

# Who is in charge?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So if you were with us last Sunday morning, so not this Sunday morning just gone, but the previous Sunday, we were looking at the beginning of Romans 13 where Paul outlines how we are to, or attitude we are to have to governing authorities.

So he starts Romans 13 verse 1, and Romans 13 is at the end of your handouts. It says, let everyone be subject to the governing authorities. That's his kind of headline.

And that provides us with a neat step back into our series on the 1689 Baptist Confession, because it has a whole section entitled Civil Government, as the Baptists in 1689 talked about how we should relate to those in government and in authority over us.

Now it's worth saying both about Romans 13 and the 1689 Baptist Confession, that what they say about authority, they do not say from a privileged position or a position of influence or ease.

If you were with us on that Sunday morning, you'll know that Romans 13 is written to the church in Rome, who are under the very beginnings of Nero's reign. And Nero was not a nice guy, and he was not elected through a vote of the people, but got there by various underhanded means.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] And the 1689 Baptist Confession, likewise, was only published after a long delay, because prior to the act of tolerance, Baptists weren't allowed to publish books or do various other things as well.

So one historian writes this about the time. So England's act of uniformity enacted on May the 19th, 1662, was a significant piece of legislation during the restoration period that aimed to establish religious conformity within the Church of England.

So you might, if you know your history, Oliver Cromwell had started the kind of revolution, Charles II came back, and he brought in this act of conformity, which made a legal obligation for every church in the country to use the Book of Common Prayer.

So it says here, following the English interregnum, which allowed for a degree of religious liberty under Oliver Cromwell, the return of Charles II brought about a desire for uniformity in worship.

The act mandated that all ministers accept the revised Book of Common Prayer and publicly affirm their adherence to it. Failure to comply resulted in excommunication and a loss of positions, leading to the expulsion of over a thousand ministers who opposed its strict requirements.

[ 2 : 3 1 ] This period was marked by increased persecution and imprisonment of those who refused to conform, resulting in the creation of a rich body of dissenting literature. The act of uniformity laid the groundwork for future conflicts regarding religious freedom, which would not be fully addressed until the act of toleration in 1689.

Now, that history may not interest you. It kind of interests me, but maybe not you. But it means that the people who wrote the 1689 Confession, many of them had been in prison, and were in prison for what they thought about the place of the church and its relationship to the government and those kind of things.

So these people are not writing because they're the people in authority, just like Paul was not writing about being in authority. If you are interested, the ministers objected from their churches for their failure to conform to this act of parliament, where they weren't allowed to be within five miles of the place that they used to minister.

So they weren't, not only that they weren't allowed to go back into the church, but they weren't allowed to go within a five mile radius. And so that was the idea that they weren't then allowed to gather their churches again in any other, in any other way.

And so many of them just disobeyed that law. And so the prisons were apparently full of Baptist ministers at the time. So if anyone had a reason to be anti-authority, it was these guys, but they weren't.

[ 3 : 51 ] They were otherwise convinced. So let's read what they wrote. Chapter 24 of the 1689 Baptist Confession, Civil Government, starts paragraph one. God, the Supreme Lord and King of the whole world, has ordained civil authorities to be under him and over the people for his own glory and the public good.

For this purpose, he has armed them with the power of the sword to defend and encourage those who do good and to punish evil doers. Paragraph two.

Christians may lawfully accept and carry out the duties of public office when called to do so. In performing their office, they must especially maintain justice and peace according to the wholesome laws of each kingdom or other political entity.

To carry out these duties, they are authorized now under the New Testament to wage war in just and necessary situations. Paragraph three.

Because civil authorities are established by God for the purposes stated, we should submit in the Lord to them in everything lawful that they require.

[ 5 : 01 ] We should submit not only for fear of punishment, but also for sake of conscience. We ought to make requests and prayers for kings and everyone in authority so that under their rule, we may live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty.

Now, I know because we've talked about this on a number of Sunday evenings that some of that is quite dense, right? And you might be in a bit of a fog after me reading it. But perhaps you notice that each paragraph is dealing with a slightly different area of authority.

So the first one is talking about the principle of authority. The second is talking about a Christian carrying out authority or taking authority to themselves or an office that carries authority.

And the third is then about how we relate. And so we're just going to deal with it around those paragraphs. So firstly, the principle of authority. Now, in a way, this is what we were spending most of our time on on that Sunday morning looking at Romans 13.

The principle is that God, the God of all authority, to whom all authority belongs, delegates his authority to others that they might rule on his behalf in a particular area.

[ 6 : 09 ] And God promises to hold those rulers to account for the manner in which they've used his authority because it was always his and it still belongs to him. In this paragraph, you might see that the governing authorities have the power of the sword.

They are armed by God to punish evil and to encourage good. And so, as we saw last week, it's not that authority is bad.

Authority is good. And it is there to punish evil and to encourage good. It's interesting as well to note that authority is not imposed as a result of the fall.

As if in glory, there's going to be no authority structures. Right. Rather, authority from God delegated to others is how good is encouraged. And that's how it was always meant to be. And it now also assumes this role of punishing evil.

Now, I think as well as being the civil authorities in view, it goes with other authorities, too, don't we? We're thinking about that last week. Not all authorities carry the sword. So not all authority is the authority to command.

[ 7 : 15 ] Some authority is the authority to influence. So if you think about the authority of a parent over a child, that changes in some ways from command. Put on your shoes.

We're going out to the authority of influence. Hey, would you like to come out? We're going to go out now if you'd like to come as you as your children get as your children get older. And here, this is the authority of command that the government have because they carry the sword to punish disobedience.

One thing that we didn't get into last week, though, which is worth picking up here, is the idea that authority is linked to an office. So notice that in the 1689 confession and in Romans 13, authority is not so much invested in a particular individual because of who they are, but rather because of the office that they hold for a season.

The Lord has ordained the civil authorities. It's an important distinction because authority goes wrong when we mess this up. You imagine, right? Okay, so imagine that you're driving home from church tonight and a car pulls in front of you and they get out of the car and they say, listen, you wait there while all these other cars go past.

You know, well, hang on a minute. Who are you? You know, you just, you've literally just obstructed my right of way. And then they're telling me to let all these other people pass. Who are you to do

that? But if the same car, the same thing that happened, but the car was a police car and the person getting out of the car was a police officer and they told you to do that, that would be different.

[ 8 : 42 ] Even if the individual who is doing it was exactly the same person in both instances. It's because of the office that they have and it's the office that carries the authority, not the individual.

And that's made clear in those three paragraphs in the confession as well. So that is the office that carries the authority. That's really important, isn't it? You can see how that works in different areas. Tony Blair this week wrote his essay being very critical of the government. But his essay carries no authority, does it? Because he's no longer the prime minister. So he can think what he likes, but he no longer has any authority because the authority is invested in the office, not in the individual. And this means, doesn't it, that authority belongs to God. It's his idea. He stands behind it and it still belongs to him and is exercised under his supreme authority.

One way that the Westminster Confession teases this out. So if you know, the 1689 Baptist Confession is based on the Westminster Confession of Faith.

[ 9 : 42 ] The Westminster Confession of Faith is both written as a confession and then the larger and shorter catechism which were designed to teach it. And in the larger catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith, it teaches you authority on the basis of the fifth commandment.

What is the fifth commandment? Honor your father and mother. Well done, Anna. You always were my favorite daughter. Yeah.

And so what is the fifth commandment? It is honor thy father and thy mother that in the days may be long on the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee, as it says in the confession.

Then question 124 in the larger catechism says this. Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment? And this is where it's surprising. Look at the answer. It's there on your handout.

The answer is given is this. By father and mother in the fifth commandment are meant not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts and especially such as by God's ordinance are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church or commonwealth.

[ 10 : 52 ] It then talks about how superiors are to love and serve and be tender towards their inferiors like a parent to a child. We'll have a look at that in a moment. And it then says this.

What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors? We don't like those words, do we? But that's how it puts it. The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is all due reverence in heart, word and behavior.

Prayer and thanksgiving for them. Imitation of their virtues and graces. Willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels. Due submission to their corrections. Fidelity to defense and maintenance of their persons and authority according to their several ranks and the nature of their places.

Bearing with their infirmities and covering them in love so that they may be an honor to them and their government. What are the sins of inferiors against their superiors? It says next.

The sins of inferiors against their superiors are all neglect of the duties required toward them. Envy at, contempt of and rebellion against their persons and places in their lawful counsels, commands and corrections.

[ 12 : 01 ] Cursing, mocking and all such refractory and scandalous carriage as proves their shame and dishonor to them and their government. That's interesting, isn't it?

That it would place that under the fifth commandment that we are to submit not only to our fathers and our mothers. But also to all authority structures instituted by the Lord. I want you with the person next to you or persons next to you to think, do you agree with that?

Do you think obedience to the fifth commandment includes how you treat your boss at work or your teacher or those in government or those in law enforcement? You can answer why or why not. And then why is that so unpopular, do you think?

Go for it. Have a conversation with the person next to you about it. Okay. Okay.

Sorry to interrupt your conversations. What are your thoughts? What are our thoughts on whether or not we think that is a right use of the commandment?

[ 13 : 07 ] I mean, I wish it wasn't. You wish it wasn't, right. So who's going to help Leila out to say it's not? That's not what it means. She said she wishes it wasn't because she doesn't like the idea.

I think the problem is in the word meant because they're assuming that that is what God means when you gave that command. Right. If you say there is an analogy, like for example, with parents and children, it differs as they get older.

Yes. But it doesn't differ in terms of honouring you half an other. Right. And so likewise, I mean, you've got church authority. Church is voluntary. Yes.

Yes. And it doesn't alter with age unless you say somebody gets older and they have more respect and more sensible. Okay. They may not.

But that's not, they're not starting off like being a child that has to have commands. Yes. So for the sake of those on Zoom, we're helpfully distinguishing between meaning and intent.

[14:17] So just whether that's exactly what is intended or whether that is an inference from. Yeah. And so, and even in the relationship to our mother and father changes over time, given our age.

Yeah. Right. Right. Right.

There's quite a lot of different concepts coming out. So we need to kind of try and distinguish. No, no, no. It's good. It's good. So whether or not you base the laws of a country on the Ten Commandments, it might be one thing to say that is, those things are good, but you're not creating a Christian nation by implementing those laws.

And implementing God's punishments. No. No, exactly. Exactly. And I think it's interesting. And we're going to come on and talk about this a little bit in a moment. But I think theologians have over the years quite helpfully distinguished between different uses of the law now that we're no longer under the law in an Old Testament sense.

So one being that it is a helpful tool to guide governments to teach us what's right and wrong. So it should be wrong to murder people in any country.

[15:53] That's, you know, the protection of life is really important. You know, a country should uphold marriage. That's a good thing for us to uphold. It's given by God in creation.

But that, again, doesn't mean that we're recreating the nation of Israel or that we're enacting the punishments. And I think if you're reading the Bible in the ages in which it comes, as we were thinking this morning, that should be, you should be able to distinguish that.

The second use of the law that it talks about is convicting people of sin. You know, you read the law and go, OK, so this is what it says. I'm a sinner. I deserve to be condemned by this God.

This is what holiness is. And then the third would be to teach us about holiness, to teach us what it means to live to please the Lord, which is how I think Jesus is using it in Sermon on the Mount.

Anyone else? Sorry, so this is just not a conversation just between one person and me, but anybody else want to talk about the fifth commandment and whether we thought that was a right use of it or not?

[16:55] Just wait one minute, Charles. Yes. Yes. I guess a key part of what it comes down to Paul saying that if no, he's not going to go to God.

Yes. So then if we're, I may disagree, the character is still not thinking we would follow the third place. Yeah. But if God has the point of that, then we're rebelling against.

It's rebelling against God. Yeah. And it's also, you can see how it's not helpful. Yeah. You know, it's not helpful to rebel against the office and respect the position of promise.

Yeah. Yeah. Yes, so that's helpful. We can see how God has put those out. And so I think you can see a similarity between the principle of the fifth commandment and the principle going on in Romans 13.

There is a parallel there. Thanks, Joey. Charleston, what were you going to say? Sorry. Yeah. Yeah.

[18:07] Yes. Yes, in Titus 2. Yeah. So you're talking about how you treat older men and older women in Titus 2. You treat them with respect. Yeah. Yeah. Why do we think this is so unpopular?

Did anyone talk about that? Go on. We did because we usually think as, yeah, as father and mother.

But then we don't think, for example, about our bosses or authorities that we, I'm not going to like generalize and say like everybody does it. But like we usually listen in this case.

Because I don't like my boss. I don't have a good relationship with them. So like it's important to apply this also in our work area. Yeah. And I was thinking that like, I think that good example someone very wise gave me some years ago was doing everything for God.

Great. It's important for the person who wanted me to have a good relationship with him. Do it for God. great yes so that's thank you that's really helpful it's um it's colossians isn't it where paul says whatever you do whether in word or deed you do it all for the glory of god and i think um yeah and whatever you do whether in word or deed do it all in the name of the lord jesus giving thanks to god the father through him that really helps doesn't it especially when your boss is perhaps a difficult person and then yeah my my deference to them is really my deference to the lord um and so that and that helps me yes so the question about slavery let's park that for a moment um yeah i think yeah we can park that we've talked about that before but yeah let's move on uh and talk about the christian in authority i'm not sure that if we were including or writing the 1689 confession ourselves so that we perhaps include this but it is there in the westminster confession too that it is okay for christians to carry out the duties of public office when called to do so and that then how they do it should be informed by their christian faith so not only should our christian faith shape how we submit to authority it should also shape how we exercise the authority that god has given us now you can imagine at the time this is quite revolutionary but the thinking was that it was good both for christians to hold these positions but also to be christian in the way they went about them so it's okay for a christian to be involved in party politics or for a christian to be in the army and a christian to take up arms and fight the westminster larger catechism included this about how to go about holding a superior office what is required of superiors towards their inferiors it is required of superiors according to that power that they receive from god and that relation wherein they stand to love pray for and bless their inferiors to instruct counsel and admonish them countenancing commending and rewarding such as do well and discountenancing imagine going into a conversation i am discountenancing you now if you're a teacher you could try that tomorrow at school reproving and chastising such as do ill protecting and providing for them in all things necessary for soul and body and by grave wise holy and exemplary carriage to proceed to procure glory to god honor to themselves and so to preserve that authority which god hath put upon them in other words you are to exercise your authority in such a way which is good for the people under you so that they might flourish that they might do well authority is not given to to squash people but to provide an environment in which they will flourish and do well and maybe you've experienced that maybe you've experienced a boss like that or a parent like that or someone at school like that who has enabled you to flourish because they exercise their authority in a way that enabled you to do well what are the sins of superiors the sins of superiors are besides the neglect of their duties required of them and we we talked about that didn't we on sunday that actually uh a kind of neglect of your authority or uh what would it be called oh my mind has just got black what you call it when you don't exercise your authority sorry not yeah abdicating your authority yes abdicating your responsibility thank you yeah um that is wrong um you have been given authority so you need to use that so besides the neglect of the duties required of them an inordinate seeking of themselves their own glory ease profit or pleasure commanding things unlawful or not in the power of inferiors to perform counseling encouraging or favoring them in a way in that which is evil dissuading discouraging or discounting them in that which

[ 23 : 10 ] is good correcting them unduly and julie carelessly exposing or leaving them to wrong temptation and danger provoking them to wrath or in any way dishonoring themselves or lessening their authority by an unjust indiscreet rigorous or remiss behavior we could i mean you could spend ages on picking all of this couldn't you but it is so helpful isn't it and you can see where authority goes wrong because of those sorts of things can't you so there's like the bias towards people at favoring them in that which is evil or commanding things not only that are unlawful but are impossible for them to perform so you know you might have had this in with a boss or maybe a teacher at school who asks you to do something which is way beyond what you are capable of doing either because of the time or the capacity that you might have that is an unjust use of their authority to demand that you do something like that and so if you're in authority don't do that now it's interesting isn't it then if it's okay for christians to hold positions of authority and maybe you hold one and it's even right for christians to hold positions of authority in civic government then really we should perhaps touch upon christian nationalism and i know that's a really controversial and and hot topic at the moment and how much should christian values shape a nation and does that make you a christian country now notice how these instructions tiptoe through that minefield on the one hand it is good for the authorities of a nation to be shaped around christian values right justice peace integrity are good for everyone and you you actually can't pretend to have those things without a good god you know don't you that actually that whole idea of of human inalienable

human rights is really difficult if you don't have a good god who made humanity right the only way that you can argue for human dignity is if that dignity is assigned to humanity by a good god who made us so it is good isn't it for us to assign value to humans because god does but still we mustn't think that by holding high office by a christian holding high office that we're somehow going to build the kingdom of god as if we can build it with a sword we can't can we and the country does not become christian in some way by christians holding high office now here it's worth noticing i think it's worth noticing you can decide for yourself whether you thought it was but there is a distinction then between the baptist confession in 1689 and the westminster confession of faith the westminster confession of faith written by the westminster divines on the command of parliament the baptist confession written by non-conformists who were really largely just expelled because of their unwillingness to submit to parliaments or to the king's instruction that they should submit to the book of common prayer so here the westminster confession has an extra paragraph and in that extra paragraph it says that the government should have authority over the doctrine of the church i know shock horror and the 1689 baptist confession does not have that paragraph and it's interesting it is a strategic deletion from the confession and robert strivens who's written a book on the confession says this the omission of any such statement in the 1689 confession reflects the early realization by baptists that under the new testament church and state are to be separate each has its own sphere of operation and one is not to encroach upon the other questions of doctrine and church practice are for the church to regulate not the state just as the church is not to tell the government how to run the economy or defend its territory so the civil authorities have no right to dictate to the church how to organize its meetings

or what to teach we touched on that didn't we a few weeks ago that the church is given the great commission and are given the keys to the kingdom to show what is real true belief and the state is given the sword and really christians are to pray that the state does their job so that they can do their job of making disciples you don't pray that the government would make disciples of all nations you pray that the church would do that and the government would allow the freedom to do that it's the separation of the church and the state so that brings me to an interesting set of questions for you to discuss with the person next to you so if you're in government as a christian would it be right or wrong for you to seek to make abortion a criminal offense to enforce shops to close on a sunday to make a law like switzerland where you are neutral in all wars to criminalize the worship of gods other than the god of the bible have a think with the person next to you about what you think about that yes or a no on each of those okay um let me interrupt your conversations i should um i should preface this discussion by saying that um we are we are entering into areas over which it's we're free to disagree okay and we're free to think aloud so please don't judge one another by whatever answers are given because it's it's important that is a process of learning we are allowed to say what we're thinking right without fear that someone's going to slam us down or judge us as a result say um and i realize that some of these issues are controversial and difficult so um i wanted to say that um so that first say yes anyone want to say what they thought charleston okay so let's deal with that last one first say number four to criminal it's good that the police are going past as we're talking about this isn't it to uh they're just they're just going to arrest some people for worshiping a different god um is it right is it right to criminalize the worship of gods other than the god of the bible do you think if you were in high office as a christian that that would be one of the things that you were instructed to do yes or no that's it it depends on the it depends on god yes okay so that is really interesting thank you that's a really helpful point it depends what is involved in the worship of that god so if the worship of that god involved child sacrifice you would criminalize it yes absolutely yes but it is the sacrifice that's criminalized it's the it's the act of worship that involves uh the loss of life say again sorry yes so i think okay i'll put out there what i think then you don't have to say what you think so i think this is beyond the remit of a government because i don't think that's what governing authorities are put there in the bible for so i i think for for a government to criminalize the worship of a god given the exception that we had down here which is really helpful unless that act of worship involved the loss of life or something uh criminal or some adulterous act or something like that then you uh then really the freedom to worship um should be granted right because you know don't you that by criminalizing the worship of other gods other than the god of the bible you're not making christians because you cannot make christians like that it's only a work of the spirit that can make christians yes in actual fact you might be doing more harm than good yes yeah definitely okay um make a law like switzerland where you are neutral in all wars no okay yeah uh enforce shops to



authorities.

But you might want to think, if my workplace demanded that I was not allowed to talk about being a Christian, would I obey it? Or would I disobey it? If my workplace demanded that I was unable to express my Christian faith in other ways, or talk about it, or take Sundays off, then would I obey or would I disobey? And those kind of things. You might want to think about that.

You might also want to think about why we find it so easy to rebel in some things, like speed limits, and hard to rebel in areas that really matter, like standing up for the rights of the unborn child. You might want to think about that as you go to bed tonight or something.

But what I'm going to suggest is that in those little groups that you're in, that we pray, and that we pray for one another. This is our prayer, isn't it, in this? It's not just in the land of theory. This is our prayer, that those in authority would enable us to live quiet, godly lives, where we share the good news of the Lord Jesus with others, and that our submission and prayerfulness for those in authority would lead to fruitfulness for our church and our witness.

[ 39 : 42 ] So pray for that with those around you for a few minutes, and then I'll close in prayer. Okay, let me close in prayer for us in a couple of moments.

Heavenly Father, we are very conscious that we owe a lot to men and women down through the years who have really, really thought about and understood authority and how it's to be used. We owe a lot to them because we enjoy so much freedom here tonight because of the sacrifices that they have made. And Lord, we do not want to take those things for granted. We don't want to be thoughtless about what it means to be under authority or in authority. And nor do we want to pretend like your word has nothing to say to how a country should be run or how authority should be submitted to or exercised. And we recognize that we may well find ourselves in years ahead and in times to come in a position where authority over us is not used to give us freedom to worship, but to curtail our freedom to worship. And Lord, we pray if that's our circumstance that you might make us bold and courageous to stand for the Lord Jesus and to continue to speak his name. And we pray that you would,

Lord, prevent that from happening and help us to use whatever influence that we have, whether it's just a vote in a box or whether it's a position of authority that you've given us, that you might help us to promote what is good and to resist what is evil. Lord, that your church might flourish and grow, not at the point of a sword, but at the preaching of the good news of the Lord Jesus. So make us, we pray, those courageous Christians who understand these things and think them through and who live them out. Pray just especially maybe for people here in this room who go tomorrow to a difficult work situation with an unreasonable boss. Pray that you would help them in that situation to do whatever they do in word or deed in your name and giving thanks to you as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.