

Submit to Governing Authorities—Romans 13

A part of the *Layman Looks at Law* series

Aside from the organization that God established—the priesthood and prophets in the Old Testament, and the offices of apostle, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers under the lordship of Jesus in the New Testament—has he asked us also to submit to secular authorities?

Remember, God tried to discourage Israel from setting up a king domain by warning them of the consequences.¹ Also, using the writers of the books of Daniel and Revelation God presents/symbolizes those governments as terrible beasts.² Throughout the early years, it was secular governments that persecuted Christians. Even today, in governments allegedly elected by the people to serve people, we see prayer removed from our schools, marriages perverted, and limits placed on what we are permitted to call sin—and we’ve done little to oppose it. Why? Was it because we are to be in subjection to “governing authorities”—a conflict between the masters we serve? To submit to government is to surrender our God-given inalienable rights. Too many of those rights have already been given up to a government, who by law should be our public servant, not our superior.

In that light, we need to examine the opening verses of Romans 13 which *appear*, especially in the modern versions, to direct us to submit to governing authorities.

Please know that I hold all scripture as God-inspired and as the final authority in my life—in its original form and language.

Romans 13

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. (Romans 13:1a NASB)³

Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers. (Romans 13:1 ASV)⁴

Most twentieth century versions have interpreted the Greek words as “governing authorities” while those of older origin, such as King James (1611), American Standard (1901), Bishop’s (1595), Geneva (1599), Darby (1890), Tyndale (1534), Webster’s (1833), carry the more literal translation of these words as “higher powers.”⁵ Why this change in the newer versions? Was the change a matter of accuracy or some ungodly influence over a few of the translators? This change would certainly hamper every ‘good Christian’ from opposing even ungodly government.

The word translated *governing* in the NASB is the Greek word *huperecho* that means “to hold above, to rise above, to be superior.” It is rooted in the words *Huper*—over, beyond—and

¹ 1 Samuel 8

² Daniel 7, Revelation 13

³ The New American Standard Bible (NASB) (NAS [1977] and NAU [1995]). Copyright © 1986, both by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

⁴ American Standard Version 1901 (ASV)

⁵ This modern twist would play into the hand of those pushing for the New World Order by compelling any real Christians to submit to those who are supposed to be our servants - <http://www.lapstoneministries.org/govern.html>.

echo—to have, hold.⁶ The use of the word *govern* here may come by deducing a connection to verse 3 where Paul uses the analogy of our relationship to physical rulers to make a point. More on this later.

The Greek word *exousia* translated *authorities* in the NASB has interesting roots. It means *power to act*, **authority**, and comes from *exesti*—*it is permitted*, **lawful**, which in turn comes from the two words *ek* or *ex*—*from*, **from out of**, and *eimi*—*I exist*, **I am**.⁷

Discussion has been ongoing whether the term *exousia* refers to human authority or spiritual.⁸ I believe that the adjective *higher* means that Paul is distinguishing his *exousia* to from that which is human.

When putting these translations together, *exousia* could refer to some “law or authority, coming out of I AM.”

In Context

According to established principles of translation, the context in which a verse or verses are used must be considered. These verses, purported to speak of submission to government, are sandwiched between sections that pertain to loving our neighbours. This very fact raises a concern. Using a sampling, we read:

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love...” (Romans 12:10 NASB)

“Every person should obey the government in power...” (Romans 13:1 GWN⁹)

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another...” (Romans 13:8 NASB)

Read Romans 12, 13, and 14 in a modern version of the Bible now, without chapter or verse breaks, and note the sudden change in theme with Romans 13:1-7.

Why this change in direction toward an external authority figure like secular government and then, just as suddenly, back to loving our neighbours? Is it valid? Does it fit Paul’s intent and flow? I think not. I believe that Paul is referring not to some human authority, but to a spiritual, inorganic principle of law that God established and set into motion with creation, which some referred to as Natural Law.

Natural Law

Jesus tells us, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”¹⁰ Everything about the Law and the Prophets is about establishing good relationships. Jesus frequently said, “You have heard that it was said ... but I

⁶ Strong’s Concordance

⁷ Strong’s Concordance

⁸ Bauer, Walter, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Edition. Copyright © 1957, 1979. The University of Chicago Press. pg 278

⁹ GOD’S WORD® translation. Copyrighted © 1995 by God’s Word to the Nations.

¹⁰ The Golden Rule, Matthew 7:12 NASB

say to you”¹¹ as though he were presenting a higher or more refined law than the Law delivered to Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai.

This higher law was set into motion at the beginning. Although it may be synonymous with what we call *the laws of nature*, I reserve this later title for laws that affect physical science and prefer the term *natural law* for the higher law that influences human relationships.

Another great example of this natural law is the immutable law of sowing and reaping:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.
(Galatians 6:7 NASB)

Natural law is an inexorable, higher law that affects all humankind, as does the law of gravity. Natural law was established to govern our conduct in relationship with each other, and can be summarized in Jesus’ *Golden Rule*¹² with an addendum—that there is a reactive component to it.

The sowing and reaping principle of natural law teaches that whatever we do will result in a reaction that comes back onto us. If we sow good actions toward others, then we will be rewarded with good, but if we sow evil, then we will be repaid with evil. This is very similar to that law of nature which states, “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” For every good action we do toward others, there is an equally good action that comes back to us. This is the higher power of which Paul was referring, and it pertains to loving our neighbours.

Speaking of *jus* (Latin for “right”) as Natural Law, Dr. F. Graves, JD writes:

Jus is Natural Law supernaturally rewarding good and tearing down evil, utterly heedless of our human statutes, courts, or legislatures...If we are loving and kind the Unseen Hand rewards us, sometimes with mysterious benefits we could never have predicted. If we are selfish and cruel, Natural Law sooner or later brings suffering. Though the effects of *jus* may be delayed for a time, they are never escaped. Natural Law obeys no human legislation. Its rule is heedless of our most eloquent demands. It is what it is. Only fools ignore it.¹³

Much of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount details the action/reaction of God’s natural law. There will be rewards for our good behaviour, and for that reason, we should love our neighbours and show respect to those who are due our respect. If we choose not to treat others the way we would like to be treated, we have good reason to live in fear since our bad behaviour will come back to afflict us.

We find this principle stated in Romans 13:2 where, in my words, it reads essentially that those who oppose this **higher law** bring judgment on themselves.

This natural law, I believe, is the *higher power* or *higher law* that Paul was trying to draw to our attention.

With this in mind let me rewrite Romans 13:1-7 using the term of *higher law*.

¹¹ Throughout Matthew 5

¹² Treat others the way that you want to be treated.

¹³ *The Search for Natural Law*, © 2005 by Frederick Graves, JD All Rights Reserved

But if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing, you will be heaping fiery coals on his head. Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good. Everyone must submit to the **higher law**, for there is no higher law than from God, set in place by God. So then, those who oppose this **higher law** oppose God's command, and those who oppose it bring judgment on themselves, just as rulers are not terrors to good conduct, but to that which is bad. Do you want to be unafraid of this **higher law**? Do good and you will have its approval. It is God's servant to you for good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. This **higher law** is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. Therefore, you must submit, not only because of its wrath, but also because of your conscience. For this reason, pay attention to it, for it is a tool in God's service, constantly watching. Therefore, give to all people what you owe them: respect to those due that respect; end relationships that need to end; reverence those who should be revered; honour those due the honour. Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled that law.

These sections of scripture now fit and flow together since there is no interruption to the focus on human relationship issues.

The death of Paul, and probably all the disciples, was at the hand of governing authorities. I am sure they were not looking for conflict—it was simply the consequence of loving people and following Jesus.

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. (John 15:18-19 NASB)

Summary

Paul, in Romans 13:1-7, is not admonishing us to submit to secular government. He is teaching us about a higher law that causes us to reap what we have sown, a principle which acts as God's administrator, a tool used to encourage us to good behaviour.¹⁴

How then ought we to relate to governing authorities? We follow exactly what Paul tells us in these verses: we owe them love but not at the cost of the freedom to follow God's direction for our lives and personal ministry. Should conflict arise, we will know that the world has also hated Jesus. Relax; maybe we are doing something right.

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Any action you take remains your responsibility.

¹⁴ I suggest you read "*Fathered by God*" by this author for more on this matter.