

Authority: Belonging to God

Mark 12:17; Rom 13:1, 6-8; 1 Peter 2:13-17
SS Lesson for 04/12/2026

Devotional Scriptures: Mark 17:24-27

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
Key Verse: Mark 12:17

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

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Entitlement of earthly authorities (17)

- Entitled to not be rebelled against (Prov 24:21)
- Entitled to be paid taxes (Matt 17:25-27)
- Entitled to be respected (Rom 13:7)
- Entitled to be honored (1 Peter 2:17)

Entitlement of God's authority (17)

- To fulfill vows to God (Eccl 5:4-5)
- To love God (Mark 12:30)
- To offer body as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13)
- To offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1)
- To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God (Mic 6:8)

TRIBUTE TO AUTHORITIES (ROM 13:1, 6-8)

Source of authority (1)

- Authorities are instituted by God (1 Peter 2:13-14)
- Authorities are anointed by God (1 Sam 24:5-6)
- Authorities are given power by God (Dan 5:18-19)

Debt to authority (6-7)

- Debt of obedience (Eph 6:5)
- Debt of submission (1 Peter 2:18)
- Debt of honor (Eph 6:2)
- Debt of respect (Lev 19:32)

Requirement of authority (8)

- Requirement of not taking advantage (Deut 24:14)
- Requirement of providing what was promised (Prov 3:27)
- Requirement of the golden rule (Matt 7:12)
- Requirement of loving one's neighbor (Gal 5:14)

SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITIES (1 PETER 2:13-17)

Submit to obedience (13-15)

- Obedience to show faith (Gen 22:9-12)
- Obedience to witness (Acts 8:26-31)
- Obedience regardless of prejudice (Acts 10:19-23)
- Obedience to follow Jesus (Matt 9:9)

Submit to serving others (16)

- Serve out of love (Gal 5:13)
- Serve wholeheartedly (Eph 6:7)
- Serve with the gifts God has provided (1 Peter 4:10)
- Serving makes one great (Mark 10:43-44)
- Serve by carrying other's burdens (Gal 6:2)

Submit to honoring others (17)

- Honor by serving (Matt 20:26-28)
- Honor by seeking other's interests (Phil 2:3-4)
- Honor by giving honor that is due (Rom 13:7)
- Honor by welcoming others with great joy (Phil 2:28-30)

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Gospel of Mark and the epistles of Romans and 1 Peter contain some of the sharpest statements in the New Testament about how Christ-followers should relate to their governments. These passages guide us as we walk out our duties to God and nation. Two aspects of first-century context are helpful for modern readers in this regard. First, the intended audiences of these texts lived under the dominion of a foreign empire. The Roman emperor held total authority. He ruled locally through a structure of governors and other officials. Roman citizens possessed a few rights, but most of the emperor's subjects had minimal legal protections and no say in the political processes that affected them. Public objection toward ruling powers was considered seditious, and officials responded swiftly with overwhelming force. Consequently, the populace possessed few avenues for political or cultural change. Second, the earliest Christians viewed spreading the gospel as their primary responsibility. Therefore, they avoided actions that might hinder their message. They discouraged behaviors that would dishonor the faith community in the eyes of unbelievers—the apostles aimed at discipleship, not political revolution.

Lesson Context: Mark

The Gospel of Mark contains a series of stories with a consistent structure: (1) Jesus' opponents pose a tricky or controversial question, hoping he will stumble in his response, but (2) Jesus gives a response that challenges, frustrates, or silences them (Mark 2:18-22; 2:23-28; 3:1-6; 7:1-13; 11:27-33; 12:13-17; 12:18-27; 12:28-34). The opponents aimed to trick Jesus, harm his reputation, and subvert his authority (12:13). These opponents came from religious sects like the Pharisees and Sadducees, as well as political groups like the Herodians. Conflicts between members of religious sects or philosophical schools were common in the ancient world—as the old saying goes, “Nothing makes better friends than a common enemy.”

Lesson Context: Romans

Paul wrote this letter to introduce himself to the followers of Christ in Rome. He explained the gospel message, corrected rumors, and addressed misconceptions regarding his character and message. One distortion of his teaching was that Paul encouraged his converts to “do evil” so that “good may come” (Romans 3:8). Paul provided examples of upright behavior in response (Romans 12-15).

Lesson Context: 1 Peter

The epistle of 1 Peter was most likely written from Rome in the early AD 60s. During this time, the evil Emperor Nero reigned (AD 53-68). Therefore, we detect a coded reference to the city of Rome as Peter greets his readers from the church “who is in Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13; compare Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2). The Babylonian empire brought about the exile of the southern kingdom of Judah (586 BC). In Jewish literature contemporary to 1 Peter, Babylon represented decadence, immorality, and opposition to God. Some Jews, like the authors of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch (non-biblical books from the collection known as the Apocrypha), also used “Babylon” as a code name for Rome. The author of Revelation calls Rome “Babylon” too. Peter addresses his letter to the “exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). By using the term “exiles,” Peter encourages Christ's followers to perceive themselves primarily as citizens of God's kingdom, even as he addresses the responsibility owed to their earthly government.

Key Verse: Mark 12:17

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at Him

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Entitlement of Authorities (Mark 12:17)

17 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at Him.

Entitlement of earthly authorities (17)

Entitled to not be rebelled against (Prov 24:21)

21 Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious,

Entitled to be paid taxes (Matt 17:25-27)

25 "Yes, he does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes — from their own sons or from others?" 26 "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. 27 "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

Entitled to be respected (Rom 13:7)

7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Entitled to be honored (1 Peter 2:17)

17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Entitlement of God's authority (17)

To fulfill vows to God (Eccl 5:4-5)

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.
5 It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.

To love God (Mark 12:30)

30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

To offer body as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13)

13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

To offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1)

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.

To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God (Mic 6:8)

8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Tribute to Authorities (Rom 13:1, 6-8)

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Source of authority (1)

Authorities are instituted by God (1 Peter 2:13-14)

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

Authorities are anointed by God (1 Sam 24:5-6)

5 Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. 6 He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord."

Authorities are given power by God (Dan 5:18-19)

18 "O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. 19 Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled.

Debt to authority (6-7)

Debt of obedience (Eph 6:5)

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

Debt of submission (1 Peter 2:18)

18 Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

Debt of honor (Eph 6:2)

2 "Honor your father and mother" -which is the first commandment with a promise—

Debt of respect (Lev 19:32)

32 "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.

Requirement of authority (8)

Requirement of not taking advantage (Deut 24:14)

14 Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns.

Requirement of providing what was promised (Prov 3:27)

27 Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act.

Requirement of the golden rule (Matt 7:12)

12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Requirement of loving one's neighbor (Gal 5:14)

14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Submission to Authorities (1 Peter 2:13-17)

13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men —

16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Submit to obedience (13-15)

Obedience to show faith (Gen 22:9-12)

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Obedience to witness (Acts 8:26-31)

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Obedience regardless of prejudice (Acts 10:19-23)

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." 21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" 22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.

Obedience to follow Jesus (Matt 9:9)

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

Submit to serving others (16)

Serve out of love (Gal 5:13)

13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Serve wholeheartedly (Eph 6:7)

7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,

Serve with the gifts God has provided (1 Peter 4:10)

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Serving makes one great (Mark 10:43-44)

43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

Serve by carrying other's burdens (Gal 6:2)

2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Submit to honoring others (17)

Honor by serving (Matt 20:26-28)

26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Honor by seeking other's interests (Phil 2:3-4)

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Honor by giving honor that is due (Rom 13:7)

7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Honor by welcoming others with great joy (Phil 2:28-30)

28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Reason 3: A Clear Conscience (Rom 13:5-7)

Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Subjection which is based only on the fear of painful consequences is as incomplete as sexual purity based solely on the fear of contracting AIDS. A higher reason for subjection is found in verse 5.

The external motivation that promotes submission is the fear of punishment—at least primarily. The motivation Paul calls for here is internal—that of a desire to maintain a pure and undefiled conscience. The standard which the law sets is the minimal standard for all men. The standard set by our own conscience is personal, individual, and hopefully higher than the minimum set by human government.

What is the conscience? It is an internal standard, defining right and wrong. It is not present only in Christians. All men have a conscience (Romans 2:15). The conscience of one may be stronger than that of another (see 1 Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12). Some consciences have become hardened and insensitive due to sin (1 Timothy 4:2), while the consciences of others are sensitized by obedience (Hebrews 5:14). We must never defile our conscience by doing what it considers evil, nor should we offend others by practicing what their consciences condemn as evil (1 Corinthians 8).

Our conscience is not an infallible guide to good and evil. While we must never do what our conscience condemns, we dare not assume that everything our conscience permits is good, since our conscience can become hardened and insensitive (1 Timothy 4:2).

Paul's conscience was very important matter to him. He sought to serve God with an undefiled conscience (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 2 Timothy 1:3), which he urged others to do as well (1 Timothy 1:19; 3:9). A clear conscience is a prerequisite for love and service to others:

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5).

I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day (2 Timothy 1:3).

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14).

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22).

Whenever we violate our conscience we hinder our fellowship with God and our service, to Him and to others. A violated, guilty, conscience makes us less sensitive to sin and more vulnerable to error (see Hebrews 5:12; 2 Timothy 3:6). A guilty conscience makes us more tentative and less bold to proclaim and practice our faith. Due to a defiled conscience, we may tend toward a legalistic, external obedience, based upon appearances rather than on reality (see Luke 16:15).

What does our conscience have to do with submission to human government? Mere outward compliance with the requirements of government is simply not enough. This we can expect from unbelievers, if for no other reason than the fear of punishment. But God desires a fuller, deeper, obedience from the heart. This requires conscientious subjection—submitting done out of obedience to God. Such an attitude of submission enables us to retain the right attitude and actions toward government even when we must disobey specific laws in order to obey God.

An internal attitude of submission stimulates us to obey government even when our disobedience cannot be seen or punished. The actions of verses 6 and 7 are the outflow of an undefiled conscience and a spirit of submission. Paul does not tell us here to “obey the laws of the land,” but rather to honor those in authority and to pay taxes and custom fees. Why are these specific forms of obedience named? I believe it is because these are the very things which are easiest to avoid doing, and the least likely violations to be discerned and punished.

We can be rude and disrespectful to officials and get away with it. We can even more effectively pretend to be respectful and never have our insincerity detected. We can quite easily report our income or our baggage in such a way as to avoid income taxes or customs fees. More often than not, if we are devious, we will not be caught.

But we already know that government has God's authority and ministers for Him. Thus, when we fail to “pay our dues,” whatever these might be, we disobey God. Even if the civil authorities never catch us, our conscience before God will be defiled. Our fellowship with Him will be hindered. Our service to others will be adversely affected. And so we must live by the higher standard. We must not only comply with the demands of government, we must cooperate in spirit. In so doing our conscience will be clear, our testimony untainted, and our service unhindered by sin and guilt. Living in subordination to divinely ordained government is beneficial to our walk with God and our service to others.

Finally, these things which God requires us to give government officials are those things which facilitate the ministry of public officials. Both honor and money are necessary for public officials to carry out their tasks.⁸⁰ Our subordination to those in authority not only means that we should do what we are required, but that we should provide all that is necessary so that our superiors can do their jobs. Our submission means that we serve *and support* them.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/33-christian-and-civil-government-romans-131-7>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

As citizens of God's kingdom, we owe allegiance to God above all. Where a government's laws conflict with God's law, believers must follow God. Yet the God who created the world oversees and sanctions the nations. They exist at his discretion and derive their authority from him. Therefore, believers are also to submit to earthly governments. By obeying human leaders, Christ's followers honor God, submit to his cosmic order, and strengthen their witness to those outside the church. Citizens in Western democracies are blessed with "due process," among other things. Such citizens have opportunities that ancient Christians could only imagine. But no matter the kind of government under which we live, Scripture's commands remain the same: love and care for neighbors, resist evil, and model upright citizenship. Honor others, especially those in high positions, while loving all people well. In other words, reflect the character of God.