

LESSON 7

April 12, 2026

Unit II: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Family and Community Whose Rules Rule?

DEVOTIONAL READING: Proverbs 31:4-9

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Mark 12:13-17; Romans 13:1-14; 1 Peter 2:13-17

PRINT PASSAGES: Mark 12:17; Romans 13:1, 6-8; 1 Peter 2:13-17

KEY VERSE

Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him. (Mark 12:17, KJV)

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Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him. (Mark 12:17, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Analyze God's directive for relating to just governmental authorities.
- Honor God through intentional prayer for elected leaders.
- Thoughtfully engage in civic and public life.

*Key Terms

Authorities (Romans 13:1)—Greek: *exousia* (ex-oo-see'-ah): power or right to act; delegated authority; "powers" (KJV).

Due(s) (Romans 13:7)—Greek: *opheilé* (of-i-lay'): debt(s) or obligation(s); "what you owe" (NIV).

Render (Mark 12:17)—Greek: *apodidómi* (ap-od-ceed'-o-mee): to return or restore; "give back" (NIV).

Respect (Romans 13:7)—Greek: *phobos* (fob'-os): reverent fear or honor; "fear" (KJV).

Submit (1 Peter 2:13)—Greek: *hupotassó* (hoop-ot-as'-so): to subordinate oneself; to put in subjection voluntarily.

Well doers (1 Peter 2:14)—Greek: *agathopoios* (ag-ath-op-oy-os'): those who practice what is good or virtuous; "them that do well" (KJV); "those who do right" (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

The passages in this lesson represent the work of three different authors and two distinct literary genres. The gospel of Mark differs from the epistles of Romans and 1 Peter. Yet, since the earliest days of the church in the first century, tensions over jurisdiction have persisted. The Israelites were a conquered people constantly faced with the question of who was truly in charge. This was evident during the trials of Jesus: was it Herod, Pilate, Caesar, or the Sanhedrin? Ultimately, Jesus was executed by the ruling class.

Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, lived with multiple allegiances. He was both Jewish and Roman. His ambition to travel to Rome included the hope of presenting the Gospel to the Emperor Nero himself. Yet, he experienced conflict with local governments as well as his own religious leaders. Eventually, Paul was executed under Nero. Peter wrote his first epistle to Jews living in the Diaspora. These believers endured unjust persecution, and Peter sought to encourage them. Out of this environment of suffering and opposition, Christian hope was born, fueling a church focused on its mission and undistracted by fear.

Introduction

The U.S. Constitution sets up three branches of government—Legislative, Executive, and Judicial—and establishes a system of checks and balances. Each branch has the power to limit or influence the others, which prevents any single branch from becoming too strong. This design requires cooperation and creates accountability through powers such as vetoes, judicial review, and the appointment of officials.

In practice, however, this balance does not always appear even. Laws, executive actions, and court rulings often overlap, raising questions about who holds the final authority. Citizens may wonder how these choices shape daily life and how far government power should extend into schools, courthouses, or other public places where people expect safety and fairness.

Conflicts also develop when federal, state, and local governments all claim authority in the same situation. These jurisdictional disputes can cause confusion, leaving communities uncertain about whose rules should apply.

At its best, the system of checks and balances protects individual rights, strengthens democracy, and promotes fairness for all. The balance of power is meant to guard against abuse and ensure that no leader or group can rule unchecked. Yet the complexity of government means that ordinary people must think carefully about issues of law, freedom, and justice. Such challenges remind us that self-government requires constant effort and raise a timeless question that every generation must face: *Whose rules rule?*

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Render to Caesar and to God (*Mark 12:17*)

KJV

17 And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

NIV

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

This saying of the Master arose in a rather interesting manner. Members of the Sanhedrin were accosting him. This group consisted of members from the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were the Jewish religious leaders. They wanted to entrap Jesus so that they might have a valid reason to turn him over to Rome for treason. Thus, they raised a thorny question by asking about taxes.

During Jesus' ministry, taxation was a sensitive issue. The Romans required the nations under their control, including Judea, to pay heavy taxes that went directly into the emperor's treasury. These included income, land, and poll taxes, as well as tolls on roads, bridges, and goods entering or leaving the country. The Israelites, forced to serve a foreign power, found this deeply burdensome. To make matters worse, the coins used for payment carried the ruler's image, a constant reminder of their subjugation.

In addition to Roman taxes, the people were also responsible for paying tithes to support their own religious obligations in Judea. They could not ignore one duty simply because the other was imposed. Jesus' response to the question of taxes was therefore both politically wise and theologically sound. He honored the state's authority while also affirming God's claims. Rather than avoiding the issue, Jesus gave each side its proper place. This revealed the remarkable wisdom of the Master Teacher.

? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How should believers approach the issue of church and state? Do we give attention to one while ignoring the other?

You Are the Boss of Me! (*Romans 13:1, 6-8*)

KJV

LET EVERY soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

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6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

NIV

LET EVERYONE be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

.....

6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.

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

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

Paul's letter to the church in Rome is one of his most significant writings. It is highly valued because Paul not only used careful language but also addressed essential teachings that shaped the early church and continue to guide faith today. These include justification by faith, salvation, Christ's sacrifice, the power of the Gospel, and freedom from sin. Along with these, Paul also spoke about how believers should relate to government in Romans 13.

The idea that Christians should live under secular authority may seem unusual, but Paul had reasons for saying this. First, Paul was both Jewish and a Roman. Living under two identities, he understood how power and authority worked. Second, Paul believed strongly that Jesus would return soon. With that hope, he did not see the need to overturn the social order. Third, Christianity was still young, and believers needed to coexist peacefully with rulers to avoid unnecessary conflict. Fourth, Paul hoped to one day speak before Caesar himself, believing that the Gospel could even reach the highest levels of leadership. Finally, Paul trusted that God is sovereign. If rulers had power, it was only because God allowed it.

Q WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Can church and state work together in healthy ways? If so, who should take the lead? And how should Christians respond when leaders do not share their faith?

Christian Freedom! (1 Peter 2:13-17)

KJV

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

NIV

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, 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.

15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

16 Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.

17 Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Peter wrote his letter to believers scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. They were living as exiles in communities where they often felt like outsiders. As a result, they required strong encouragement to remain faithful and hopeful. For Jews who had always understood themselves as God's covenant people, the idea of submitting to human rulers was not easy. Yet, under the new covenant in Christ, submission had to be understood in a new way. It was not blind obedience but submission *for the Lord's sake*.

Human rulers, like all people, are flawed and sometimes act from selfish motives. However, when believers show respect to authority because it honors God, their submission assumes a higher purpose. Christians are called to pray for leaders, show honor, and use their freedom to serve God, not to excuse sin.

Daniel's example illustrates this balance. Though he lived as an exile in Babylon, he served faithfully in a foreign kingdom while never compromising his devotion to God. The key question is not simply about rulers but about God's will. When Christians submit to Him first, they can live faithfully in any society. In this way, they honor God while also living in peace with others.

🔍 WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In a world of deep political division, how should Christians submit to leaders or parties whose views are very different from their own?

A Closing Thought

God knows we live in a world that is both religious and secular. Christian freedom is about finding balance between the sacred and the civil. No one modeled that balance better than Jesus. His answer about taxation struck perfect harmony. Paul lived as both Jew and Roman. Peter also knew the struggle of navigating two worlds. Yet, both understood that social issues were secondary to the greater mission of unity in the kingdom of God.

Your Life

As a responsible voter, what qualities do you value most in elected leaders? Are you respectful toward others, regardless of their political party and perspectives? Should you show respect to people in leadership, even when their actions contradict biblical values? Do others see God reflected in your political stances?

Your World!

Do you engage with the world or turn away from it? Do you pray only for leaders you like, or do you bring before God those with whom you strongly disagree? How do you pray when policies or positions clash with your own convictions?

Closing Prayer

O Lord, thank You for giving us faith that faces life rather than escapes it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Do you depend on God, or do you carry every worry on your own? In preparation for next week's lesson, read Mark 9:36-37, 42; 10:13-16.

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, April 13	"A Heritage from the Lord"	(Psalm 127)
TUESDAY, April 14	"My Child, Be Eager to Learn"	(Proverbs 2:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, April 15	"Do Not Despise the Little Ones"	(Matthew 18:7-14)
THURSDAY, April 16	"Obedience that Is Acceptable before God"	(Colossians 3:20-25)
FRIDAY, April 17	"Praise from the Mouths of Infants"	(Matthew 21:8-9, 15-17)
SATURDAY, April 18	"Recognize the Good Deeds of Children"	(Proverbs 20:7-12)
SUNDAY, April 19	"Let the Little Children Come"	(Mark 9:33-37; 10:13-16)