



# PASSIONFORTRUTH

WHERE NEW LIFE BEGINS

## Romans 13: Obedience, Resistance, and the True Purpose Behind Paul's Words

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*"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities..."*

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These words from Romans 13 have sparked generations of theological debate. Do they mean blind obedience to political power? Or is there a deeper message—perhaps a contextual instruction lost in translation? Let's take a deeper look into Paul's message to the Romans and uncover its true purpose.

### The Text: What Did Paul Really Say?



Romans 13:1–7 begins with a command: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God..."

This has often been used—perhaps misused—to justify full compliance with state mandates. But a closer inspection reveals something critical: **the original Greek word for "subject" is *hypotasso*, which means to submit or recognize authority, not to obey without question.**

To be "subject" is to place oneself under authority, not necessarily to do everything that authority demands—especially when it conflicts with God's commandments.

### Obedience Isn't Always Righteous

The idea that Christians must obey government in all things doesn't stand the test of Scripture. Would we say that the Hebrew midwives in Exodus were wrong for defying Pharaoh's order to kill newborn boys? Would we condemn Daniel for praying when it was illegal? What about Paul himself, who disobeyed Roman orders and paid for it with his life?

History and Scripture are filled with righteous men and women who refused to comply with evil commands. Paul cannot be contradicting that entire legacy in Romans 13. So what **was** his point?

## Context Is Everything: The Tax Debate of 58 A.D.

When Paul wrote Romans—around 58 A.D.—Rome was embroiled in a public controversy over **taxes**. The Roman historian Tacitus records widespread unrest surrounding indirect taxation and corruption by tax collectors, also known as "**revenue farmers**." Emperor Nero even considered abolishing these taxes but was advised against it.

Now, combine this with the recent return of Jews to Rome after their expulsion under Emperor Claudius. Tensions were high. Paul wasn't arbitrarily addressing all government obedience—he was **urging believers not to use faith as a reason to rebel against tax laws**.



Hence Romans 13:6–7: “Because of this you also pay taxes... Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

Paul's exhortation was not about blind obedience, but about **living in peace and integrity within a hostile system**, especially in non-essential matters like paying taxes.

## When Obedience Conflicts with Conscience

Paul draws a clear line: “Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.” (Romans 13:5)

This implies a moral dimension. If a command violates one's conscience—and especially God's law—**disobedience may be the right path**.

If the government demands what is unrighteous, whether it's persecution, propaganda, or something even darker (as one speaker warns: the hypothetical mandate of a "mark of the beast"), the believer is not called to compliance, but to courage.

## Love: The True Fulfillment of the Law

Paul shifts tone in Romans 13:8: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

Love is not a free pass to moral relativism. Paul doesn't mean “do whatever feels good as long as you call it love.” True love is **defined by God's law**. It doesn't abolish the commandments; it completes them.

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*“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Romans 13:10)*

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Love means not stealing, not lying, not committing adultery—not because of the law itself, but because the heart transformed by Christ **desires to do good**.

## **A Call to Wake Up and Walk in the Light**



Paul ends the chapter with a passionate plea: “The night is far spent, the day is at hand... put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh...” (Romans 13:12–14)

He shifts from teaching to preaching. The urgency is palpable. Paul believed Christ’s return was near. Whether or not we believe His return is imminent, the message stands: **Wake**

**up. Cast off the darkness. Live righteously. Love deeply. Obey God above all.**

## **Final Thoughts: What Does This Mean for Us Today?**

Romans 13 is not a command to become passive under any and all government rule. It's an appeal for **discernment**: to live in peace when possible, to resist evil when necessary, and to do all things in love.

Our obedience to earthly authorities must always be **secondary** to our allegiance to God. And as we navigate complex political, ethical, and spiritual challenges today, we must ask ourselves: **Am I living in truth and love? Or am I simply complying out of fear or convenience?**

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*“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*

*— Romans 12:18*

*But when that peace comes at the cost of righteousness, let us remember:  
Faithfulness to God always comes first*

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