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Our Responsibilities Under Grace - Part 9

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Well, we come to chapter 13. Not only will we see the church differently and the congregation differently, but we are going to have a different view of civil government. We are going to see governing authorities differently when we are surrendered and our minds are renewed by the Word of God.

Now I want you to make sure you understand the times that this was written. We are living in a day in which we are breeding disrespect for authority by one thing or another. It may be through the media, but we are breeding in our young people disrespect for authority. That is tragic when it gets into the church, because we have got to remember that we don't live in times like they lived in during the times the Scriptures were written. Biblical times were very difficult. Jesus Christ was born into a society where political corruption and autocratic rule were common. Merciless and murderous tyrants were everywhere. As a matter of fact, human slavery was the norm of the day when Jesus walked on this earth. In some accounts, the historians say that in the Roman Empire they had three slaves for every free person.

You remember the ruler, King Herod, who ruled most of Palestine, including Judea and Samaria, with horrible cruelty. Matthew 2:16 cites one account, when the Magi tricked him about the whereabouts of Jesus. It records in Matthew 2:16 that he became very enraged and with absolute callousness, sent and killed all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all of its bordering areas, from two years old and under. Now we don't live in a day when that is happening in America. Yet we have a lot of people who

disrespect authority.

Taxes were outrageous. The governor approved overcharging and extortion by tax collectors, which placed a tremendous financial burden on the people. The Jews of that day were not much more than an underprivileged and oppressed minority. They had no voice in any level of government and they had little legal recourse for injustices. For 50 years they had been under Rome, enslaved to Rome. Before that was Greece, before that was Medo-Persia, before that was Babylon, before that was Assyria and before that was Egypt. They were always in bondage to somebody. But even though they outwardly submitted, you have got to see something. Inwardly, they always were rebellious towards any Gentile authority. Outwardly they might have submitted, but inwardly they did not have the heart to submit.

This is clearly evident in John 8:31:

"Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, "You shall become free?"'"

What! Never been enslaved to anyone? I just listed how many nations had conquered them and put them in bondage. But you see, you have to understand something. The nature of flesh is to rebel against any authority. Understand that that is sin in you, in me, and in Israel. They submitted, yes, but really inwardly they never did.

It's like the little girl who was in the closet. The Mother put her in the closet and said, "You just go in there for a while. I can't think of anything else to do with you. Sit down." About three hours later, the Mother went back and checked on her, and she was sitting there in the chair in the closet. She had that look on her face. Her Mama said, "What are you doing?" She said, "Mama, I am sitting in this chair, but inside I am still standing up." That is exactly the way Israel saw authority.

I want to tell you something. If that is your view of authority, then you need to go back to Romans 12:1 and get your heart right with God and let His Word renew your mind, because you are way off base in your Christian walk. That should never be your view of authority.

Well, even in spite of all the heavy restrictions, Rome granted all kinds of freedoms to the Jewish people. For instance, they were free to maintain their priesthood and their temple and to support these institutions with their offerings. They were not required to worship Caesar. I thought that was interesting. Their Sabbath was safe-guarded by the Romans, along with their ceremonial and dietary laws, even their desire to rid themselves of any idol, especially images of Caesar. They were allowed to take images of Caesar out of their practice except on their coins where his head was imprinted on the coins. Now, many of the Christians at that time were considered by the Romans to be a sect of Judaism. So they were allowed the same freedoms.

But the Jews in the midst of all this, to show how rebellious they were, rebelled against Roman authority. They formed a group called the Zealots and they refused to pay taxes and engaged in terrorist attacks against their rulers. They used Scripture to justify what they did. The verse they used was Deuteronomy 17:15,

"You shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your country-men you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman."

Now, they took that and said any Gentile ruler is a sinful ruler and it is a sin to bow before him. Some of them became assassins, even to their own countrymen if their own countrymen would not side with them. They would kill them, saying that these countrymen had become traitors.

Now this is the government and the situation during the times that this was written. It is very important that we understand that. The result of Israel's rebellion against authority was horrible. In 70 A.D. a holocaust, only to be exceeded by the one under Hitler, occurred. 1,100,000 men, women and children, all Jews, were massacred mercilessly by the Romans who were getting them back for what they had done. You see, that possibly could have been completely prevented had they understood that authority is something God ordains.

Obviously Israel is the picture of the vine of flesh in the Old Testament and we need to learn from them. My flesh does not want to submit, but the Spirit of God in me teaches me to submit to authority. This is a very delicate subject and I want us to really understand that it was written in times much worse than anything you think you are going through in America today. Yet in the midst of all of that, the words that we are going to study were written.

The Lord Jesus was disappointing to the Jewish people, because He never made any call for political reform or social reform. As a

matter of fact, He said quite the contrary in Matthew 22:21:

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."

Can you imagine how they heard that? They didn't want to render anything to Caesar. "We render everything to God." He said, "No, sir. It is not that way." Matthew 23:2 says,

"The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses."

These were wicked people. And Jesus said,

"therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them."

In other words, do not do what they do, but do what they tell you to do. "But, Lord, they are wicked!" Do what they tell you to do. Don't do as they do, but do what they tell you to do.

Nowhere in the New Testament did Jesus ever advocate that His followers were to rebelliously change the form of government or even try to reform society. His purpose was clear. He did not seek to reform society from without, He sought to reform souls from within, to transform them from within.

Now I want to tell you something, when I am surrendered to Him and His heart is in my heart, then His purpose becomes my purpose. I am not so much interested in social reform as I am in people coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ and being changed from within. As a matter of fact, if you want social reform, that is the best way to go about it. Because when a person changes from within, obviously what he does from without is going to be entirely different. So the Lord Jesus was clear. He was clear to us. He was clear to them.

The Apostle Paul was no stranger to suffering from pagan governments, to being treated unjustly. Five years he spent in prison on a false accusation, a political hostage. No stranger to any of that, he writes these words in Romans 13 concerning how we are to live in this world that is wicked and that many times has corrupt people in authority. We are to live in it, but yet we are not to be of it. It is very important that we hear what he has to say to us.

In Romans 13, the first thing he says is, we are to submit to government. Verse 1 reads, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Now that is a powerful verse. You see, the situation in Rome would be more intense than in other place because Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire. It would be in Rome that the tendency and the temptation for believers to become militant and rebel against the government would be more there than it would be anywhere else. So it is almost as if Paul is giving them a warning in his command to not rebel, to be submissive to government.

Now look at the verse: "Let every person." The word "every" is the word *pas*. It means each and every, and the whole when you put it together. Now what is he saying? It is not just for lost people, but it is also for Christians to be submissive to government. Christians do not have an out when it comes to government. We are to be just as submissive as anybody else. He says, "Let every person be in subjection." The word "subjection" is *hupotasso*. It comes from *huper*, which means under, to be under something, and the word *tasso*, which means to orderly arrange yourself under something. So orderly arrange yourself under the authority that God has established.

The word "authority" there is the word *exousia*. It means right and might. I am to orderly arrange myself under the ones who have the right and the might over me. Now notice, it doesn't say to orderly arrange yourself under the authorities who love Jesus and always do right. Don't you wish it said that? Somehow we interpret it that way. You see, there are no exceptions given for a ruler's incompetence. He may be immoral, he may be cruel, he may be godless, it doesn't matter. We are to subject ourselves under his authority.

Then he goes on to explain,

"For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

Now, there is no authority except from God. God appoints all authority. He says, "and those which exist are established by God." The word "**established**" means that God appointed or arranged them the way He wanted to appoint them and arrange them. That is amazing to me. "Oh, come on, you know there are wicked people in authority. God wouldn't put them there!" Oh? In the book of Daniel it says that God raises up kings and establishes kingdoms. He is the one who tears them down and He is the one who puts them in office.

What Paul is saying to these believers in Rome, the capital city of the Roman Empire, is very similar to what the Apostle Peter said to the believers in Asia Minor back during the persecutions that came from a person by the name of Nero. Nero was the most

deranged Roman emperor who ever was. He burned Rome and blamed the Christians for it. The Apostle Peter is going to be a martyr himself, but he is writing to them to encourage them. They have already become scattered because of this persecution. It says in 1 Peter 1:1,

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,..."

Now, Peter writes something to those who were scattered everywhere. The persecution was rampant. Asia Minor was another place under the control of Rome. What was going on in Rome now had spread over there, and Peter is writing to them. He is writing to people whose friends have been dipped in boiling oil, have been nailed to poles, have been set on fire and have been human torches while the Romans had their orgies around them. He is writing to people whose friends had animal skins put on them and animals came and ate them in the front of cheering crowds. I mean, this is a very, very difficult time. Folks, you think it is bad in America? Oh, come on, this is a piece of cake compared to what these people were going through.

Listen to what he says to them in 1 Peter 2:13-17:

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond slaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

You may say, "Well, they didn't understand what I am going through." Are you kidding? This is one of the worst times ever in Christian history of persecution. Peter says in the midst of it, "I don't care if they are pagan. I don't care if they are immoral, you be model citizens regardless of how they live." As Peter said in 1 Peter 3:17,

"For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong."

When will we ever learn! Somehow we have taken government in and tried to wrap Christianity around the government. We have come up with this idea that we are going to reform the world with our thinking. Nowhere in Scripture are we told to do that. We are told to honor Him and seek out the lost and to allow His Holy Spirit to use us, not to change people from without, but to change people from within. That is the heart of God. It has always been the heart of God.

Somehow we have tried to wrap Christianity around government. Be real careful! That is not what God is all about. Now thank God for those great and wonderful politicians in our culture who are Christians. I mean, we have godly people within the law of our society. We have a culture in which we can put people in positions where they can bring about change. Thank God for that. They didn't have that back when Paul was writing this. But these men are doing what they are doing under the law, to see that laws can be changed and change can come about in our society.

But nowhere in Scripture is it ever allowed for me to become militant to any form of government in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I don't care where I live. God does not allow that kind of attitude. As a matter of fact, you know what He tells me to do with government, besides obey them? He tells me to pray for them. Do you have the government authorities on your heart when you pray? Isn't it great to go some place and just sit around and gossip about what you think about this person and that person? All of us do it. Then God whispers through 1 Timothy and says, "Pray for them."

As a matter of fact, I want you to see what God commands us. Now this is not an option. This is something every one of us is responsible to do. The next time you want to criticize a politician, the next time you want to criticize somebody in government authority, be real careful. Don't open your mouth if you haven't prayed for them because God says that if you are surrendered to Him, He is going to change your mind towards them and He is going to quicken within you the desire and the energy to pray for them. First Timothy 2:1 says,

"First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."

Look over in Titus 3:1-2. Titus is on the island of Crete and he is appointing elders in the churches and says,

"Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men."

You see, we are to live a quiet, respectable life with integrity.

Go over to 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. I am breaking in the middle of a sentence:

"and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business [quit worrying about everybody else] and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need."

Somebody is going to say,

"Well, wait a minute. If we are to obey authority, doesn't it matter if they are pagan? Aren't there exceptions in Scripture?"

Yes, there are. But we are not talking about the exceptions. We are talking about the rule.

There are exceptions. Any time a government authority tells me to do something, orders me to do something, that God's Word will not allow me to do, I am automatically exempt. With respect I am to say,

"I will not obey you for you have asked me to do something that my God will not allow me. I must take whatever punishment I need to take, but I do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

You do it with integrity, not with militant rebellion. You do it with total submission, remembering that God has told you something else. And you take whatever comes to you as the result of it.

You ask, "Where is that in Scripture?" Well, how about in Daniel? The book of Daniel is probably one of the greatest books in Scripture that talks about authority and how to handle authority. That is when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire came and took over Israel. Of course, they took the young men out first. There were three sieges on the city. The first one was when Daniel was taken out.

As soon as he got over there, the king said, "You guys are strong, good-looking guys, obviously educated. I want to feed you to the fullest so that you can be as fit as you possibly can be." The diet he prescribed went against the Mosaic Law as to what they could or could not eat. They were in a dilemma. Daniel did not walk in and say, "Hey, big boy, who do you think you are?" No, the scripture says he sought permission even to speak to the king.

Nebuchadnezzar liked Daniel. You can't study the book of Daniel and not see that. He liked him. I tell you what he liked about him. He liked his attitude. He liked his heart, his integrity. Daniel went in, and God had given him a creative alternative. He said, "Nebuchadnezzar, I'll tell you what. You have asked me to do something that my God will not allow me to do, but if you will just give it a test. Let's go for about six weeks and let us eat what He tells us to eat instead of what you have said to eat and if we are not more fit in six weeks, then we will do the other." So the king agreed. Sure enough, God honored it. Boy, in six weeks they were ready. The king changed his mind, you see. There was an exception there.

We find other exceptions in the book of Daniel. In Chapter 3 we find the king saying, "Listen, I want you to bow down to this statue I have made of myself." Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came forward and said, "King, we can't do that. We cannot do that." He said, "Okay, we will throw you in a fiery furnace." They threw them in the fiery furnace. Did God honor it? God honored it and God got in the furnace with them. Their hair wasn't even singed and they didn't even have the smell of smoke on them. The only thing that burned was the things that bound them. So, therefore, you see again that there was an exception.

We see in Daniel 6, Daniel in the lion's den. Darius foolishly made a rule, not realizing what it was going to do to Daniel because he was close to Daniel. He made a law and said, "You cannot worship any other God except me. I am God." Well, Daniel couldn't abide by that. Daniel had been very faithful. Daniel prayed in the morning, prayed at noon, and prayed at night. Of course, they found out about it and put him in the lion's den. He had to because he made the law, and the law was sovereign. So they put him in the lion's den. Did God honor it? Oh, yeah, He just shut the lions' mouths and put them to sleep. Boy, that did a work on Darius, too, when God brought him out.

Yes, there are exceptions. But you see, a lot of people build their theology off the exceptions. You don't build your theology off the exceptions. You build your theology off the rule and the rule is, you submit to authority. Period. It doesn't matter who they are. It doesn't matter whether they are like you or do the things you do. You submit. You pray for them. You live quiet lives with integrity.

Now, Paul has a second word for those who tend to not like this and tend to resist authority. What about those who would resist this and say, "Oh, you are off the wall. That was written a long time ago. That doesn't apply to today." Well, Paul has a word for you and it is found in verse 2:

"Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

Now, if you want a lot of pain and sorrow from people who are in positions of government or leadership, policemen or whatever, then you just decide that you are going to rebel against the laws that they are there to uphold.

First of all, you need to realize that if you disobey authority—now listen to me very carefully—if you choose to rebel against authority, you have chosen to rebel against God. Do you understand that? Do I understand that? When I choose not to do what authority, what law tells me to do, civil law, I have chosen to rebel against God. The word "resist" comes from two words, anti, against, and tasso, which means to ordain, set. It is the same idea of disobeying, when I stand and I say, "No, sir, I will not do what you tell me to do."

The word "oppose" is *anthistemi*, which means to stand against. It has the same meaning as the word for "resist." You have just looked at God and said, "God, I will not present my body to You. I will not let you renew my mind. I will not let you change my character. I won't do what you tell me to do." That is exactly what you have just said. You have taught everybody that you do not love God and you are not a person who seeks to walk after God by that attitude.

The word "ordinance" is the word *diatage*. He says,

"You have opposed the ordinance of God."

I know sometimes these words don't mean anything to you. It comes from the verb *diatasso*. The word **dia** means through or thorough, when you do something thoroughly. The word **tasso** means to arrange something very carefully, thought through, you put it there. Okay? When someone determines the proper arrangement of things or situations, then he orders or commands that such arrangements be executed.

The word "**ordinance**" is more than a mere command. God didn't just say, "I think I will just make them feel bad. I will put this command on them." No, He carefully thought it through. It is very purposeful and it is absolutely thorough in His redemptive purpose to mankind to give us the command that we must obey authority. For me to reject the authority is to reject Him, to reject His purpose, to reject His thinking. To reject His intent in my life is to take the law into my own hands and to prove myself rebellious. As a matter of fact, if you are rebelling against some law, some authority, then Romans 12:1-2 does not have anything in your heart. It has no place in your life. You have chosen not to walk and be surrendered to God. If you are illegally doing anything, stealing from the government, whatever you are doing that is against the law, you have made a choice, "I will not walk with you, God. I will do my own thing." That shows that you are not presented, your mind is not renewed and your life is not transformed. This is a powerful principle here.

Then Paul goes on to say, "and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." The word "condemnation" is *krima*. The *ma* on the end of that word means the result of something. The result of a judgment; in other words, the punishment. What he is saying is, it is not punishment from God, you are going to get punishment from the people who are upholding the law that He has put them there to uphold. They are going to cause you a lot of pain.

When you break the law, what have you just done? You have invoked the penalty and punishment that goes along with that law down on yourself. That is the condemnation that he is talking about. You are not going to be condemned by God in that sense. You are going to have a lot of pain because you have broken the law that God has set up Himself.

Then Paul explains in verse 3,

"For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil."

Now let me ask you a question. When you ride by a State Trooper with a radar gun, what is your first reaction? You immediately hit your brake to slow down. You do it quickly and fearfully because you just saw that State Trooper. If you are fearing authority, what does that mean? It means that you are not doing what authority has told you to do. Paul says that authority is not to be feared by those who do good.

You don't fear the law if you are doing what is good. People live in fear of authority. Why would you live in fear of authority? If you are seeking to obey God, you are going to obey authority, which removes the fear. That is what Paul is talking about here. He says, "For rulers are not a cause of fear." Then he says in the rest of the verse, "Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same."

Anytime you find somebody afraid of authority, look out, there is something wrong somewhere. What does it talk about over in Psalms?

"The evil flee when no one pursues." It is something that you have inside of you when you are not responding and respecting authority. Paul says, "Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same."

Only in notable exceptions have believers had difficulty with authority when they chose to obey God and live in submission to Him.

Yes, there have been exceptions but this is the rule. The one administering the law is in effect a minister of God to you for good. Look at verse 4: "for it is a minister of God to you for good." The word "it" should be translated "she" or "he." It fits the context much better to translate it "he." It doesn't change a thing and I think it is a much better translation: "for he is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword for nothing; for he is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil." In other words, he becomes an actual servant of God to keep the peace down here on this earth.

Paul goes on in verse 4 and says,

"But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword for nothing; for he is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."

The word "**avenger**" there is the word **ekdikos**, one who executes that which is right. He brings wrath, orge, which is the word here that means punishment. Now all Paul is saying is,

"Guys, guys, settle down. If God appointed the authority, then God is in charge of it. Now if you are going to obey God, be submissive to the authority. Live lives of integrity. Let your witness be the fact that you are willing to submit to them. Treat them with respect. Treat them with honor."

This message somehow needs to get to the hearts and lives of young people today who say they love God but have absolutely no respect for people in positions of authority whether it be civil authority or family authority. This is talking about civil authority, no respect for it whatsoever. It automatically shows you that you are really not surrendered to Christ and you are not living a life that He is pleased with because if you were, then you would love His commandments and do whatever He tells you to do. His Spirit would enable you to do as God leads.

In verse 5 Paul adds something very, very important. He says,

"Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake."

Do you know what he is saying? He is saying,

"Listen, don't go out of here obeying the law because you are afraid of what they might do to you. No, anybody can do that."

He said, "for conscience sake." "Conscience" means the inner witness that God puts within you that determines the motive of what you do. In other words, on the outside you can obey the law, but you are doing it like Israel did it. You are standing up on the inside while you are sitting down on the outside. But what he is saying is, because you so love God and respect Him, your whole purpose is to honor Him by submitting to these authorities. It is such a beautiful, beautiful picture.

What is your view of authority? What is your view of somebody who has a badge on? You know, when a person has a position like that, you better remember that if you respect God, you need to respect them. Some of the meanest letters I have ever received have come from people who in the name of Christianity did certain things that were totally an embarrassment to the Christian community and their integrity. They would go against the law and want me to join in with them. I wouldn't do it, even though I believed exactly the way they believed, because I respect something of the Word of God and the Word of God tells me to properly and orderly arrange myself up under the authorities God Himself has placed over me.

Let me tell you what a witness this does and how God uses it in your life. Over in Romania there was a church that wanted to build another church. They had a bad place to meet in. It was falling apart. They wanted to build themselves an auditorium. So they got all their people together and raised as much money as they could and started building that little church.

Well, the mayor of that town came to them and said,

"Folks, you are going to have to shut the project down."

The preacher said,

"Why? I thought we were doing what was lawful."

He said,

"No, you don't understand. You have to have permission to build this from Bucharest and you don't have that."

The preacher said,

"Oh, no. I didn't realize that. I apologize. I am sorry."

So they backed off the project. They didn't rebelliously build it anyway. They got together and prayed and God gave them wisdom.

He went back to the mayor and said, "Since we can't build our church, we have a lot of good people here who are hard workers. What projects are you doing in the area that we could come and work for nothing to help you out?" The mayor said, "Are you kidding me?" He said, "No, sir. We respect you." He said, "Well, I have got this and this and this." They went out and began to work.

About six months later the mayor came back to him with tears in his eyes and he said,

"I have never seen the kind of work ethic your people have had in helping us. Our people do not have this. Where do you get this?"

The pastor was able to say,

"Well, that is the Lord who lives inside these people. They are not like people who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ."

The man said,

"Because of what you people are and the way you live I am going to personally give you permission to build your church."

The whole thing happened as a result of people's testimonies under pagan, godless authority believing that God said it. Because they loved God, they would submit to that authority.

Something has got to happen to America, folks, and especially to Christians to get us back to this understanding. We need to realize God said it, it is very purposeful and if I love Him and His purpose, then I will love His commandments and will do what He tells me to do. What is your attitude towards authority?