

April 12, 2026

“Authority: Belonging to God”
Lesson 2

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

Intro

In all three of the texts that are used today, the intended audiences were under the dominion of Rome. The Roman emperor had total authority, and he ruled through a system of governors and other officials. Roman citizens had a few rights, but most had minimal legal protections and no say in the political processes that affected them. Any public objection toward the ruling powers was seen as sedition, usually met with overwhelming force. The people possessed few options for political or cultural change. Also, the early Christians viewed spreading the gospel as their primary focus and responsibility. Therefore, they avoided actions that might hinder their message. They discouraged any behaviors that would dishonor the Christian community in the eyes of unbelievers.

Mark’s gospel is filled with multiple stories of Jesus’ opponents posing tricky or controversial questions, hoping he will stumble in His response. Instead, Jesus’ answers challenged or frustrated or silenced these opponents, which came from both religious and political groups. Romans is Paul’s letter to the church in that city, written to explain the gospel message further, correct rumors, and address some misconceptions regarding Paul’s own character and message. One of these misconceptions was that Paul encouraged believers to “do evil” so that “good may come”. 1 Peter is his letter to the “exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”. Calling them exiles is Peter’s way of asking them to see themselves primarily as citizens of God’s kingdom, even as he talks about their responsibilities to their earthly governments.

Read Mark 12:17

1. vs. 17: Jesus answers a question about whether they should pay a tax to Caesar

This comes from a group of both Pharisees (religious) and Herodians (political)

If Jesus says they should pay the tax, the Pharisees will say He is breaking Moses’ Law

If He says no, the Herodians can charge Him with treason against Rome

Jesus answers the question by calling for a coin, which has Caesar’s image on it

He tells them, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”

The answer shows that Christians owe something to their earthly governments

They are to meet these obligations, not try to avoid them

The answer also shows that God is owed something by the people

He is owed their honor, respect, obedience, and worship

Caesar is not the ultimate authority—He is an earthly one who gets what he is “owed”

This answer prevents Romans from claiming Christians are disloyal to the state

God’s people are responsible for their earthly citizenship as well as their heavenly one

Read Romans 13:1, 6-8

2. vs. 1: Paul here says that all authorities have been established by God

However, this doesn't mean total obedience to what an evil or tyrannical ruler orders
If their directives conflict with God's, then obedience to God's ways takes precedence

Peter asked the Sanhedrin if they should obey God or man (Acts 5:29)

Paul was beaten and imprisoned multiple times for unlawful conduct

God may allow that authority to be in power, but our obedience is tempered

3. vs. 6: Paul says "This is also why..."

In vs. 3-5, he says that governing powers serve the people

They uphold what is right and punish wrong behavior

Here he notes that they officials are "God's servants", doing their work full-time

As God's servants, they deserve to be supported (financially) by the people's taxes

No doubt, many feel at times that being taxed is a burden

There were corrupt tax collectors in the 1st Century that took advantage of people

Despite potential injustices, Paul invites believers to see taxation differently

It's not just a legal obligation—it's a moral one as well

God has given them authority to maintain peace, safety, and order

The word "servants" here implies *service*, as in the term "public servants"

4. vs. 7: This verse is concerned about paying debts that a person owes

Paul says this applies to at least four areas: taxes, revenue, leadership, and God

People owe taxes as part of a governmental system—pay them willingly

People owe revenue, a part of their income, to maintain the functioning of the system

These are two aspects of our current taxation program in America

Those who are leaders are to be given "respect" and "honor"

Their positions are due this attitude, like how one treats a police officer

Those two words also apply to our attitude toward God

Honor in particular means respect given to another, human or divine

5. vs. 8: Paul here sums up a Christian's obligation toward their debts

They are all to be paid

The only one that is to continue is our "debt to love one another"

This one is a debt that we never finish paying off; it is to continue forever

This love is to be not just toward believers, but to all people

The Good Samaritan showed love to someone whose people didn't like him

Jesus said a neighbor is anyone who needs help

Paul says this kind of love fulfills "the law", referring to Lev. 19:18

Read 1 Peter 2:13-17

6. vs. 13a: Peter writes this epistle from Rome, where Christians suffer persecution from Nero

He emphasizes the authority of governmental laws, saying people should obey them

He says we are to obey "for the Lord's sake", the same point made by Paul

7. vs. 13b-14: Peter here notes two areas of earthly authority: the emperor and the governors
A primary task of the government is to protect the innocent “from those who do wrong”
The opposite of that group is “those who do right”, who Peter says will be commended
This commendation isn’t the main goal, but a by-product of Godly behavior
This reflects well on God and His church
Peter is calling for believers to consider how their behavior serves as a witness for God
8. vs. 15: Peter appeals to the church by noting that good behavior is “God’s will”
Believers are to be models of proper living
Opponents to the faith called Jesus and His followers law-breakers and hostile
If believers live in a way that benefits others lawfully, they “silence” the negative voices
They are to carefully submit to the civil authorities
This submission will help the church’s mission and will protect the faithful believers
This submission naturally assumes the civil law is not asking believers to disobey God
9. vs. 16: Peter encourages Christians to live rightly, freely, but not to do evil
There are two extremes of behavior: *legalism* and *license*
Legalism stresses following the rules as the way to achieve righteousness and God’s favor
License views God’s grace/forgiveness as a way to continue to live an immoral life
Peter’s statement is between these two, in a category called *liberty*
Liberty means being free from sin, obeying God out of love and not obligation
Peter says we are to live as “God’s slaves”—willingly obeying Him out of love
10. vs. 17: Peter summarizes what he has written in vs. 12-16 with four short phrases of action
Give honor and respect to everyone—everyone
Give the best and continual love to all who follow Jesus--even when they mess up
Direct awe and reverence to God
Give honor (esteem) to governmental leaders because of their position

Application: As Christians, we owe allegiance to God above all. If a government’s laws conflict with God’s law, believers must follow God. However, God created the world and sees all the nations in it. They exist at his discretion, and get their authority from Him. Therefore, believers are to submit to earthly governments. By obeying human leaders, Christ’s followers honor God by submitting to His order and strengthening their witness to those outside the church. No matter what kind of government a person lives under, Scripture commands the same actions of disciples: love and care for neighbors, resist evil, and model upright citizenship. Honor others, especially those in high positions, while loving all people well. In other words, reflect the character of God. s

Prayer: Father God, help us learn the proper balance between our life in this world and our citizenship in Your kingdom. Guide us in following Your will as we fulfill our responsibilities to earthly authorities and fellow human beings. In Jesus’ name, Amen.