and the apostles answered* those leaders, *We must obey God rather than men*, and continued telling them about Jesus. At the same time, they were thrown into prison for doing so. When they were finally released Acts 5:41 says, *they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus*. However, there were times when those authorities killed them instead of releasing them. Even then their obedience gave witness to Jesus as their King in the kingdom of God fulfilled (cf. Acts 14:22).

Civil obedience can happen simply because it's the law. However, civil obedience **sanctified in Christ** can give witness to an identity which far extends the kingdoms of this world. It can open up people to inquire about the motive for your obedience, respect and ardent prayers for those *governing authorities*—because you are a citizen of heaven by God grace, forgiveness and love in the Person & Work of Jesus. Amen.

Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior,

the Lord Jesus Christ,

Who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body,

by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.

(Philippians 3:20-21)

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