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Our Responsibilities Under Grace - Part 10

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

This whole passage of scripture, verses 1-7, is like a little block that is fitted into the teaching that Paul began in Romans 12:1. I want to make sure we understand something as we talk about our responsibilities under grace. Once I am submitted to the highest authority, God Himself, and the Lord Jesus Christ is truly Lord of my life, then God gives me the ability through the power of His Spirit to be submitted to all other authorities. As a matter of fact, I have a different perception towards those who are in authority.

I was reading and studying this past week and something hit me. As you come out of chapter 12, this love without hypocrisy that we have been talking about in chapter 12, that the Holy Spirit of God produces not only within the church but also outside the church, hits in about verse 17 of chapter 12. Paul begins to talk about persecution. He begins to talk about enemies. He begins to talk about people who treat us wrongly. Then he moves outside the church walls. Even though there is much of that inside the church, there is a lot of that outside the church.

Verses 17-18 say, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." They may not be at peace with you, but you are to be at peace with them. Verses 19-20 continue, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."

Remember, that was not so that you are nice to them so that God can get them. That is not what he is saying. It is saying, if you are

kind to them that will shame them in what they are doing to you and perhaps God can use that to bring them to repentance and they can come to know the Lord Jesus in their own lives.

Verse 21 says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Verse 8 of chapter 13 picks up the subject of love again. It almost seems as if verses 1-7 of chapter 13 are inserted. It is like the Holy Spirit stopped Paul in his tracks and said, "Now, Paul, you had better put this in." Why? Because the enemies, the persecution, the things that they would go through, which are mentioned in verses 17-21 of chapter 12, normally came from instruments of the government. There would be wicked governments. There would be a wicked authority that would bring this persecution upon them.

Paul was reminded by the Holy Spirit that Rome is the capital of the Roman Empire. It would be much more difficult to live in Rome than any other place. This is where the oppression and the persecution would be the most difficult. Paul wanted to make sure that these Romans believers understood that every authority over them had been established by God. Never does he give them the allowance to rebel, to do anything to try to change authority. He simply says, "You submit to that authority that God has appointed over you." That makes all the sense in the world why these seven verses are where they are.

Now, the last time we saw that there is no authority except from God. Verse 1 of chapter 13 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." I can hear many saying, "But wait a minute. Do you mean God established wicked people in positions of authority?" Hang on. God gave them the power, and God gave them the position. They may misuse the power, but all of that is from God. God is the one who puts them in their place. God is the one who raises up kings and establishes kingdoms.

In verse 2 he says, "Therefore he who resists authority [the word "resist" means to stand opposed to authority] has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." In other words, the just penalty, the just punishment, will not necessarily be from God, but from the people who they have opposed, whom God has appointed.

The word there for "ordinance of God" is important to remember. It is the word that means that which has been carefully and purposefully thought through by God. God didn't just throw this commandment out and see how people would handle it. God thought it through. And not only do the people of the world have to obey it, but Christians have to obey it. Being a believer does not give us an exception clause to being obedient and submissive to public authority, civil government, that which God has put over us. God not only appointed all authority, He thought through the command to obey that authority.

Believers take it a step further. We have a conscience and as a matter of fact, we are to let our conscience guide us in this principle. If you will look in verse 5 you read, "Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake." The word "conscience" is referring to that which is inside of us. It gives us an inner witness, not in what we are doing, but in why we are doing it. Everybody has a conscience. But once you become a believer, the Holy Spirit gets involved and begins to teach and train our conscience with the Word of God.

We also have a principle. The Word of God will not allow us to disobey. As a matter of fact, Romans 12:1-2 tells us what develops and teaches our conscience. That is the attitude that we are to have to Christ at all times. Paul says in those verses, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Now, once we are submitted with our minds renewed and our lives transformed, then that gets hold of our conscience. That is part of the process. Our conscience will not allow us, when surrendered to Christ, to disobey civil government. It will not allow us to disobey authority.

I realize now that when you obey the authority that God has put over you it is teaching you something. If you are willing to submit to them, that is a reflection of the fact that you are already submitted to Him. People who rebel against authority are telling you something. They are not just rebelling against the authority down here; they are rebelling against God's authority in their life.

Well, what is the greatest test for a person who actually, literally believes what the Word of God says? It is found in verses 6 and 7. Do you know what it is? It is paying taxes. That is what we have in common. Every one of us has to pay taxes. Our attitude towards paying taxes is one of the greatest proofs of whether or not we are willing to submit to God and to believe what His Word has to say and to honor the authorities God has put over our life.

Let's look at Romans 13:6-7: "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."

I have heard people who say they are not to pay taxes because the government is oppressive. They say they are not to pay taxes, and they are attaching the name "Christian" to that mind-set. May I share with you from the authority of the Word of God? If you have that view and you feel like somehow it is not right for you to have to pay taxes and to submit to what the government tells you, then 1) you are probably not a Christian; 2) if you are a Christian, you are showing your absolute ignorance of what the Word of God says. People who use Christianity to escape obeying the laws of the government are people who are not living renewed in their minds and transformed in their behavior by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Make sure you get that down quick in your theology. If I am submissive to God, I will be submissive to authority. And part of that will be a willingness to even pay taxes.

Paul says, "For because of this you also pay taxes." Now, what does that little phrase "because of this" refer to? It refers to the first five verses of chapter 13 and the fact that if God appointed authority, then we ought to pay taxes which support that authority. That is what he is saying. Because of this: God appointed the authority; He put them over you—therefore, you are to support them, which is what our taxes do, among other things.

I want to take you back into Jewish history and show you some other people who have had to pay taxes. Do you remember way back when Babylon took the children of Israel into captivity? Medo-Persia then took over. They were finally released from Babylon by the Persian king to come back into their land. When they came back into their land, the Persian government put a tax on them that was overwhelming. They had already spent 70 years in captivity, but the government continued to put that overwhelming burden on them.

Let me show you what it says in Nehemiah 5:4: "Also there were those who said, 'We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.'" Have you ever had to borrow money to pay taxes? That was the situation that was going on way back in the Old Testament times when the people of Judah returned to their homeland.

Even their own kings taxed them overwhelmingly. As a matter of fact, when Solomon died, Rehoboam, his son, took over. They came to him and begged him and said, "Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." In other words, "Loosen up. Your father put a lot of weight on us in the sense of taxation. Get off our backs. Let the situation be better." Rehoboam, in 1 Kings 12:14 replied, "And he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men [not of God], "saying, 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"

As a result of that ten tribes of Israel rebelled and went to the north. That was the split in the kingdom. The two southern tribes, Benjamin and Judah, became known as Judah. And the ten northern tribes became known as Israel. Did God ever bless the ten northern tribes for doing that? Absolutely not. They never had a righteous king. Their history was downhill from that point on. They wouldn't get up under the authority. They wouldn't trust God. They wouldn't obey. Therefore, they rebelled.

Sometimes they were overtaxed because of extortion. In other words, Israel's king would be put under pressure by another government which actually had control or power over them, such as has happened in 2 Kings 23:35: "So Jehoiakim gave the silver and gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land in order to give the money at the command of Pharaoh. He exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land, each according to his valuation, to give it to Pharaoh Neco."

If you take taxation back to the first mention of it in Scripture, you find it in Genesis. Joseph has been sold into slavery. His brothers were so jealous they sold him into slavery. While his family thought he was dead he had been made Prime Minister of Egypt. You know the story. The Pharaoh had a dream and in his dream he had a prediction of two seven-year periods of time, seven years of abundance, seven years of famine. So Joseph, being the prime minister, made a law and required of the people a tax that one-fifth of all the harvest be stored away every year for seven years so that during the seven years of famine, they would have plenty of grain. Of course, that is when his brothers came over to get the grain and that is when his family was united and Israel came on over into Egypt.

But the first real mention of taxation, when the people were penalized, when they were required to take what they had honestly earned and put it aside, was with Joseph over in Egypt when the grain had to be put up and stored for famine time. As a matter of fact, later on he made this a permanent law that every year they had to put away one-fifth of all the grain that they took in.

When God established the nation of Israel He established six taxes upon the people. Now we talk about the tithe all the time. I don't think we understand what the tithe really was. It was a tax. It was not ten percent, folks. It amounted to about 24% of what the people took in, whether in crops or whatever per year. It wasn't initiated by a pagan government; it was initiated by God. The principle being that if they are going to enjoy the privilege, then they are going to have to be a part of the responsibility to support what they had. So therefore God set it in order.

The first three taxes were tithes. The first tax was to be a tenth of their income. It was to support the priests who were of the tribe of Levi. Now why would you support the priests of the tribe of Levi? Because that tribe received no land in the Promise Land. They had no means of support, no land to claim. They were the priests of the people, the spiritual leaders, so therefore, Leviticus 27:30 says, "Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord."

What most people don't understand is that the priests of Israel were not just spiritual leaders, they were also the civil authority. They were the government. They made all the governing decisions. So the first thing that happens when Israel is established is that God puts a tax on them to take care not only of the spiritual leaders but the governing authorities which were the priests of the tribe of Levi.

The second tax that He put on the people, also in the form of a tithe, was what they called the annual festival tithe, which was to support the tabernacle and the temple. It was to do even more than that. It was for Israel's cultivation, their social life, their national unity. Now wait a minute, do you mean that God put a tax on the people that was to somehow cultivate national unity, to cultivate their social ways and to cultivate the people there? Yes, He did.

The third tax was also a tithe, but it was only taken up once every three years so it amounted to about 3.3% of their income. Deuteronomy 14:29 explains: "The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do." It was a welfare tax and God did it!

When most people think of taxes, they think "Oh, that can't be of God." But God's first tax was to take care of the priests and the governmental leaders. His second tax was to produce and promote national unity. His third tax was a welfare tax to take care of the poor and the needy and those who were destitute.

Well, those are the first three. The fourth tax was used to support the tabernacle and the temple. It was levied on every Jewish male who was 20 years old or older and was as Exodus 30:14 says, "a contribution to the Lord".

The fifth and the sixth tax were sort of indirect. The fifth tax was levied after every growing season. They had to leave some of their crops unharvested so that the poor and the needy could come by and get the crops from the land. It says in Leviticus 19:10, "Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God."

The sixth tax that God put upon the people was in the form of a sabbatical year. Every seventh year they had to let the land lay fallow for a year. That seventh year they couldn't plant. They couldn't harvest. If any crops came up, that was for the poor. If anything was left over of those crops that came up even though they hadn't planted, then they would use that for food for the livestock.

So there were six taxes, and when you put them all together they came up to about 24%. One of the thoughts that hit me is, wouldn't it be amazing if we had churches that way today? Wouldn't it be amazing if, when you joined the church, we told you, "Listen, if you want to enjoy the privilege of being in this body, then we are going to tax you!"

We have people today who don't have a clue what all this is about. If you are going to enjoy something, you are responsible to take care of it. I have heard people say, "Well, I'll give my money to missions, but I will never give it to the church; because if I was down there, I would do things differently." Oh, what a sweet attitude that so reflects a person's walk with Christ! It is amazing, isn't it? Do you realize that the local church is the key to what is going on in missions? You cut the throat of the local church, and friend, you have just cut the lifeline to missions. I don't know why we can't understand that.

I couldn't help but see this. If you enjoy something, whether it be in society, under the government's rule, or whether it be in the church, God says that you are responsible to make sure that it continues and to sustain it and to support it with whatever your income will allow. This is a beautiful picture here.

You know, it was for not giving of their tithes, the taxes, that God rebuked the people in Malachi 3. I do want you to know when you come into the New Testament, folks, we are no longer under the tithes, I promise you. Just relax, I am not going to get you back up under that again because we are not taxing anybody.

You say, "Why are you over here on the church? He is talking about taxes to the government?" Folks, it all ties in. The original system of taxation God gave to His people is included. If you are not willing to take care of one, I guarantee you that you aren't taking care of the other. So it all ties in together.

I had always believed that it was Old Testament. But I got over into the New Testament to find out what is required in the New Testament. Do you know what I found? God doesn't want 10%, or 22% as some people say, or 24%. Do you know how much God wants in the New Testament? He wants it all!

Now let me throw a principle at you. You say you love Jesus. I say I love Jesus. If a legalistic Jew would, by requirement, give 24% of his income to support that which he enjoys, what in the world should the church under grace be doing? Folks, I am telling you what, when you see what taxation is, God appoints the ruler. God says, "Now support him." He puts a tax on them. The implication is that by taxing the people, then they start becoming responsible to support that which God has placed over them. That is what taxation is. That is all it is.

Let's keep on going. The Lord God established this system. Now when you come into the New Testament, the Roman government is different. The Roman government even allowed the Jews to continue taxing their people. You see, there were taxes in the religion, and there were taxes in the government. You don't bring up the subject of tax and not have to bring in the New Testament because these people knew what it meant to be overburdened and oppressed by taxation.

Now, the religious leaders, called the Sanhedrin (the high priest, the chief priests and scribes), put together what they called a two-drachma tax. It went into what they called a temple treasury. The temple treasury actually funded them. In other words, that was their salary or anything else they wanted. They really got a lot of money off the people. These were wicked people. These are the very people who plotted to put Jesus on the cross.

I want you to see something. The Lord Jesus was involved in a situation to where this two-drachma tax came up. It was supposed to take care of the temple and the priests who were in it. Now here is God, the living Temple on this earth, God Himself, the God-man, and He is having to pay a tax on the temple where God is supposed to dwell on this earth. (Of course, He did not. He never walked past the outer court.) But I want you to see what happens here.

Look at Matthew 17:24. I want you to see how He answers them, what He does, and the reason He does what He does: "And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter, and said, 'Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?' He said, 'Yes.' And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, 'What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?'"

He is bringing up a point. "Here I am the Son of God, the living Temple on this earth. Do you mean to tell me that I am supposed to pay a tax?" That is the implication, but that is not His attitude at all. Look at what He says: "And upon his saying, 'From strangers,' Jesus said to him, 'Consequently the sons are exempt. But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater. [That would have been enough to pay all their taxes.] Take that and give it to them for you and Me.'"

Now that is interesting to me. What He is saying is, "Listen, I am the Son, and you are now being made sons, and the sons don't have to pay this kind of tax, because they collect it from strangers. However, to keep from causing an offense, let's pay it." He not only willingly paid it, He miraculously paid it. He did it miraculously to show who He was, but also that He was willing to bow to human government. He actually paid that tax.

Remember where that went. It went into a temple treasury. You say, "So what?" It was out of this treasury that Judas was paid 30 pieces of silver to betray Him. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, not only willingly but miraculously paid that tax to the very pot that was going to turn around and put Him on the cross. Now folks, who are we to have the attitude that we are not going to pay taxes?

Now, these people who say, "I am not going to pay taxes," I want to look them right in the face and say, "Man, get a life. Man, get real. What do you mean you are not going to pay taxes? If you are a Christian, you had better pay taxes and not only had you better pay them, you had better pay them with a loving attitude because if you love God, He will enable you to have that kind of attitude,

even in paying taxes!"

You may say, "Let's talk about something else. Let's talk about the joy you get from coming to praise the Lord. Let's talk about something else." You know, that is the problem. We skip all this stuff. It is easy to talk about the spiritual life and all these areas, but you get down to this kind of thing and it will show you where you are. If we are not under His authority, we are under no authority. That is what He is trying to show all of us.

The week after the Lord Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Pharisees were running around half crazy. If they could get a charge against Him that would be qualified by the Roman government as treason, then the Roman government would take Him out and they wouldn't have to do a thing. They finally succeeded.

One of the ways they tried was over in Matthew 22. If they could get Him to speak against the government in any way, then they had Him on the count of treason and they could get Him crucified. Matthew 22:15 reads, "Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?'"

They had Him where they wanted Him because if He came back and said, "Only render unto God and don't render unto Caesar" that would be treason and they could put Him on the cross. Jesus knew what they were doing. His whole lifestyle was entirely the opposite. He always submitted to those authorities whom His Father had placed over Him. Verse 18 continues, "But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, 'Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.' And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' And they said to Him, 'Caesar's.' Then He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.'"

Immediately He established the principle that flows right into Romans 13:6-7. There it is right there: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Don't cheat Caesar so that you can give to God. That is not what He said. He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."

I want to make sure you understand that taxation is nothing new. It has been around for a long time. As a matter of fact, if you think that you are overtaxed, just study the history of these people. When Paul wrote the book of Romans, Nero was in power. He was the most deranged emperor Rome ever had. You say, "I don't like the leadership of my country." Well, friend, you had better start liking it because it is nothing compared to what it was in these times. Yet he is teaching these principles in the midst of it.

Look at Romans 13:6: "For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing." The word "servant" there may catch you by surprise. It is not diakonia, the word for minister or servant that we have seen earlier in Romans; it is the word leitourgos. We get the word "liturgy" from it.

It started off with public servants who would serve the people at their own expense. Later on it evolved to people who were in public office by election. They were paid by the taxes that were given by the public. Then it even got into the Christian vocabulary. Many times it is used in the Christian manner of ministry. So it is a word that we can sort of understand. It means to serve people. The idea is civil servants who are serving people.

The verse says, "For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God." They are serving the people but they are really serving God. What does that mean? It means that they are doing what God has appointed them to do. Now here is the key to this whole thing. Some of them know what they are doing. They go to work every day realizing they are in a position that God has put them in. God empowers them to do that. But there are other people who go to work who won't give God the time of day. They wear a badge and have a place of authority. They don't know it, but they are actually serving God. They are actually carrying out His purposes as they administer the law and justice to the people. They are servants of God.

Then Paul goes on and says, "devoting themselves to this very thing." The word "devoting" has the idea of working for it. I mean, they get up every morning, put their clothes on and go to work. Their whole life is devoted to carrying out the law, to serving in that position of leadership. Many of them don't even know they are serving God, but they actually are God's appointed people. They may misuse the power, but God gave them the power and they have the position. You say, "Wait a minute. Does it ever get right?" Listen, God will take care of the ones who aren't doing it right. We are not talking about that. We are talking about our responsibility to line up under them and be submissive to what they say.

Verse 7 finishes it out: "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." The word "due them" is *opheile*, which means that which is owed them. Again I want you to understand the concept. If you are going to enjoy the privileges, there is a responsibility. There is something owed when you have the privilege. That is all taxation is, no matter how man has clouded it. Taxation is God's plan for the people who are enjoying the privileges to support the people who are in those positions of authority who are giving them those privileges.

Then Paul continues, "tax to whom tax is due." The word for "tax" is *phoros*. That was an income, personal income and personal property tax that they had back then. It was usually imposed on them by a foreign government that was pagan and overtaxed them in every area. Paul says, "Pay tax to whom tax is owed." We know that it was not a very fair thing as far as the people were concerned, but they had to do what was put on them.

He also goes on to say, "custom to whom custom." The word "custom" is the word *telos*. It was a form of toll or a goods tax. This was the tax that was used to pay all the Roman vassals, those who were not necessarily Romans but were working with the Romans.

King Herod, for instance, was paid by this tax. Herod was a very wicked man. He was the man in Matthew who slew all the male children when they were trying to find the baby Jesus and the Magi tricked him. Yeah, the same Herod was paid out of this tax. Do you know what that does? It takes every excuse you can come up with and throws it out the window. God says, "You pay it if they put it on you because we don't want any offense to come to the name and the witness that we bear."

Paul continues, "fear to whom fear." That is the same train of thought. The word "fear" is *phobos*. It has the idea of everything from awesome reverence to horrible terror. But here I think it means respect to whom respect is due. In other words, if they are in the position, respect the position. If you can't respect the man, respect the position. Respect the authority God Himself has allowed that man to have. And remember what Paul told Timothy: you are to be praying for these people all the time that you are also doing what they tell you to do. Never cease praying for them.

Well, the final thing he says here in the realm of submitting to authority is "honor to whom honor." To whom it is owed is implied. He is not saying put them on some pedestal as if they themselves are gods. What he is saying is, make sure that what you do is honorable in its intention. Make sure it is not tongue-in-cheek. Make sure that what you are doing is truly honorable on the inside because God knows why we do what we do, not just what we do.

The Word of God tells us as Christians, "You make sure that what you do is honorable in your heart because the God that we serve lives in us and knows everything about us." We are told to submit to them because He appointed them and because He appointed them, they make the laws and we submit. The only time we have an exception is when we are told by government to do anything God's Word will not allow us to do.

You see, folks, verses 1-7 are very important to the whole context of Romans. Rome was the capital city again of the Roman Empire. If you ever wanted to live under oppression and heavy taxes, that is where you wanted to live. What is happening here in Romans is, Paul is saying, "Guys, don't fight. You bow to Him, therefore you can bow to them and you can even pay your taxes with gladness. If you are going to enjoy the privilege you have the responsibility under that privilege."