

WARM-UP

- Do you always obey traffic rules and regulations? Why or why not?
- What is one obligation that you were happy to fulfill? Tell us about it.
- What is your typical reaction to people who give you orders? Why do you think you react that way?

WORD *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. **ROMANS 13:1***

From Romans 12 onwards, the apostle Paul talks about our reasonable response in light of the mercy that God has shown us through Christ. This is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God as our service of worship. This means expressing love to others in various ways. In Romans 13, Paul discusses the practical application of this when it comes to relating with the government as Christian believers and citizens. This is a complicated and touchy topic for many. However, Paul gives two truths that could guide us.

1 | God delegates His authority.

For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ROMANS 13:1

Paul wrote the book of Romans to believers in Rome, which at that time was led by an emperor who was known for his cruelty to Christians. He knew the weight of his words when he said those in authority have been instituted by God. But this verse implies that human authority and power are not absolute. The truth is, there is no authority except from God. Therefore, He is the one who positions and removes people from places of authority. This does not mean that all civil authorities are godly and that all they do are pleasing to God. But God can use even ungodly rulers to bring about His purposes (e.g., Pontius Pilate). How does Romans 8:28 give us assurance that He will fulfill His good plans and promises, regardless of the person who sits in civil authority?

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2 | We submit ultimately to God's authority.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ROMANS 13:1

Since all authority is from God and He is the one who puts people in positions of authority, Paul is saying that we have to submit to governing authorities. However, submission and obedience are not the same thing. He is not saying that we ought to obey everything they say. Paul and the other believers during his time were commanded by authorities to stop preaching the gospel, but they did not obey them (Acts 5:27–29). They chose to declare the gospel to others

even if it meant persecution and death. Since God is the ultimate authority, in areas where the commands of human authorities conflicted with God's will, they chose to obey God rather than men. The idea of submission refers more to an internal attitude. A person can submit to authority and still voice out his or her points of view, concerns, and even disagreement. In modern-day democracies, citizens have the right to freedom of speech. However, as followers of Christ, we should do this with an attitude of respect and the motive of love, thus reflecting Christ to all around us. In what ways are you submitting to authorities? How does this reflect your submission to God's authority?

APPLICATION

- How are you fulfilling the obligation to love the people in your community? Ask God to give you specific things you can do this week to show love.
- Write down specific government rules or regulations that you have difficulty obeying. Ask God for the grace to obey the laws of the land.
- God is the one who puts civil authorities in positions of power. In what ways can you support the authorities in your community?

