

Introduction

1. Chapter 12 began the practical application section of Paul's letter and leads with one overarching plea: that we present our bodies as living sacrifices by being transformed in our minds, rather than being conformed to the world
2. The first instructions he gave us regarding this transformed living included:
 - a. Maintaining a proper view of our position within the body of Christ
 - b. Loving one another without hypocrisy
 - c. And blessing those who mistreat us
3. This week and next week he addresses our duty to government and our duty to one another
4. Today we will look at our duty to government and what it looks like to live a transformed life

A. Our duty to governing authorities (13:1a)

1. We are to subject ourselves to governing authorities (1a): **“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.”**
 - a. Who are the **“governing authorities”**?
 - 1) The Greek phrase is more literally, **“those having/holding authority”** and this phrase is only used one time in the NT
 - 2) In the NT, the word for **“authorities”** is used to refer to all kinds of rulers, including those in government, the synagogues, the church, and even the spiritual or heavenly domain
 - 3) Some argue that this is a reference to spiritual leaders (e.g. church leaders or those governing the synagogues where they met):
 - a) They claim that the phrase doesn't explicitly state these are civil or government authorities
 - b) They also claim that a discussion of submission to government doesn't fit the surrounding context of the letter
 - c) However, it appears what drives this understanding of the passage is not so much exegesis but more an aversion to the thought that Paul would command Christians to be subject to unsaved, even wicked, civil authorities
 - 4) There is ample evidence that Paul has in mind civil/government authorities:
 - a) The language later in the passage suggests governing authority, not church or spiritual authority (e.g. use of words like condemnation, fear of authority, bearing the sword, avenger who brings wrath on the ones who practice evil, paying taxes and customs)
 - b) Peter clearly taught submission to civil authorities: 1 Peter 2:12-17
 - c) Two other passages by Paul, 1 Timothy 2:2 and Titus 3:1, also seem to support submission to civil authorities
 - d) Finally, Jesus and Paul both submitted themselves to the Roman authorities (e.g. Jesus in his arrest and crucifixion and Paul in his trials)

- 5) The last thing we should note here is whether Paul is referring to individuals or the institutions of government authority:
 - a) Paul likely has in mind a recognition and subjection to the ***institutions*** of government
 - b) However, it is hard to make a strict distinction because such institutions are made up of individual officers who represent the institution

- b. Notice that Paul states that we are to be in “**subjection**”, not necessarily that we are to always obey:
 - 1) The word that Paul uses here means to subject oneself or place oneself under another
 - 2) Submission to authority is a Biblical concept:
 - a) We are called to submit to spiritual leaders (e.g. elders, etc.): 1 Corinthians 16:16
 - b) We are called to submit to one another: Ephesians 5:21
 - c) Slaves are called to submit to their masters: Titus 2:9
 - d) Those who prophecy are called to submit to others who prophesy: 1 Corinthians 14:32
 - e) Wives are called to submit to their husbands: Colossians 3:18
 - 3) In this passage, Paul is referring to submission to government rulers (v. 3) and other government authorities
 - 4) While subjection sometimes involves obedience, it is not one and the same with obedience:
 - a) The midwives disobeyed the Egyptian Pharaoh when commanded to kill their male children and this pleased God (Exodus 1:17; 20-21)
 - b) Rahab disobeyed the rulers in Jericho and hid the spies (Joshua 2)
 - c) Obadiah hid the prophets when Queen Jezebel was trying to kill them (1 Kings 18)
 - d) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego disobeyed King Nebuchadnezzar when ordered to worship an idol (Daniel 3)
 - e) Daniel refused to worship the king (Daniel 6:6-17)
 - f) On two occasions, Peter and John disobeyed civil authorities when commanded not to preach the Gospel (Acts 4:19; 5:29)

2. There are two other important observations we can make:
 - a. Paul doesn’t qualify this command—he doesn’t write that we are only to subject ourselves to only Godly or ethical authorities, but simply to governing authorities.
 - b. The Bible as a whole reveals that the exception to this *rule* is that when there is a clear contradiction between God’s moral laws, commands and/or Biblical principles and those of man, we are to obey God rather than man.

B. Principles that govern our subjection to authorities (1b-7)
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1. **Principle #1:** All authority comes from God, including that of government (1b): “**For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.**”
 - a. There is no authority except from God: “**For there is no authority except from God...**”
 - 1) Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar:

- **“You, O King, are a king of kings, for the God of Heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength and glory”** (Daniel 2:37)
 - (when he interpreted the king’s dream): **“...the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men”** (4:17) and **“until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes”** (4:25)
- 2) Jesus to Pilate: **“and [Pilate] entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, “Where are You from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 So Pilate said to Him, “You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?” 11 Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.”** (John 19:11)
- b. God is the one who institutes government authorities: **“and those which exist are established by God.”**
- 1) Notice that this phrase does not say that those which exist are permitted or allowed by God, but rather that they are “established” by Him
 - 2) Sometimes God raises up strong, moral leaders like King David and King Hezekiah for Judah, or even leaders like many of our Founding Fathers and Presidents
 - 3) However, sometimes He raises up wicked leaders and governments for His purpose and will (generally as a form of judgment or chastisement):
 - a) The book of Judges is filled with God raising up the wicked leaders and nations who came against Israel, conquered them, oppressed and governed them (as a form of chastisement)
 - b) God raised up the Assyrians and the Babylonians to conquer Israel and take them into captivity (who then governed Israel for nearly 200 years)
 - c) Peter also claimed that the wicked leaders who opposed, and ultimately crucified Jesus (Herod and Pontius Pilate) were raised up for God’s purpose: **“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”** (Acts 4:27-28)
 - 4) So, does this mean that God raised up people like Hitler and Stalin who murdered millions of people and were responsible for some of the most wicked atrocities this world has ever seen, or people like North Korea’s Kim Jong-un?
 - a) If we take this text at face value we would have to say yes as difficult as this is to accept
 - b) As we saw above, however, God does so in order to accomplish His purpose and plan
 - c) Though we may not always know what that purpose or plan is, most of the Biblical examples involve God using such men and nations for judgment and chastisement
2. **Principle #2:** Those who oppose government authority, oppose what God has instituted, and will face judgment (2-4): **“Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”**

- a. Paul has in mind here the person who is continually resisting government authority which is indicated by the use of the present participle, “**the one resisting**”, so not a single act of civil disobedience but rather someone who outright opposes and rejects government authority
 - b. This individual has completely rejected what God has established--“**opposed**” is in the perfect tense both times indicating one who has rejected and now stands in a state of opposition to God
 - c. Such individuals can expect the judgment of God: “**they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves**”
 - 1) “**condemnation**” is simply judgment and likely refers judgment by civil authorities and possibly God Himself (based on the language in v. 4 below)
 - 2) If we do what is good, we shouldn’t have reason to fear government authority (3): **For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same**”
 - 3) But, if we do what is evil, we have reasons to be fearful (4): “**for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.**”
 - 4) NOTE: Paul is likely writing in *general* terms here, not absolute. Generally speaking, good behavior avoids issues with authority while bad behavior brings punishment. However, this doesn’t mean that abuse of authority doesn’t exist, or that good people aren’t unjustly treated or prosecuted by bad governments or authorities. Christian persecution is a good example of this.
3. **Principle #3:** We should subject ourselves to government authority as a matter of conscience (5): “**Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.**”
- a. Our conscience is the mental faculty that allows us to differentiate between right and wrong, and is based upon one’s knowledge and understanding of God:
 - 1) The author of Hebrews attributed his desire to conduct himself with honor in all things to a “**good conscience**” (Hebrews 13:18).
 - 2) Paul encouraged Timothy to keep “**faith and a good conscience**” because some had rejected these and suffered shipwreck in their faith (1 Timothy 1:19)
 - 3) This may be what Paul has in mind when he wrote in 1 Timothy 4:2 that a time will come when false teachers with “seared” consciences will lead many to fall away from the faith
 - 4) In 1 Corinthians 10:25-28 Paul warned that we can “wound” the consciences of unbelievers when we abuse our Christian liberties (e.g. when they were told meat had been sacrificed to idols but ate it anyway it would wound the conscience of the one that sold it to them)
 - b. The one who rejects or opposes the government authority which God has established is at risk of deadening his own conscience so that he can no longer rightly discern right and wrong:
 - 1) The person who kills the abortion doctor
 - 2) The violence committed by Black Lives Matter protestors
 - c. When we subject ourselves to the earthly authority structures God has established we protect our consciences

4. **Principle #4:** We are to recognize and support those who govern (6-7): **“6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”**
- a. In Mark 12 the Pharisees and other leaders tried to trap Jesus by asking Him whether it was lawful to pay Roman taxes. Jesus responded with, **“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”**
 - b. Essentially, Paul repeats that command here when he states that we pay taxes because those taxes support the governing authorities which he refers to as **“God’s servants devoted to governing”** (NET)
 - c. Therefore, we are to **“render to all what is due them”**:
 - a) Tax to whom tax is due—a reference to direct tax like an income tax or property tax
 - b) Custom to whom custom is due—a reference to indirect taxes like duties, sales tax, fees for services, etc.
 - c) Fear (respect) to whom fear is due
 - d) And honor to whom honor is due

Conclusion
