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(Romans 13:1-7)

Intro. A young boy lived in the country. His family had to use an outhouse, which the young boy hated. It was hot in the summer, cold in the winter, and always smelly. The outhouse was located near the creek so the boy decided that he would push it into the water. After a spring rain, the creek swelled so the boy pushed it in. Later that night his dad told him that he and the boy needed to make a trip to the woodshed. The boy knew this meant punishment. He asked his father why to which his dad replied, “Because someone pushed the outhouse into the creek and I think that someone was you. Was it?” The boy responded that it was. Then he added, “Remember when George Washington’s father asked him if he had chopped down the cherry tree? He didn’t get into trouble because he honored his father & told the truth.” “That is correct,” the dad said, “but you didn’t honor me, for his father was not in the cherry tree when he cut it down” (sermoncentral.com). In light of Memorial Day weekend, I want to present a message entitled “Remembering & Honoring Our Heroes” from Romans 13.

Theme: Christian Living to Governing Authorities

Background: The first 11 chapters of Romans has to do with Christian doctrine—God is holy & righteous & completely just in judging sinners set against Him, but He is also rich in mercy & grace & has manifested a right standing with Him through the satisfying atoning work of Christ & faith in Him. That right standing includes benefits of grace to have your prayers heard, forgiveness of sins, peace with God & so much more. All of these things are in accord with God’s sovereign work of election, which should cause us to rejoice in who God is & what He has done for us in Christ. The last few chapters of this book deal with Christian responsibility in light of the doctrinal foundation.

- Bob Stein has observed, “Governments, even oppressive governments, by their very nature seek to prevent the evils of indiscriminate murder, riot, thievery, as well as general instability and chaos, and good acts do at times meet with its approval and praise (in Schreiner, 688)

➤ This passage shows us 2 basic responsibilities Christians have to those serving our community:

I. Submit to Your Governing Authority (13:1-5)

A. Because of divine appointment (13:1-5a)

- God is completely sovereign over human affairs & kingdoms (cf. Daniel 4:17, 25, 32; Proverbs 8:15-16; Acts 17:26)
- Just because leaders are raised up & set in place by God does not mean God is responsible for their evil actions, whether it be Herod, Nero & Domitian of NT days or Pharaoh & Nebuchadnezzar in OT days or Napoleon, Stalin, Hitler, Hussein & bin Laden in more recent years (cf. Romans 9:15-18)—if God wants to raise up an evil ruler (including a President or Governor or Mayor) to demonstrate His power & glory, He has the right as the sovereign Lord

Illus: Jesus said this very thing to Pilate: “You would have no authority over Me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11; cf. Acts 4:27-28)

- So if God will raise up whomever He desires, what are we to do in a democratic/republic form of government? We are to carry out our responsibility to vote (gathering information & voting in line with biblical convictions & use constitutional means to support just policies & oppose the unjust), for God uses the means to bring about His appointments
- Christians should be the best citizens in government, for the most part
 1. To resist the rulers is to resist God (13:2)—generally speaking (the divine ideal, not necessarily the human reality)
 2. To resist God is to incur judgment (13:2, 4-5)—God displays a portion of His wrath through the governing authorities—the judgment of the state can be a precursor to the judgment of God
- For He is God’s servant/minister (13:4, 6)—those who serve the state as military service men & women, legislators, civil servants, police, fire & rescue, social workers & tax collectors are also set in place as “servants of God” just like pastors, evangelists, teachers, etc., though the former group may include unbelievers who are not aware they are being used by God
- The state & those who work for it function to promote & reward the good & to restrain & punish the evil (13:3-4; cf. 1 Peter 2:14)

- “bearing the sword”—clear reference to capital punishment, for the sword refers to death in 8:35 & it was used for execution of Roman citizens (cf. Genesis 9:6)
- The state is given the responsibility of vengeance on wrongdoers, not the individual (cf. 12:19)
- Of course, the soldier & police officer do not have a blanket license to hate or kill & he must examine himself & the cause for which he serves—if it is evil or unjust in his opinion, he should refuse to participate, because God is a higher power
- God’s wrath will one day fall on the unrepentant (2:5) & is now seen in the breakdown of the social order (cf. 1:18ff), but it also operates through the processes of law enforcement & the administration of justice
- Thus, it is both right & wise to submit to governing authorities, unless one of the following occurs:
 - a. You are asked to violate a command of God
 - What if governing authorities reverse their God-given roles, commending those who do evil & punishing those who do good, must we still submit? No, for we are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God—if the state commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, then our Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God (cf. Acts 5:29)—civil disobedience
 - Examples of God’s people resisting the state to obey God:
 - 1) Hebrew midwives refusal to kill newborns at Pharaoh’s command (Exodus 1:17)
 - 2) Shadrach, Meshack & Abednego’s refusal to bow to the golden image decreed by King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3)
 - 3) Daniel’s refusal to pray to Darius & stop praying to Yahweh at Darius’ decree (Daniel 6)
 - 4) The Apostles’ refusal to stop preaching Jesus commanded by the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:18ff)

Illus: If sharing the gospel of Christ became forbidden in America, sadly, many Christians would never be found guilty

- b. You are asked to do an immoral/unethical act
- c. You are asked to go against your Christian conscience in order to obey the government

B. Because of your own conscience (13:5b)

- You are to submit to authorities to avoid God’s wrath & to avoid guilt, because you could commit a crime & never get caught here on earth, but your conscience would stand against you to condemn you in the day of judgment (cf. 2:15-16)

Illus: Copyright laws prevent not only selling copies but also making copies—as a teen, I would copy movies I rented & thought it was legal without selling them, but then I read the full warning & had to destroy what I had copied

II. Pay What You Owe to Support Them (13:6-7)

A. Specifically taxes (13:6-7a)

- “for the same reason”—pay taxes in order to maintain a good conscience
- Taxes during Roman rule in NT days, as our own, were often exorbitant, but Christians must pay their taxes. We have a right to protest injustice & correct abuse, but we should not be forever complaining

Illus: Don’t be like the man who sent in his taxes addressed to “The Infernal Revenue Service” & the next year to “The Eternal Revenue Service” (Hughes, 244)

B. Respect & honor (13:7b)

- These commands include both national & local, direct & indirect & showing proper respect & honor to those who collect taxes (1 Timothy 2 even calls for us to pray for the various authorities)

Conc. In the late seventies, Firefighters in England went on strike. Thus, the British army was required to take over emergency firefighting. One day, a squad of soldiers received a call from an elderly woman in London to come and rescue her cat, Bittsy. Poor Bittsy had gotten stuck in a tree. They arrived quickly and without much trouble saved Bittsy from her high perch. As they were getting ready to leave, the woman invited her heroes in for a victory spot of tea (very British of her). After the tea break, and many fond farewells and waving of hands, the soldiers hopped on the fire truck. But, as they drove away, they ran over sweet little Bittsy and killed her (sermoncentral.com)—the lesson I learn from that is making sure our various service personnel do what they’re trained to do & while we’ll do what we’re trained to do, let’s all honor them today. All of this is grounded in the work of Christ who gave His life for your sins. So make sure you honor Him first by surrendering your life to Him in repentance & faith.