

Today's Sermon

God's Goodness in His Gift of Law Enforcement

Rom 12:17-13:7

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, May 29, 2022

Please turn in God's Word to Rom 13 and our message today will be God's goodness in His gift of law enforcement. We studied God's goodness earlier in the book, but our focus today is what our good God has instituted for the good of people through peace officers. In a world where many speak evil of you who God has given to restrain evil, we need to hear God's Word and its good words for you. We hope our time today encourages you all. It's good for the church to give thought to your honorable service in the sight of us all

Our text is Rom 13 but let me first read the context of **12:17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all...**

13:1 Let 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.² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists **what God has appointed**, and those who resist will incur judgment.³ For 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,⁴ for **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.**⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for **the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.**⁷ Pay 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**.

Today we want to obey God by giving thought to what's honorable in the sight of all, paying honor and respect to those we owe (12:17, 13:7). That includes honorable and respectable peace officers and others. The Bible has an important place for civil servants. God in His goodness has instituted law enforcement servants for our good to keep evil from overcoming like it says in Rom 12:21 '*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*'

God puts govt. powers in place to stop abuse and misuse of power

1st point. Authorities (including police) are instituted by God (v. 1-3)

We begin in v. 1 with a phrase 'governing authorities' that we're subject to. It includes all civil authority from a king or a commander-in-chief on down. In this context it's especially those who enforce the law or stop lawbreakers. I say that because v. 4 says '*he bears the sword*' (*he* = the authority, *sword* = a deadly force weapon). Today we'd say '*he doesn't bear the gun in vain.*'

The context is authorities using weapons as an instrument of the state or city

'the sword'=literal execution, or a symbol of authority (like 'the badge')

Would also apply to armed forces, which overlapped with law enforcement in Bible times. After v. 4 mentions bearing the sword, it talks about wrath on evildoing. The OT often describes God's wrath on people who die by the sword / fall by the sword / are slain by the sword. v. 2 mentions judgment, the sword included capital punishment in Bible times. Jesus said if you live by the sword, you'll die by it (ex: if you murder or you're about to murder).

Lethal weapons are needed in self-defense or defending innocent 3rd parties. The sword in the Bible meant deadly force and deterring further criminality.

RP example of guards with M16s outside stores to deter thieves

Middle of v. 1 goes on ... '**For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.**' When did God institute those authorities with the sword and law enforcement? In Gen 3 Adam and Eve broke God's law, and to keep them out of Eden, God sent heavenly officers called cherubim to guard the entrance with the sword, flaming swords.

Humans on earth didn't invent this, God in heaven instituted it.

In Israel, God set up His law and law enforcement. A Bible Dictionary says in Hebrew *šōṭēr* was an 'officer' with civil authority and in modern Hebrew the word means 'policemen.' 'In ancient Israel, the *šōmēr* was a "guard" or "watchman." ... It is also possible that the *pāqîd*, a "deputy" (Judg 9:28) or "commissioner" (Esth 2:3), acted as a policeman... [in the NT] *hypēretēs* ... was a bailiff ... policing activities are also noted throughout Acts 3–5 ... chief captain [was] responsible for maintaining civil order in the province... [in Rome where Paul's writing this letter to] various ranks and statuses also performed duties associated with police (e.g., enforcing the law, preserving public order, protecting property and citizens, assisting in emergencies, registering complaints, investigating crimes, arresting and transporting...'¹

We read of captains over 50 men or centurions over 100 officers

Paul writes to these Romans in Romans 13:2: '*Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*'³ *For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.*'

It's because of bad guys that God has appointed the blue line. How did they resist authorities in NT times? There were zealots who politically protested the presence of the Roman police force and wanted to abolish them. Some used violence. Acts 5:26 HCSB '*the commander went with the temple police and brought them in without force, because they were afraid the people might stone them.*' Stoning is throwing rocks or bricks, Antifa of antiquity?

Roman officers had riot gear, steel helmets, big shields, body armor

There are many ways then and now that authorities can become targeted, but v. 2 ends warning there will be judgment. Recall 2 years ago this week? Law and order unraveled tragically starting in Minneapolis. A man wearing a badge horribly took the life of a man bearing God's image. And soon we saw images of their police station burning, authority replaced by anarchy in cities all over America, and police who risk their lives defending people had people calling for their defunding. Portland became exhibit A of judgment.

Jesus said lawlessness increasing is a sign of the end of the age²

Rioting and rebellion like that brings judgment according to God's Word.

Translations of v. 2 '*he who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted...they who have opposed receive condemnation...*'³

I recognize and scripture recognizes police are sinful and fallible people and need to be held accountable for any misuse of authority or mistreatment of God's image-bearers. But just as no one should judge people by the color of their skin, no one should judge police by the color that they wear. Partiality is a sin, whether against people in black or brown skin or in a blue uniform.

Authority is imperfect (parents, bosses, etc.) but anarchy is insane

Those who say institutions in power are inherently and irredeemably racist deny the gospel that redeems. Marxists resist God who instituted authorities they protest. Christians rightly stand against the white supremacist shooting and stand up for officers that stopped him. To reject police is to reject God who appointed them. The anti-cop movement is anti-God (and anti-family).

God appointed authority in family, church, govt for society's stability

God's Word says police authorities are instituted by God, that's point #1.

Point #2. Law enforcement servants are God's gift for our good (v. 4, 6)

⁴ *for he is God's servant for your good...* the *he* is the authority from v. 3.

You say 'but not all cops are good' (you know good cop, bad cop). Paul is aware of that. Paul said in ch 3 none of us are good on our own. Another reason to respect and not resist one who bears weapons, sadly some die who don't comply. v. 1 says be subject, or submissive. Most cops strive to do good but if you ever meet a bad one, don't provoke his wrath! I have a son who's black and a son who's white, entering their teens years (we've talked racial events of last 2 years) and my job is to teach them to respect authority

⁴ *for 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.* He=the authority who bears the sword and brings consequences on wrongdoing criminals.

What about policemen who do wrong? They'll face God's wrath, it says.

No wrongdoer is above the law. Bad cops should fear and face punishment. God sees what surveillance, dash cams, or body cams can't see (and heart).

There was prejudice in Bible times just as today. Many Roman officers did mistreat Jews, and some Americans have been mistreated by officers. But if we study the context of Rome that Paul's writing this to, it's so much better today! America has come a long way from its past and the rest of the world.

- My experience growing up in a 3rd world country under martial law
- New Years Eve guns, and guy taking out cars New Years Eve 1992
- Visiting a 4th world country in Africa, horrible treatment of Africans

Reality dose of history and other countries: we have it so good here!

In Rom 13:4, police aren't just government servants, they're God's servants for good. Paul's writing to Romans, and almost all of the Roman officers at that time weren't Christians, but God instituted what they do, and so they're serving His purposes anytime they do good in their work. This language of protecting and serving comes out of scripture, they serve by protecting men and women and children with the sword. Serving is a gift, ch 12 talks about gifts that God gives, including serving, same root word (v. 6-7). So those who serve God in law enforcement are part of God's gifts and for our good.

13:6 says we pay taxes and '*the authorities are ministers of God.*' Ministers aren't just pastors or priests. What's the difference between a priest and a pastor? In my case, 5 children :) (and different religion). But whatever faith police officers hold, they're God's ministers as they do what is good. Have you ever thought of police work as ministry? That's a badge of honor! That lifts up what you do as servants of God who works all things for good, 8:28.

Point #3. We need to submit to and support law enforcement (v. 5-7)

⁵ *Therefore one must be in subjection ... Another translation 'submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.'* That's the conscience that kicks in when you're driving and you see a black and white vehicle on the side. Pastor Dale used to say when God saves someone, the last part to be redeemed is the right foot on the gas

When we're not submitting to the law there is possible penalties to fear. To disrespect officers (even unintentionally) can incur wrath. [TMC STORY](#). v. 3 says if we're not doing right, we should be afraid. There's a healthy fear, and our society needs more of that. But there's also a limit to submission for a Christian. Our conscience is to God over government. Jesus alone is King. If an authority doesn't let us gather to worship according to conscience, we obey God's Holy Word above man's health guidance. Consciences differ and we support their freedom to follow their conscience. Our sheriff and county have supported churches, we PTL and need to support them too.

The Paul writing this appealed to his rights and Caesar (constitution?)

We're to be subject to authority unless it calls us to violate scripture. And we're to support authority by honor and respect. The end of v. 7 says we're to pay '*respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*'

The context is officials and officers the church is to respect and to honor.

Honor by speaking to them, thanking them, encouraging them as you have opportunity to interact. For those you know, give the link of this service to hear what God says about their honorable profession. Support in prayer.

Our scripture reading in Lk 7 of a Roman officer is a good template to pray

- A good officer highly values the welfare of all under him (v. 2)
- Pray for officers like him to love their nation and do it good (v. 5)

- Pray for them like him to be worthy (v. 4) and have humility (v. 6)
- Pray they understand authority and submit to the Lord's (v. 7-8)
- Pray they have great faith in the Lord (v. 9) as He said of that officer
- 1 Tim 2: '*first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all ... who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life*' (thank God for and uplift that)
- Jer 29:7 '*seek the welfare of the city...and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare*' (shalom/peace)

That was to Israel in Babylon but it can apply to us

We as God's people need to speak respectfully of and think rightly about officers and live peaceably and pray regularly for them. What do they need?

Point #4. They need the Lord and His gospel of grace just like us

They need the Lord like Ps 127 says: *Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain* (NIV, or NLT '*Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good*'). Watchmen need the Lord. As they guard our cities, they need the Lord as their rear guard and shield.⁴

And they need the gospel, that's how Paul started Romans (1:16)

The Lord Jesus said this about Himself in Jn 10: '**The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice ... Jesus said ... I am the gate for the sheep.** All who ever came before me were **thieves and robbers**, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved... **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full [or 'abundantly'].** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...⁵

Memorial day tomorrow we remember good soldiers who laid down their life in serving our country, and stopping enemies who kill and destroy. Today we need to end focusing on the good shepherd who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life for many. There's no greater love than laying down a life for friends – Jesus did that for enemies (Rom 5:10)!

The ultimate solution to robbers isn't cops, it's Christ. He can save a thief and change him to be one who works with his hands to do good (Eph 4:28).

Retired officer Tony Miano talked about racism, division, or tensions within families or communities on one media interview. He said the 'remedy isn't legislation, education, or medication, it's reconciliation. And the only way real reconciliation's gonna happen in our society is through the gospel of Jesus Christ... if we will but turn from our sin and put our trust in Him.'⁶

Rom 2 says God's goodness should lead you to repentance

He alone can save and change you, not being a good person or policeman.

We had a retired one at our church years ago and I asked him if he knew this abundant life in Christ and why. He said he felt he was going to heaven because he never killed anyone in his career as an officer. The man didn't understand grace and

his need of it, because we've all broken God's law. What I told him, I tell you, we all sinned and fall short of God's glory, 3:23.

And Jesus said sinful anger and insults can send us to hell⁷

As Jesus went to the cross, the gospel often brought Him together with law enforcement. The Israeli authorities put an earlier order out for his arrest, and we read '*the temple police came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why haven't you brought Him?" The police answered, "No man ever spoke like this!"*' (Jn 7:45-46 HCSB). In Jn 18 those police came with armed forces to Gethsemane with Judas and the Jewish leaders. They interrogated Him if He was Jesus, He said 'I Am' and they all fell down! A fight broke out, an ear was cut off, and the police saw Jesus heal that man!

The arresting officers are on the ground, but King Jesus came willingly

Mk 15 says when they took Him into custody, the whole battalion⁸ gathered (600 men). They salute Him in mockery and beat Him, true police brutality.

There was injustice, an illegal and illegitimate trial by Jewish authorities, inhumane flogging by the Roman authorities, and there's inciting of a riot.

He had all authority in heaven and earth but laid down His life for sin

Officers take Him to a cross, nail Him to a cross, and divide up His robes. These Roman law enforcers hear Him say '*Father, forgive them,*' and they see the change in the man on the cross next to Him, a most wanted criminal.

They saw the sky turn dark for 3 hours, they felt the earthquake at the end. The superior officer over the whole operation was shaken and changed, too, Lk 23:47: *when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"* (NKJV, others say he praised)

Mark's gospel adds: *when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

That's the purpose phrase of Mark's gospel (1:1), and this officer declares it

Conrad Jensen was a captain (now retired) of one of New York's roughest police precincts, the 23rd...wrote this to the editor of *Life* magazine... '1900 years ago a centurion (a police captain like myself...) stood by the foot of the cross of Christ and made this statement: "Truly this was the Son of God." He had just witnessed the crime of all crimes. No doubt he was reluctant to carry out the order to crucify "this just person."...Perhaps the centurion saw the peace of God in the face of the penitent thief...If America ever needed something simple and uncomplex, it is now...the preaching of the cross...The vitals of America are being chewed out by plain ordinary sin and lawlessness... salvation comes by faith in the sinless Son of God.'⁹

Captain Jensen understood Heb 2:10, Jesus is '*captain of their salvation.*'¹⁰

But the cross isn't the end of the gospel. There was security detail put at the tomb for 24 hour watch. Their chief said 'make it as secure as you can.' So their squad shut down all access, sealed off the grave, secured the perimeter.

But the command center in heaven dispatches an angel of some rank to the scene. It rolls away the stone to say ‘He is risen indeed’ and the guards fear and fall down as if dead. The gospels have a lot to do with law enforcement.

In the book of Acts we read of a 3rd centurion come to saving faith, a man named Cornelius. And the officer on jail duty with Paul asks ‘what must I do to be saved?’ Paul says ‘believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.’ It’s the first jail ministry, just like some in our church minister that same message in our county jail. Paul made an impact on many other officers in Acts and in his house arrest various officers are basically handcuffed to him and he shares the gospel, even Praetorian Guard start to get saved. I hope this encourages you how much the gospel has to say about those who serve and protect.

BOB VERNON STORY IF TIME?

¹ Daniel L. Hoffman and Tim M. Sigler, “Police & Prisons,” *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical & Post-Biblical Antiquity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014–2016), 73–89.

² Matthew 24:12, note also 2 Thessalonians 2:9: ‘*the coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan.*’

³ NLT, NASB.

⁴ For God as a shield who helps run and jump over walls and have strength for the job or battle, see Psalm 18:29–36. For the Lord as “your rear guard” see Isaiah 52:12 and note the context for people of all nations (v. 10) who the Lord Jesus would come for (52:13–53:12).

⁵ v. 3–11 NIV.

⁶ Tony Miano, “Law Enforcement Lives Matter,” www.sermonaudio.com

⁷ Matthew 5:21–22,

⁸ v. 16–21 ESV, other translations have ‘cohort.’

⁹ W. Harold Fuller with G. B., “Christianity in the World Today,” *Christianity Today* (Washington, D.C.: Christianity Today, 1957), 28.

¹⁰ NKJV.