

# The higher authorities of Romans 13

*(When quoting scriptures, from the Rotherham Emphasized Bible New Testament,  
I will substitute the Hebrew word Yahshua for Jesus, Yahshua and Elohim for God and Anointed for Christ.)*

The, “higher authorities” of Romans 13:1-7 has been interpreted by many religious institutions to mean our civil authorities or government officials.<sup>1</sup> This section of scripture is difficult because the higher authorities could be government officials (although it never states that) or they could be ministers or servants of Yahweh. The Greek word translated, higher, is huperecho, which means to excel and is used five times in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Lets take a look at the characteristics of these individuals, as described in Romans 13, to determine to whom we are to give our submission.

Higher authorities are:

- 1) Appointed by Yahweh (vs. 1).
- 2) Rulers who are a cause of fear for evil workers (vs. 3).
- 3) They praise good works (vs. 3).
- 4) Minister of Yahweh for good (vs. 4).
- 5) An avenger of Yahweh to those practicing evil (vs. 4).
- 6) Servants of Yahweh they are (vs. 6).

Now lets look at some of the behaviors of the government officials, in the Gospels and the books of Acts, to see if they fit the description of these higher authorities. In Matthew 2:16, Herod the Great killed all the male children in Bethlehem who were two years old or younger in his attempt to have the Messiah killed. “Then Herod, having seen that he was deceived by the mages, was very wroth, and having sent forth, he slew all the male children in Bethlehem, and in all its borders, from two years and under.” Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist as recorded in Matthew 14:3-12 . In Acts 12: 1-2 Agrippa I, also known as Herod, killed the apostle James and attempted to kill Peter. “And about that time, Herod the king put forth his hands, to do evil to certain of those of the assembly, and he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword,<sup>3</sup> and having seen that it is pleasing to the Jews, he added to lay hold of Peter also.” Pilate had the authority to release Yahshua Christ from the Jews but instead allowed him to be crucified. Felix, in Acts 23: 24-27, kept Paul bound in prison for two years. Also Yahweh has stated in Hosea 8:4, “They, have appointed kings, but not from me [Yahweh], have made rulers, but I have not acknowledged them:” Yahweh rejected Saul as King but Saul would not give up his

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<sup>1</sup> “Let every person be loyally subject to the governing (civil) authorities. “ (NIV Roms. 13:1)

<sup>2</sup> 5242 ὑπερέχω huperecho *hoop-er-ekh'-o* 1) to have or hold over one 2) to stand out, rise above, overtop 2a) to be above, be superior in rank, authority, power 2a1) the prominent men, rulers 2b) to excel, to be superior, better than, to surpass (Rm. 13:1, Phil. 2:3, 3:8, 4:7, I Pet. 2:13)

kingdom nor his power.<sup>3</sup> (Yahweh has appointed unusual leaders such as Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus but their appointment was announced by the prophets.<sup>4</sup>)

We must ask ourselves the question, “Were these the servants of Yahweh, appointed by Yahweh, to praise the good works of the Church as described in Roman 13, or were they the enemies of Yahweh?” They all had something in common. They were all civil authorities or government officials. Are they the higher authorities spoken of in Romans 13? If we resist them, do we resist Yahweh’s ordinances? Would Yahweh deliver Peter from Agrippa I, who was going to have Peter killed, if he was given his authority by Yahweh? Did Yahweh appoint these men as His servants, to kill children; behead John the Baptist; crucify Yahshua; kill James by the sword and keep Paul in prison for two years? Were any of these men faithful Christians or faithful Hebrews? Emphatically no! Then who are the higher authorities?

They are called “servants [leitourgos] of Yahweh in verse six. Leitourgos is used four other places in the Word of Yahweh. Paul was speaking about himself when he said, “for my being a servant [leitourgos] of Yahshua Christ to the nations” (Rom. 15:16). In Philippians 2:25 Epaphroditus was called a servant, “And I thought it necessary Epaphroditus—my brother, and fellow-workman, and fellow-soldier, and your apostle and servant [leitourgos] to my need.” Leitourgos is used twice in the book of Hebrews. “And unto the messengers, indeed, He said, ‘Who is making His messengers spirits, and His ministers [leitourgos] a flame of fire of the holy places a servant”(Heb. 1:7). “And the sum concerning the things spoken of is: we have such a chief priest, who did sit down at the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens, of the holy places a servant [leitourgos]”(Heb. 8:1,2). Servant is used for apostles, high priest and angels but not for civil government officials. Also, the higher authorities were twice referred to as ministers [diakonos] of Yahweh in Romans 13:4.

A few examples of diakonos are listed below. “Paul and Timothy, servants [diakonos] of Christ Yahshua”(Phip. 1:1). “Ministers [diakonos] in like manner grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not given to filthy lucre” (I Tim. 3:8). “And I say Yahshua Christ to have become a minister [diakonos] of circumcision for the truth of Yahweh, to confirm the promises to the fathers”(Rom15:8). Diakonos, when used in association with Yahweh, always refers to faithful Christians or faithful Hebrews. Other attributes of these servants are that they give praise to those doing good and are appointed by Yahweh to rule.

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<sup>3</sup> And Yahweh said unto Samuel—How long, art thou going to pine for Saul, seeing that, I, have rejected him from being king over Israel? (I Sam. 16:1)

<sup>4</sup> Now, therefore, I, have given all these lands, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant... Jer. 27:6; Thus, saith Yahweh, to his Anointed, to Cyrus—Whose right hand I have firmly grasped, To subdue, before him, nations, And, the loins of kings, will I ungird... Is. 45:1

“That which is good be doing, and you shall **have praise** from it, for of Yahweh he is a minister to you for good”(Rom. 13:3,4). A servant of Yahweh may praise you when you do good but this behavior is not common with a civil government official. “The authorities existing are **appointed** [tasso] **by Yahweh**”(Rom. 13:1). Another example of “tasso” is in Acts 22:10 when Paul said, “What shall I do, Lord? and the Lord said unto me, Having risen, go on to Damascus, and there it shall be told you concerning all things that have been appointed [tasso] for you to do.” In verse three Yahweh states that they rule. Rule is the Greek word “arche” which means “a ruler, commander, chief or leader. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1). Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue (Luke 8:41). These were Hebrew rulers or leaders who were faithful to Yahweh.

Romans 13 is in the context of chapter 12, which is talking about the Body of the Christ and its members. “For as in one body we have many members, and all the members have not the same office, so we, the many, one body are in Christ, and members each one of one another. And having gifts, different according to the grace that was given to us; whether prophecy—‘According to the proportion of faith!’ or ministry [diakonia]—‘In the ministry’” (Rom. 12:4-6). Diakonia is the service rendered by a diakonos as used in Romans 13:4. Yahweh has called believers into the ministry and the Apostle Paul is an excellent example of a called servant of Yahweh serving the Body of the Christ. Chapter 13 gives instructions on how we are to submit to the minister or servants of Yahweh.

A good example of a higher authority would also be the Apostle Paul. He was a servant [leitourgos] of Yahweh (Rom. 15:16). He was called a minister [diakonos] of Christ Yahshua (Phil. 1:1). He praised the believers for doing good; he was appointed by Yahweh (Acts 22:10). But was he a ruler (leader) and a avenger of Yahweh? Lets take a look at I Cor. 4:20-5:5. “For not in word is the reign of Yahweh, but in power? what do you wish? with a rod shall I come unto you, or in love, with a spirit also of meekness? Sexual immorality is actually heard of among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the nations—as that one has the wife of the father!—and you are having been puffed up, and did not rather mourn, that he may be removed out of the midst of you who did this work, for I indeed, as being absent as to the body, and present as to the spirit, have already judged, as being present, him who so wrought this thing: in the name of our Lord Yahshua Christ—you being gathered together, also my spirit—with the power of our Lord Yahshua Christ, to deliver up such a one to the Adversary for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of Yahweh.” I believe delivering someone to the Adversary would fit as a avenger of Yahweh. This is nothing new. Moses, a prophet of Yahweh, had 3,000 people killed in the wilderness (Exodus 32:25-28). The prophet Samuel also killed by Yahweh’s order. “And Samuel saith, ‘As thy sword bereaved women—so is thy mother bereaved above women;’ and Samuel heweth Agag in pieces before Yahweh in Gilgal” (I Sam. 15:33). Higher authorities also bear the sword as described in Roman 13:4.

The sword can mean the Word of Yahweh. “For the reckoning [Word] of Yahweh is living, and working, and sharp above every two-edged sword, and piercing unto the dividing asunder both of soul and spirit, of joints also and marrow, and a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart”(Hebrew 4:12).”Take you up the whole armor of Yahweh... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the saying of Yahweh”(Eph. 6:17). A minister of Yahweh bears the Word (sword) of Yahweh, which is sharper than any two edge sword. To those who practice evil the Word of Yahweh will cut into the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In Romans 13:7 we are to render tribute, tax, fear and honor to those who are due. “The well-leading elders of double honor let them be counted worthy, especially those laboring in word and teaching, for the Writing said, ‘An ox treading out you shall not muzzle,’ and ‘Worthy is the workman of his reward’(I Tim. 5:17,18). Both of these verses are instructing us to render service to the servants of Yahweh. Yahweh commands the believer to support financially the minister of Yahweh (I Cor. 9:11, Phil. 4:16).

In conclusion, Romans 13:1-7 is a difficult scripture. Ministers of the Glad-Message of Yahweh are called by Yahweh and placed in the Body of the Christ to serve and lead its members. They stand for lovingkindness, justice and righteousness. They are excelling authorities. The higher authorities, in Romans 13, could also apply to good government officials, such as King David because “... he [governed] unto thee for that which is good. But, if, that which is evil, thou be doing, be afraid! For, not in vain, the sword he beareth; for, Yahweh’s minister, he is,—an avenger, unto anger, to him who practiseth what is evil” (Rm. 13:4). On the other hand there are other government officials, such as Ahab and Jezebel, who practiced evil instead of good. These individuals are not the servants but the enemies of Yahweh. As Yahweh has said in Hosea 8:4, “They, have appointed kings, but not from me [Yahweh], have made rulers, but I have not acknowledged them.” You will know a tree by its fruit.

*An additional article written on Romans chapter 13 is listed below. It was written in 1750 by the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew. Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1776) was a leading New England clergyman who served at West Church in Boston from 1747 to his death. He was famous, in part, for this 1750 sermon, in which he espouses the cause of liberty and the right and duty to resist tyranny. In 1818, Founding Father John Adams identified Mayhew and this sermon as having "great influence in the commencement of the Revolution."*

### **A Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers: with Some Reflections on the resistance Made to King Charles I**

Let us now trace the apostle’s reasoning in favor of submission to the *higher powers*, a little more particularly and exactly. For by this it will appear, on one hand, how good and conclusive it is, for submission to those rulers who exercise their power in a proper manner: And, on the other, how weak and

trifling and inconnected [sic] it is, if it be supposed to be meant by the apostle to show the obligation and duty of obedience to tyrannical, oppressive rulers in common with others of a different character.

The apostle enters upon his subject thus—*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.* Here he urges the duty of obedience from this topic of argument, that civil rulers, as they are supposed to fulfil the pleasure of God, are the ordinance of God. But how is this an argument for obedience to such rulers as do not perform the pleasure of God, by doing good; but the pleasure of the devil, by doing evil; and such as are not, therefore, *God's ministers*, but the devil's! *Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.* Here the apostle argues, that those who resist a reasonable and just authority, which is agreeable to the will of God, do really resist the will of God himself; and will, therefore, be punished by him. But how does this prove, that those who resist a lawless, unreasonable power, which is contrary to the will of God, do therein resist the will and ordinance of God? Is resisting those who resist God's will, the same thing with resisting God? Or shall those who do so, *receive to themselves damnation! For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good; and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good.* Here the apostle argues more explicitly than he had before done, for revering, and submitting to, magistracy, from this consideration, that such as really performed the duty of magistrates, would be enemies only to the vil actions of men, and would befriend and encourage the good; and so be a common blessing to society. But how is this an argument, that we must honor, and submit to, such magistrates as are not enemies to the evil actions of men, but to the good; and such as are not a common blessing, but a common curse, to society! *But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: For he is the minister of God, a revenger, to execute wrath upon him that doth evil.* Here the apostle argues from the nature and end of magistracy, that such as did evil, (and such only) had reason to be afraid of the *higher powers*; it being part of their office to punish evil doers, no less than to defend and encourage such as do well. But if magistrates are unrighteous; if they are *respecters of persons*; if they are partial in their administration of justice; then those who do well have as much reason to *be afraid*, as those that do evil: there can be no safety for the good, nor any peculiar ground of terror to the unruly and injurious. So that, in this case, the main end of civil government will be frustrated. And what reason is there for submitting to that government, which does by no means answer the design of government? *Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.* Here the apostle argues the duty of a chearful and conscientious submission to civil government, from the nature and end of magistracy as he had before laid it down, i. e. as the design of it was to punish evil doers, and to support and encourage such as do well; and as it must, if so exercised, be agreeable to the will of God. But how does what he here says, prove the duty of a chearful and conscientious subjection to those who forfeit the character of rulers? to those who encourage the bad, and discourage the good? The argument here used no more proves it to be a sin to resist such rulers, than it does, to *resist the devil*, that he may *flee from us*. For one is as truly the *minister of God* as may the other. *For, for this cause pay you tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.* Here the apostle argues the duty of paying taxes from this consideration, that those who perform the duty of rulers, are continually attending upon the public welfare. But how does this argument conclude for paying taxes to such princes as are continually endeavouring to ruin the public? And especially when such payment would facilitate and promote this wicked design! *Render therefore to all their dues; tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honor, to whom honor.* Here the apostle sums up what he had been saying concerning the duty of subjects to rulers. And his argument stands thus—"Since magistrates who execute their office well, are common benefactors to society; and may, in that respect, be properly stiled *the ministers and ordinance of God*; and since they are constantly employed in the service of the public; it becomes you to pay them tribute and custom; and to reverence, honor, and submit to, them in the execution of their respective offices." This is apparently good reasoning. But does this argument conclude for the duty of paying tribute, custom, reverence, honor and obedience, to such persons as (although they

bear the title of rulers) use all their powers to hurt and injure the public: such as are not *God's ministers*, but *satan's*? such as do not take care of, and attend upon, the public interest, but their own, to the ruin of the public? that is, in short, to such as have no natural and just claim at all to tribute, custom, reverence, honor, and obedience? It is to be hoped that those who have any regard to the apostle's character as an inspired writer, or even as a man of common understanding, will not represent him as reasoning in such a loose incoherent manner; and drawing conclusions which have not the least relation to his premises. For what can be more absurd than an argument thus framed? "Rulers are, by their office, bound to consult the public welfare and the good of society: therefore you are bound to pay them tribute, to honor, and to submit to them, even when they destroy the public welfare, and are a common pest to society, by acting in direct contradiction to the nature and end of their office."

Thus, upon a careful review of the apostle's reasoning in this passage, it appears that his arguments to enforce submission, are of such a nature, as to conclude only in favour of submission *to such rulers as he himself describes*; i.e. such as rule for the good of society, which is the only end of their institution. Common tyrants, and public oppressors, are not intitled [sic] to obedience from their subjects, by virtue of any thing here laid down by the inspired apostle.

I now add, farther, that the apostle's argument is so far from proving it to be the duty of people to obey, and submit to, such rulers as act in contradiction to the public good, and so to the design of their office, that it proves *the direct contrary*. For, please to observe, that if the end of all civil government, be the good of society; if this be the thing that is aimed at in constituting civil rulers; and if the motive and argument for submission to government, be taken from the apparent usefulness of civil authority; it follows, that when no such good end can be answered by submission, there remains no argument or motive to enforce it; if instead of this good end's being brought about by submission, a *contrary end* is brought about, and the ruin and misery of society effected by it, here is a plain and positive reason against submission in all such cases, should they ever happen. And therefore, in such cases, a regard to the public welfare, ought to make us with-hold from our rulers, that obedience and subjection which it would, otherwise, be our duty to render to them. If it be our duty, for example, to obey our king, merely for this reason, that he rules for the public welfare, (which is the only argument the apostle makes use of) it follows, by a parity of reason, that when he turns tyrant, and makes his subjects his prey to devour and to destroy, instead of his charge to defend and cherish, we are bound to throw off our allegiance to him, and to resist; and that according to the tenor of the apostle's argument in this passage. Not to discontinue our allegiance, in this case, would be to join with the sovereign in promoting the slavery and misery of that society, the welfare of which, we ourselves, as well as our sovereign, are indispensably obliged to secure and promote, as far as in us lies. It is true the apostle puts no case of such a tyrannical prince; but by his grounding his argument for submission wholly upon the good of civil society; it is plain he implicitly authorises, and even requires us to make resistance, whenever this shall be necessary to the public safety and happiness. Let me make use of this easy and familiar *similitude* to illustrate the point in hand—Suppose God requires a family of children, to obey their father and not to resist him and inforces [sic] his command with this argument; that the superintendence and care and authority of a just and kind parent, will contribute to the happiness of the whole family; so that they ought to obey him for their own sakes more than for his: Suppose this parent at length runs distracted, and attempts, in his mad fit, to cut all his children's throats: Now in this case, is not the reason before assigned, why these children should obey their parent while he continued of a sound mind, namely, *their common good*, a reason equally conclusive for disobeying and resisting him, since he is become delirious, and attempts their ruin? It makes no alteration in the argument, whether this parent, properly speaking, loses his reason; or does, while he retains his understanding, that which is as fatal in its consequences, as any thing he could do, were he really deprived of it.