

Romans 13:1-10
OUR ULTIMATE OBEDIENCE IS TO GOD
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I'm a World War II enthusiast. I enjoy reading about World War II. I own many books, videos and movies about it. I subscribe to a World War II magazine. As I study about World War II, I, as a student of the Bible, also see God's hand in that terrible conflict. He guided matters so that the Allies beat back Hitler's Nazism and the Japanese War Lords. This in turn opened many doors for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be preached to more people.

One of the oddities I find in all of this, concerns Adolf Hitler. He was certainly not a God-fearing man. Yet he had a favorite section of the Bible which happens to be our text, Romans 13:1-10. It may have been the only part of the Bible he liked. I think we can understand why, too. At first these verses appear to give validity to his totalitarian type of governing. Hitler read those words to mean the people of Germany owed him ultimate allegiance and obedience no matter what, and whatever peoples he conquered would owe him that, too.

What Hitler did not see in these words, however, is that they point out OUR ULTIMATE OBEDIENCE IS TO GOD. While it includes submission to governing authorities as well as love for our fellow man, the emphasis in these verses is that OUR ULTIMATE OBEDIENCE IS TO GOD.

I

Notice the repeated phrases "authority. . . God has established," "authorities. . . have been established by God," "rebellious against what God has instituted," and "he is God's servant," all of which point to God as the ultimate authority. All earthly authorities come from God the ruler of all. And the ultimate Authority says we owe obedience to the earthly authorities he allows to have authority here. Why?

First, it is simply because God says so. That should be reason enough. We want what God wants so we submit to them. Christians in the Roman Empire were to submit to the ungodly pagan Emperors and yes, the people of Germany were to submit to the authority of Hitler.

We are to submit to the various governing authorities over us. Not to submit or to rebel against them is to rebel against God.

While it may sound unreasonable to us to submit to governing authorities we don't like and with whom we disagree, God has several reasons for us to do so. One is this, "He is God's servant to do you good." Many good things come through government. Through government, even what we may call a bad government, God provides stability in society so its citizens can live in relative peace, make a living and provide for their families. Government provides infrastructure which allows for commerce and growth in the economy. Government makes the education of its citizens more feasible and attainable. Even Hitler's government, Communist governments and even dictatorships provided such good things for its citizens.

Another reason God wants us to submit to the governing authorities- "He is God's agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." It is far better in society to have a structured government keep law and order than for vigilantes to do it. Justice carried out in the streets leads to chaos and everyone loses. While miss justice is sometimes carried out, it is far worse to have vigilante justice which amounts to no justice, just everyone seeking revenge on everyone else.

There is one more reason given for submitting to the governing authorities- “It is necessary to submit to the authorities. . . because of conscience.” Do you want a clear conscience before God? Then submit to the governing authorities God has placed over you. While unbelievers may submit out of fear of punishment, we submit out of love for God who blesses us through government. We realize, too, that our submission is not so much to men but to God, who wants us to submit.

What happens, though, if the government God allows over us wants us to do things we know are contrary to God’s Word? What were Christians in Nazi Germany to do when asked to kill Jews, wreck their property, steal from them and what not all else? What were Christians in Communist countries to do when told to spy on fellow Christians and turn them in as traitors to the state? What do Christians in dictatorships do when they are told to keep food and basic necessities away from certain ethnic groups in the country? We don’t do those bad things!

We follow the example of Peter and James in Acts 5:29. When the governing authorities forbade them to speak in Jesus’ name any more, they answered, “We must obey God rather than men.” Peter and James did not go into total, open rebellion against the authorities. They respectfully said they could not obey that particular command. If it meant arrest and jail time for them, so be it. They were not going to stop doing what Jesus had commanded them to do. Listen to what Peter wrote about this in 1 Peter 3:14-17, “But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. . . It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”

The governing authorities put Jesus to death for doing good. Oh, they accused him of evil like blasphemy, and trying to be a king in place of Caesar, but he was innocent. But God used that innocent death to provide you with forgiveness of sin and eternal life. That is your motivation to submit to the governing authorities as Jesus did, and even suffer for doing good rather than disobey God. As Jesus rose from the dead to live a new life and ascended to heaven to rule forever, so God will raise you and take you to his heavenly kingdom where you will be able to render perfect obedience to your perfect God forever.

II

Until then we submit to the governing authorities in every way we can according to God’s will. For **OUR ULTIMATE OBEDIENCE IS TO GOD**. This also includes showing love for our fellow man.

This part of our text begins by telling us, “Let no debt remain outstanding.” A Christian citizen will see to it that he pays all his loans and debts. This implies, too, that he will strive to be a good manager of whatever wealth God gives him so that he doesn’t get into debt to the point that paying it off seems impossible.

“Let no debt remain outstanding” is only part of a sentence in our text, though. The other part says, “except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.” There is one debt we never get paid up in this life, the debt of love we owe to each other. It is something we are to show to everyone every day.

Now that is relatively easy to do toward those who also love us. But Paul originally wrote this to Christians living in Rome. They were in the midst of a community that persecuted, maligned and ridiculed those who followed Jewish slave who was shamefully nailed to a Roman cross. Worshiping the scum of the earth is what they thought Christians did. Soon these same citizens would be cheering wildly in the Colosseum grandstands as down below their Christian neighbors would be mauled and

murdered by bloodthirsty beasts. Still, God required those Christians to love their neighbor as themselves. He expects the same of us. It's hard, isn't it? It's very hard, and we often fail in paying this debt of love.

That's what makes Jesus' perfect life of love toward his fellow man and his innocent sufferings and death on the cross so important to us. He did it for us. He did it in our place. He did it to fulfill the law for us and to pay the debt of sin we owe. Through faith in Jesus it is all credited to us, it counts as our perfect life, our payment for sin. We are forgiven. Eternal life is ours in the world to come.

What if Adolf Hitler had been a God-fearing man? What if he had understood Romans 13:1-10 correctly? What a lot of trouble could have been spared the world. You and I do fear God. We understand Romans 13:1-10 correctly. In Jesus Christ we have motivation to love our fellow man and to submit to our governing authorities, difficult though it can be at times. For **OUR ULTIMATE OBEDIENCE IS TO GOD.** Amen.