



GOD'S VISION FOR A NEW HUMANITY | A CHANGED RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE (34)

May 17, 2026

Romans 13:1-7

PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships
To participate in God's mission to the world

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Discussion Question

- What is one way you have seen people being welcomed or getting more connected at Central this past week?

WORSHIP 10 MIN

PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

RESPONSIVE PRAYER — Psalm 24

Lift up your heads, O gates!

**And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.**

Who is this King of glory?

**The LORD, strong and mighty,
The LORD, mighty in battle!**

Lift up your heads, O gates!

**And lift them up, O ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.**

Who is this King of glory?

**The LORD of hosts,
He is the King of glory!**

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 13:1-7

¹Let 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. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

BIBLE STUDY Summary**40 MIN**

We are continuing our sermon series entitled *God's Vision for a New Humanity* throughout which we are studying the latter part of the book of Romans. When we are moved by the mercies of God, and when our minds have been renewed to grasp his will, all our relationships become transformed. This week's passage arrives with a certain abruptness. After Paul's sustained call to love, serve, and bless others in the last chapter, he pivots without transition to the Christian's changed relationship to the state. This serves to stifle the kind of extremism that would twist the gospel ethic discussed in the previous chapters into an assumption that belonging to new creation means owing nothing to the existing earthly order. One can easily imagine early Christians reasoning that because the old age had passed and they then reigned with Christ, the secular authorities of a defunct era had no claim on them. Paul's response is an unambiguous command: "let every person be subject to the governing authorities" (verse 1). His argument for this is theological rather than pragmatic. The state is not a concession to human weakness that Christians are to simply tolerate, but a positive institution of God's common grace, established for the ordering of human life even after the inauguration of the new age.

Paul's argument is that the governing authorities derive their power from God (verses 1-2), meaning that the Christian has an obligation to submit to them. We should be clear, however, and remember that Paul is not asserting that every particular ruler has been personally appointed by God or that their actions are therefore beyond reproach. He knew perfectly well the miscarriage of justice in the condemnation of Jesus, and had himself appealed to Caesar against unjust proceedings (Acts 25:11). His claim is rather that human authority as such is a delegated authority, so that what Jesus said to Pilate applies universally: "you would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). Pilate abused that authority to condemn the innocent, and yet even in that act, the authority of the state was being used, however unwittingly, as the instrument of God's purposes. The authority is real even when its exercise is corrupt. This is why Christians can acknowledge the God-given role of the government while also insisting that obedience has its limits. When the state commands what God forbids, the response should be clear: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Scriptural examples of the Hebrew midwives (Exodus 1:17); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3); and the apostles before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:18ff) all illustrate that our submission to authority is not absolute.

The Apostle goes on to describe rulers as those who commend good and punish evil (verses 3-4), which, as he surely knew firsthand, is a picture of the ideal rather than a reliable description of every regime. Roman governance was not consistently just, and Christians in Rome had experienced that firsthand. Yet Paul frames the duty of submission in broad terms because the obligation is tied to the office and its God-given purpose, not to the personal virtue of whoever holds it. The duty of rulers to 1) promote and reward good and 2) restrain and punish evil can be described as the state's ministry. That second function is the crucial link between chapters 12 and 13. As we saw last week, Paul told Christians to step back from personal revenge, because vengeance belongs to the Lord (Romans 12:19). Here he shows that one of the ways God exercises that vengeance in the present age is through the courts of law and the processes of civil justice. The punishment of wrongdoers is ultimately God's business, and the government is one of the tools he uses to carry it out.

The passage closes in verses 6-7 with a practical list of obligations that flow naturally from everything Paul has argued. Rather than seeing these things as simple civic duties, believers are to do them because the authorities who require them are ministers of God, attending to the work of ordered human life. The word that Paul uses is the same one used elsewhere for those who serve in a priestly capacity, suggesting that the government's work, when carried out rightly, participates in something of God's own governance of creation. This is a far cry from any view that dismisses the political and material order as unworthy of a Christian's attention. The world in which we live out our daily lives has not been abandoned by God, and his grace continues to work through institutions that carry his authority, even imperfectly.

1. Looking at the Bible

- Share with the group some key phrases or ideas that stood out to you from the passage.

2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- Paul says that the state's punishment of evil is one of the ways God executes justice in the present age, albeit imperfectly and temporarily. What does it mean for how we relate to governing authorities knowing that Jesus will one day set everything right perfectly and finally?

3. Looking at our Hearts

- Paul wrote these words to Christians living under Roman rule, an empire that was largely hostile to the Church and would soon actively pursue it. Knowing that, what does it feel like to read his call to submission?
- Where do you find it hardest to trust that God is still governing through authorities you might find unjust, corrupt, or simply wrong?

4. Looking at our World

- We live in a republican democracy, which gives us a political voice early Christians never had. How might our situation change, or not change, the way we apply this passage, especially during something as heated as an election season?
- Edmund Burke once said that "human laws either reflect God's law or rebel against it." Can you think of examples of this either from history or from the present day? What guidance does Paul's argument in this passage give us for navigating that difference as citizens?

PRAYER
15 MIN

Pray for each other: Share any prayer requests you have.

Pray for our federal, state, and city governments, that they would execute the will of God, and that they would promote and reward good while restraining and punishing evil.