

Independence Day Sermon
Romans 13:1-7

From the pen of John Adams . . .

The 4th day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America, to be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty from one end of the Continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore. You will think me transported with enthusiasm, but I am not. I am well aware of the toil, the blood, and the treasure that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration and support and defend these states; yet, through all the gloom, I can see rays of light and glory; that the end is worth all the means; that posterity will triumph in that day's transaction, even though we shall regret it, which I trust in God we shall not.

I love the United States of America. I love this country because God has established it. He has used brave men and women to fight for and even die for this great nation. I love this country because I have the freedom to worship Jesus Christ. I love this country because God uses U.S. missionaries and U.S. ministries to teach the rest of the nations about Him and His Son. I love the United States of America.

However, I'm not preaching from the Declaration of Independence, nor am I preaching from the Constitution, I love God more than I love this country; and I'm preaching from the Bible. Patriotism is good, but it has limits. "*Patriotism is the willingness to kill and be killed for trivial reasons.*" by Bertrand Russell. "*Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it.*" by George Bernard Shaw.

Read Romans 13:1-7

Pray

This passage is not out of Paul's thought processes, as the liberals say. It actually fits right into the argument found in chapter 12. Verses 1-2 of chapter 12 tells of what the relationship between believers and God should be like; verses 3-14 tells of what the relationship between believers and other believers should be; and verses 15-21 tells of what the relationship between believers and outsiders, or even enemies should be. The relationship between the believer and civil authorities, then, fits right in.

Paul is writing to the church in Rome, the heart and center for the government of the Roman Empire. Many of the Jews throughout the empire were looking for opportunities to shake off the yoke of subjection to Rome. They were looking for

their messiah to come and make them independent once again, with a king of their own. There was lots of turmoil, and at one point things got so heated in Rome that Claudius expelled all the Jews from the city. So, with that background I hope you understand the need for this warning from Paul. Plus, Paul does not want Rome to think that the gospel of salvation is antagonistic in any way shape or form to the properly functioning Roman government. Of course, this letter was written before the Roman emperors became totally intolerant of the Christians.

Let me give you the lowdown on this passage – the main point of the passage:

Written To? Each and every true believer.

What? Be in subjection.

To Whom? Your government authorities.

Why? Because the government is established by God to have authority over you.

That makes the first point simple:

God commands believers to honor and respect governmental authorities.

Read Romans 13:1.

God created everything by His word, including the Earth. On this earth He created great land masses. He then created man, who sinned and rebelled, and at the Tower of Babel He sent them off to different parts of the globe to establish separate nations. Time marched on and these nations became heavily populated.

You know what happens when you put lots of totally depraved people together – disorder breaks out. Chaos is prevalent, and anarchy rules. So God, because of his common grace, established governmental authorities to control us. Government controls the behavior of those within its nation.

And our great nation – the United States of America – was established by God Almighty! Remember what we learned in public school growing up? That Christopher Columbus sailed to America to discover riches and gold. That is a lie, it's from revisionist historians. Christopher Columbus sailed to America in order to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God establishes nations for His purpose! Some as punishment, some as a blessing. He established and developed the USA for many purposes: for temporal blessings upon its inhabitants, as a refuge for the persecuted Church, and for a missionary sending nation to promote His gospel. It's so obvious that God loves America! He has chosen to love and bless this country, and He continues to love it in spite of our horrible national transgressions!!

He is in control of the kings, queens, princes, dictators, rulers, and presidents. Jesus told Pilate the only power he [Pilate] had was from above. Listen to **Proverbs 21:1**, “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.” He sometimes blinds leaders to wisdom, and he sometimes sheds light. His working providence brings peace upon nations, he brings war upon nations. He sways elections. He brings forth “natural” disasters, and He rains “heavenly” blessings upon those within a nation.

Because of the Lord’s work in all of this, each and every true believer must be in subjection to the ruling authorities. Who are we talking about here? The ruling authorities include politicians from the president on down, and the military personnel. Also, judges and everyone in the judicial system, including police officers. Which leads right into my next point . . .

God punishes law-breaking citizens.

Read Romans 13:2-5.

When you break the law, does God smote you right on the spot? When Israel had their theocracy God would occasionally punish law breakers immediately. Look what God did in 2 Kings 7:25, “*At the beginning of their living there, they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them which killed some of them.*” Listen to what the Lord did with Korah and his rebellious followers, “²⁶ *and Moses spoke to the congregation, saying, “⁽²⁹⁾ Depart now from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing that belongs to them, ⁽³⁰⁾ or you will be swept away in all their sin. . . . ³¹ As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; ³² and ⁽³⁶⁾ the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and ⁽³⁷⁾ all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴ All Israel who were around them fled at their outcry, for they said, “The earth may swallow us up!” ³⁵ ⁽³⁸⁾ Fire also came forth from the LORD and consumed the ⁽³⁹⁾ two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.”*

If you shoplift does a lion come and kill you? If you do illegal drugs does the earth open and swallow you? No, the Lord uses the means of the governmental system to punish you. Politicians have set the laws, a police officer enforces the law, and a judge convicts and sentences lawbreakers.

That is how God's correction works upon a law breaker. The wrath of God falls on you through His avengers, His ministers of justice. Are the politicians, judges, and officers ordained ministers? No. But they are your authority, sent by God to correct you when you do wrong.

Is this passage talking about the strict blind obedience to governmental laws? Does this verse demand that we never, ever surpass the speed limit? That we never, ever shoot a U-turn where a sign forbidding it is posted? That is definitely not the focus of the passage. The focus of this passage is the relationship between the believer and the ruling governmental authorities. When a police officer pulls you over and writes you a speeding ticket, you respect and honor him, and accept his punishment with grace. You blew it, you broke the law, you were caught, admit it, smile and accept the punishment.

NOW, obedience comes into the picture.

Because of God's wrath which falls upon you - you should behave. Did you notice in the passage about Korah the effects that proper punishment encourages? You should fear the consequences of bad behavior. **Read vv. 4** Have you checked the federal penitentiaries lately? They don't work, do they? Did you know that the name "penitentiary" came from the word "penitence?" Repentance? That is because conditions were intentionally made so bad, it would lead you to repent of your crime. It would strike fear in the general public so they would never want to commit a crime, as well. Proper punishment, the wrath of God, leads to proper behavior.

Another reason to behave is a clear conscience. Read v. 5, "*Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for the sake of the conscience.*" God's intent is for the government to work along with the Holy Spirit to maintain order in an imperfect world. You all know what conscience means, con = "with," science = "knowledge." When you commit a crime, you commit it "with knowledge," and it weighs heavily upon you. The Holy Spirit works you over, and the burden becomes intense, as your walk with God falters. You must seek a clear conscience, so that you can stay in touch with God.

Do your best to stay within the boundaries of the law. The question raised, though, is this, "Is it ever okay to break the law?" Well, "Yes. It is okay to break the law, or rebel against it, IF it causes you to break commands from God." Look closely at the example left by the disciples in Acts 5: "*Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,' he said. 'Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.'*"

²⁹*Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men!'*

³³ *When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*

⁴¹ *The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴²Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.^[2]*

Have you bought into the lie that we can't witness because of privacy laws?! When the law says we cannot go house to house witnessing, guess what, we go from house to house because we're commanded to by God. Jesus Christ told us to go forth into all the world preaching and baptizing disciples. If we get in trouble, we suffer for Jesus. If our employer says no witnessing on the job, guess what, you have to obey Jesus Christ and witness at appropriate times. If you get in trouble, you suffer for Jesus. Your whole life is a testimony to Jesus Christ, and that includes at home, at church, at work, and in the community.

When there is a conflict between God's law and man's law, God's law overrules. Here are some ways we can rebel against laws that cause us to break God's commands: 1) Write letters and make phone calls to the politicians who can protest the passage of the proposed law. 2) If given the opportunity you can vote against the law, and 3) later vote against the politician who was for the law. 4) Like the disciples in Acts 5, you can first listen to God, then do what He says, thereby breaking the law. If you get caught you will have to suffer the consequences of obeying God rather than men. Go ahead and rejoice, 'cause that is suffering for Jesus.

God blesses and uses submissive believers.

Read 1 Peter 2:13-17

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of evil, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

When you highly esteem those in governmental positions, God uses you. They are trained to expect rebellion from people, but when you honor them regardless of the situation, they are pleased and will thank you. Maybe they'll even listen to you witness about the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. That's what Paul did.

Conclusion

Read Romans 13:6-7.

This is a clear command – make sure you pay your taxes. If you don't you're holding back the wages of God's avengers - those people put in charge of your nation who punish criminals and who protect you. In essence, you're stealing from God if you cheat the IRS. You're a thief, you have to repent and pay back what you owe. God doesn't have a statute of limitations.

This passage does not lend itself to a legalistic interpretation which would have me to tell you specifically that if you drive 66 mph in a 65 mph zone, you are guilty of breaking man's law and God's law. Or, if your parking meter runs out you will experience the wrath of God. That is much too shallow of conclusion for this passage; plus, it's a complicated topic, as well. There is some grace there just like there is with God – you see, the grace of God even shows itself in our laws (explain).

Please understand that God is sovereign and in providential control of every nation and government in this world. He is in control of all earthly leaders. When you turn on FOX News and see the chaos throughout the world, the turbulence in the Middle East, the problems in Syria, etc, trust in God – He has it under control.

The main point of this passage is to show you why you must acknowledge and honor those public ministers who are in place for your good. Always respect them. This Scripture is about a relationship between you and those in authority. If you love America, and if you love Jesus Christ, you'll honor those in authority, and you'll teach your kids to do likewise.