

# THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

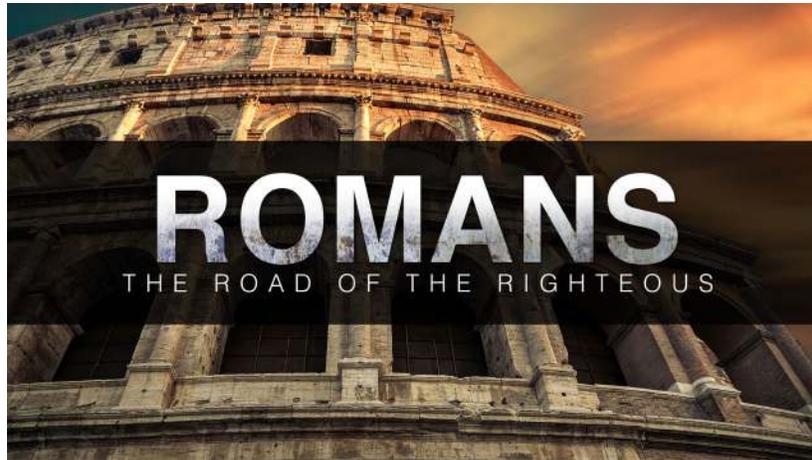
## Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 13:3-7

Written By

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In many respects, I am shocked at the current impeachment proceedings. Having been down this road before as an American, having watched how they are supposed to function based on legal processes established by the Constitution, and knowing what charges, based on the Constitution, actually are supposed to trigger an impeachment, I stand in almost disbelief at the current, supposedly, legal proceedings.

- The twisting of evidence and the purposeful guidance given to witnesses by prosecutorial politicians is something I have never witnessed.
- The secret meetings designed to determine what witnesses will say so “gotcha” type questions can be devised beforehand is unheard of in American law.
- The refusal to accept the direct testimony of witnesses, while pushing innuendo and gossip as fact is disconcerting.
- The barring of one political party from the initial legal process is alarming.
- The willingness of the press to, by and large, push an ideological agenda instead of the facts is frustrating.
- The hypocrisy within both political parties is troubling.
- The mindset that a man is guilty until proven is a purposeful reversal of everything we stand for as Americans.

These are, indeed, dangerous and divisive times, and given the current twisted trajectory we are on politically I do not like to ponder where it heads.

I do, conversely, know that these are amazing times to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. As a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and this country, I know I, like you, am under biblical mandate to be a positive point of spiritual life in a tossing, turning sea of political, moral, social, and spiritual negativity and darkness. Put differently, Paul's command for believers in Romans 12:1-2 to live spiritually transformed lives where God has paced them, is certainly applicable to our role as heavenly citizens of an eternal divine kingdom living as earthly citizens of a temporal earthly kingdom. What does God want from us as dual citizens? He wants us to constantly strive to be what we might call model citizens. Why is this important? It is important for the more we reflect Christ's character, the more we mature in the faith, the greater is our witness to the watching world, and chaos and confusion is replaced by peace and stability. Regarding this logical application of salvation to daily living, we would do well to reflect on the observation of Thomas R. Schreiner,

Giving oneself wholly to God and being transformed in one's thinking are also expressed in how one relates to governing authorities. The total dedication called for in 12:1-2 does not relate to an ethereal sphere that floats above the exigencies of everyday life. Believers express their commitment to God in how they relate to rulers and the law of the state.<sup>1</sup>

Question. Is how you live in relation to the powers that be illustrate you are devoted to God, and not some foreign, godless ideology?

All of this leads, naturally, to a main exegetical question:

### What Does A Model Christian Citizen Look Like? (Rom. 13:1-7)

To this point, we have learned two key components of model citizenship for followers of Jesus. And, please, bear in mind, these are not suggestions, but imperatival in nature, meaning they are, by definition, not optional. They are, on the other hand, applicable at all times to all believers, regardless of age.

By way of review, verses one through two give us the first two commands concerning model citizenship for saints:

- He Believes That Government Is Divinely Appointed (Rom. 13:1)
- He Does Not Live For Resistance (Rom. 13:2)

As we discussed in our last study, there are limited times when a believer would (and should) oppose a corrupt government; however, by and large, we are to be known as ones who realize God is the power behind all governmental structures. To openly resist, therefore, based on faulty and/or misguided grounds is sin for it is to resist the purposes of God himself.

To these command concepts, Paul adds two more:

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, vol. 6, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 677.

## He Is Obedient Not Disobedient (Rom. 13:3-5)

Watch carefully (and prayerfully) how Paul, the master communicator, develops this pragmatic theological point:

<sup>3</sup> 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; <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

Does it get any easier how the Lord wants us to function in our own Neronian environment? I don't think so. Let's systematically analyze Paul's argument in these verses.

First, remember the context so you can probably apply the import of these verses. In verse 2, Paul just stated that those who resist the government (when they do not have viable grounds to do so), whether believers or unbelievers, will be eventually judged for their subversive, sinister activities. Said judgment will be in the eschaton when God judges saints at the Beama Seat (1 Cor. 3; 2 Cor. 5:10), and for sinners at the Great White Throne of God at the end of time (Rev. 20:12-15). In light of this future sobering judicial reality, Paul's opening connective "for," *gar* (γὰρ), gives us the result of his prior statement. Hence, based on the imminent reality of future judgment, or even upon temporal judgment by earthly authorities for combative behavior (think of Antifa), we, as saints, should be all about embracing good verses bad behavior at all levels of our lives.

Second, God (yes, God) has sovereignly placed governmental leaders in their current positions to create fear in the lives of lawbreakers, not for causing mental anxiety in the lives of those who follow the rules. Thus, as Paul states, if you want to live a peaceful, meaningful life, then follow the law. If the law says drive 65 on a state highway, you will enjoy the drive so much more if you do not push it and go with the flow of traffic at 75. If the law says you do not taste the candies in the open bins at the grocery store, you will feel so much better by just putting your purchase in a bag and tasting it when you get home. If the law of the office says you should not play video games in your cubicle while you are at work, you will be a model employee if you do not click on those gaming sites. If the law of the school is that you do not plagiarize to pump up your term paper, you will be a much better and happier writer if you simply articulate and defend your own thesis. You get the picture, don't you? Model citizens model the law. Do you? Are you?

On the contrary, laws *are* a deterrent to would-be lawbreakers. They are a deterrent insofar as they *do* create fear, as Paul says, in the life of a devious, disruptive person because he ultimately does not want to experience punishment for his bad, edgy behavior (unless he is, one, psychologically imbalanced and is checked out of known reality; two, he is so jaded by his sinful living his conscience is dead; or, three, drugs and addiction drive him to abhorrent behavior). Paul's choice of words here for people in places of authority is most interesting. Twice in verse four he calls them "a minister of God." Hugh? The Greek term is most enlightening:

**διάκονος, ου, ό/ή** [cp. διακονία; a function-oriented rather than status-oriented term] – 1. **servant, helper** in domestic context J 2:5, 9. – 2. of one engaged in general maintenance of others **servant** Mt 20:26; 23:11; Mk 9:35; 10:43. – 3. **servant**, in dedicated service to an earthly ruler Mt 22:13; but esp. of one in the service of

God, Christ, the Christian community, and the gospel J 12:26; Ro 13:4; 16:1; 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; Eph 3:7; Phil 1:1; Col 1:7; 1 Th 3:2 v.l. – Ministerial helper, attendant in a cultic setting 1 Ti 3:8, 12.

*Diakonos* (the transliteration of the Greek) is the word for deacon in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:12, Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households, or as it reads in Greek: *διάκονοι ἕστωσαν μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες, τέκνων καλῶς προϊστάμενοι καὶ τῶν ἰδίων οἴκων*). God has providentially placed people in authority positions not to increase their power and prestige, or to expand their financial portfolios, but for them to act as humble servants to the people. Wow. How far we have fallen from God's design for leaders at all levels. They typically see themselves as our lords not our servants. From God's perspective, leaders are here to cause good to flourish, not evil, and they do this by erecting and consistently enforcing laws, rules, and regulations which have teeth or harsh repercussions.

Paul minces no words here in verse four. Many leaders in the public and private sectors are erroneously devoted to relaxing stringent laws they do not like, or which will not garner them votes from constituents. You have heard their vacuous, untenable arguments: "This particular law is not compassionate. This particular law is not moral. This particular law is racist." Paul was not so flexible for he knew that the purpose of tough laws, coupled with tough consequences is what truly helps leaders maintain order in a society with a penchant for chaos because of man's intrinsic and inherited sin nature (Rom.3:10-18; 5:12-21).

<sup>4</sup> 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.

The word "sword" here represents the government's divine mandate to exercise capital punishment in certain cases. When it does this, it acts as God's avenger for the crime in question. When it does this, the government also gives sinners a warning of the stringent judgment of God which will occur in eternity. The result of this type of tough judgment is it create fear in the lives of those who would dare commit capital crimes. Further, it also serves, by definition, apart from what all the case studies attempt to show, that extreme retributive judgment does curtail criminal behavior. Not that I want to stop and give a biblical defense of capital punishment, but we do need to momentarily address it since Paul brings it up.

I have, like you, read the arguments against capital punishment.

- There is a better alternative: life without parole.
- The death penalty puts innocent lives at risk.
- Race and place determine who lives and who dies.
- We pay many millions for the death penalty system.
- Poor quality defense leaves many sentenced to death.
- Capital punishment does not deter crime.
- There is a better way to help the families of murder victims.
- The death penalty is applied at random.
- Capital punishment goes against almost every religion.

- Mentally ill people are executed.
- The USA is keeping company with notorious human rights abusers.
- We are the “State.” When the “State” kills, we are participants.
- No civilian’s job description should include killing another person.<sup>2</sup>

These are not iron-clad arguments. For instance, just because we pay vast amounts of money for something as a country does not mean it is, *ipso facto*, wrong or evil. We pay a lot to arm our military. Based on this premise we should get rid of the military structure because it costs so much. Further, capital punishment does deter crime. Many scholarly articles on the internet substantiate this fact.<sup>3</sup> God, speaking through Paul’s pen emphatically validates this point.

Yet, when God instituted capital punishment in Genesis 9, verse 6, it was not primarily to deter further crimes, but to establish retributive *justice* because a murderer would dare to attack God by attacking man, who is made in the image of God. R. C. Sproul gives the best analysis of this verse that I have read:

But the power of the sword, although given as a restraint, was not only given as a restraint. There is a deeper moral question here, and that is the question of justice. The basic biblical support for capital punishment does not rest upon the principle of deterrence; that would be a secondary consideration. The primary consideration, biblically, for capital punishment, is retributive justice. Capital punishment is instituted very early in Genesis, in 9:6: ‘Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.’ God declared that if anyone murders another person, that person is to be put to death. The reason is not for deterrence, but for retribution, because man is made in the image of God. There is a certain sense in which a murderer assaults the very being of God. And there is nothing in the New Testament at any point that would indicate a repeal of this principle of capital punishment, at least in terms of a just treatment for murder. God has commanded the civil magistrate to be his avenger in this case.<sup>4</sup>

While the use of the sword by governments does establish a deterrence for further criminal behavior, the main reason God gave it the nations was to right the wrong of attacking His image in man. While there is a case to be made for restorative justice, in capital cases the crime is so heinous in nature God looks for retributive justice to satisfy His wrath against one who would attack His image by proxy. Hence, to remove the sword from the government, or to slow the process down so much it takes years to realized is to court more capital crime and to ultimately leave justice out in the cold. To employ it is to hold capital crimes in check and to say to God that it matters whether His holy image as born by man is respected or disrespected. If you would like to read father about this subject, I would direct you to two books, John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical*

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<sup>2</sup> “Facts: 13 Reasons to Oppose the Death Penalty,” *Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty*, accessed November 21, 2019, <https://oadp.org/facts/13-reasons>.

<sup>3</sup> David Muhlhausen, “The Death Penalty Deters Crime and Saves Lives,” *Heritage Foundation*, accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/testimony/the-death-penalty-deters-crime-and-saves-lives>. Note: this article has many studies worth reading in its lengthy bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 219.

*Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, chapter 8, and Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, chapter 12.

For our purposes, let's not get lost in the debate. Far better to focus on the implications of Paul's statement about the sword of the State. The State, or the entity of authority, be what it may, has the right to establish tough and stringent repercussions for breaking laws, rules, and regulations to create fear in the lives of would-be perpetrators so societal peace and tranquility is maintained. Is this not how it works? If you know you could possibly face a harsh fine/judgment for a sinful infraction, you will naturally and logically think twice. Recently, Liz and I drove to watch one of our Army two-stars take partial command of the Army's Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. Once we crossed the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge, I kept the car speed right at 55 miles per hour, even though everyone else whizzed past me. After a while, Liz looked at me and said, "Why are you going to so slow?" I replied, "I'm not going slow. Actually, I'm going the speed limit and appears I'm going slow because everyone else is breaking the law. I am not going to go faster than 55 because Maryland is known for the speed cameras, and I don't want a ticket." Don't tell me laws and repercussions for breaking said laws don't have a deterrent effect. I drove that day like a model citizen should. I will admit my carnal man kept prompting me to push down harder on the pedal.

Why did I obey the stringent law? Paul gives the much needed answer in verse 5:

<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

I obeyed because of two reasons: One, I did not want to face the monetary ramifications for driving fast through Maryland, and two, I wanted to have a clean, clear conscience when I arrived at the base.

If you are still muttering under your breath that laws do not deter criminal behavior, and that they do not help people become better law-abiding citizens, I submit to you California's Prop. 47. This relatively new proposition/experiment, which was voted in by the majority of Californians (60% in favor, 40% against), lovingly and compassionately downgraded a variety of non-serious, non-violent crimes which were formerly classified as felonies. Now, as long as do not shoplift anything beyond the \$950 ceiling, you are only guilty of a minor misdemeanor, which pragmatically means you will probably receive a small, slap-on-the-wrist fine or a very brief stint in jail. How progressive. Forge a check now for \$850 and you are golden, knowingly receive a \$600 stolen iPad, or use someone else's credit card and purchase \$700 worth of electronic equipment at Best Buy, and you do not have to worry too much about the police coming after you.

How has relaxing this law benefitted the State? It has only benefitted criminals. An article in the Washington Post us this much:

- Robberies are up 23 percent in San Francisco
- Property theft, including shoplifting, is up 11 percent in Los Angeles, reversing a downtrend
- Overall crime is up 20 percent in Lake Tahoe, 36 percent in La Mirada, 22 percent in Chico, and 68 percent in Desert Hot Springs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "A Virtual Get-Out-Of-Jail-Free Card," *Washington Post*, October 10, 2015, accessed November 21, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2015/10/10/prop47/?utm\\_term=.e88b8f8b9fda](https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2015/10/10/prop47/?utm_term=.e88b8f8b9fda)

Criminals, who do not fear any real repercussions for their lesser crimes, are now committing similar crimes over and over because they are released from jail so quickly. Police officers are now calling these folks “frequent fliers.” One man in Riverside was called “Hoover Heister” because he was arrested thirteen times in three months for stealing, wait for it, vacuum cleaners. It is most unfortunate that many political leaders fail to understand man’s wicked nature, and divinely mandated necessity for laws which have real, bonafide teeth. Why? These types of laws deter crime and help maintain society order.

So, what about it where your life is concerned? You as a Christian are to be known as one who follows laws, rules, and regulations. Do you? Are you? Or do you flaunt them when it is convenient? If you are in a political position, I must ask, “Are you working to establish laws with stern consequences, or are you working to erode them for a variety of personal reasons?” Further, are you really worried about something you have done? Is your conscience getting the best of you? Is it keeping you up late at night, causing you to stare at the ceiling? Are you afraid to listen to your messages on your digital answering machine for fear of hearing from someone who knows about your exploitation of a law, a rule, or a regulation?

If this is the case, what should you? Simple: Come clean. Confess what you have done. Seek forgiveness. Get everything out in the light so you can face the music and then move forward with a clean, clear conscience. That’s what model citizens do.

But long before they go off the rails, they are supposed to be known as those who obey the laws, rules, and regulations at all costs. Will that be you when you walk out of here today? Trust me. Our nation needs more model citizens who are in love with obedience to the authorities. We have too many who live for disobedience, and we can see daily how this is eating away at the health of the nation. Far better and wiser to be law-abiding every step of the way. That is a model citizen whose life is being transformed by the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

A fourth and final trait of a model maturing believer is established in verses 6 through 7. Here we learn from Paul’s mind that . . .

## He Fulfills His Societal Obligations (Rom. 13:6-7)

Again, Paul wastes no time telling us exactly what he means.

<sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> 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.

I never said Paul’s command here would be easy or enjoyable to obey.

First, Paul informs maturing believers to be known for paying their taxes. Are you kidding me? No. He even goes so far as to call tax collectors “servants of God.” Ah, this is most interesting, and we must stop and drill down into because we have many gifted IRS people in our body. And, yes, we do thank God for you. Why? You are His servant. The Greek here is most telling. It is the word *leitourgos* (λειτουργός), a word used the Greek Old Testament, or LXX, for a person performing servant functions *in God’s temple* (Num. 4:37, 41; 1 Sam. 2:11, 18; 3:1; Ezra 7:24; Neh. 10:40; Isa. 61:6). True, lexically, the word also historically denoted public officials, but its connection with religious is most interesting. Tax collectors are appointed by God to collect taxes so the governments He has established can operate and provide for the welfare of the people. In this sense they perform almost a religious function because they are doing God’s work. If you work in

the tax sector of our government, you should be proud of your service, but you should also do it with great humility in mind.

All of this tax paying language harks back, of course, to Christ's statement in Luke 20:25 for people to pay Caesar his due and God his due. Model citizens are known as those who pay their taxes and they pay them on time. Obviously, the fact that taxpayers owe the US government a whopping \$131 billion in back taxes, shows us that not everyone is a model citizen. I also read this week where 3.3% of all 9.8 million federal workers and retirees are behind on their taxes. Interestingly enough, the article said that 714 of the roughly 17,000 employees working at the House and Senate are behind on their taxes. The article also said that 15,000 workers at the Department of Veterans Affairs owe nearly \$146 million in back taxes.<sup>6</sup> Jaw dropping, for sure. I give you these stats to simply say that while many Americans have issues/trouble paying their taxes, such should not be the case for Christians. They should be gladly paying those taxes because they fear the consequences of disobedience, and they want to have clear consciences before God.

If you owe, then, you need to go and get it right . . . sooner rather than later. Why? It's a sign of true spiritual maturation. And, please, no grumbling.

Does this mean I should be for higher taxes? No. Higher taxes typically take away human freedom, and God is all about individual freedom.

Should I support laws requiring everyone to pay at least some taxes? Yes. Why? As Grudem remarks so well, “. . . so that there will be a sense of responsibility to pay for the services of the government and a sense of accountability on the part of the government for how these taxes are used.”<sup>7</sup> I could not agree more.

Should I be all about taxing the rich so more money can be gleaned to give to the poor? No. This is nothing more than wealth distribution which the Bible does not support because it is a type of legalized thievery based on a political ideology. A person's property belongs to that person and to take it to give to others is nothing short of stealing (Ex. 20:15). Christ's Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 demonstrates that people should be given what they have earned. The Parable of the Mina supports the same motif (Luke 19:17). Each person deserves what he has legally earned. He does not deserve to receive from others what they have legally and appropriately earned.

Paul finishes out his call for saints to model citizens to fulfill their societal obligations by covering just about every you can think of:

<sup>7</sup> 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.

The final two clauses are all about saints being known for showing respect to everyone in authority, regardless of their party affiliation, family ties, and so forth. Sadly, our culture thinks disrespect is a top-notch virtue. It is not. They pour water on police officers (and, no, it is not a sign of some summer fun), and cuss out speakers like Ann Coulter when attempt to speak at a secular university like Berkeley. They use obscene gestures when the President's limo drives by,

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<sup>6</sup>Alexia Fernandez Campbell, “More People Are cheating on Their Taxes, but Fewer Are Going to Jail,” *Vox*, accessed November 22, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/4/16/18311366/tax-day-cheating-prosecutions-jail>.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 295.

and they think nothing of trashing talking a referee during a football game. They disrespect our nation's founders by slapping vile, vicious names on them, and they swim in the WWII Memorial reflection pond as if it is there to cool them off. They mock their parents, and they bad mouth their managers behind their backs. It is a sad state of affairs when disrespect is worn as a badge of honor. It is really a badge of dishonor.

*God wants His people, that's you and me, to be dripping with high respect for everyone who is in a position of authority. Will you choose this day to be this type of man or woman? Perhaps this Thanksgiving you will be given a chance to live this truth out as your family assembles from around the country to give thanks for the bounty God's has showered on us.*