

“Motivation for Obedience”  
Romans 13:5  
(Preached at Trinity, April 3, 2011)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. These verses in **Chapter 13** deal chiefly with our relationship to the civil authorities. God has placed all men under authority.  
This authority comes in many forms. As we've seen there is familial authority, ecclesiastical authority, and civil authority. In addition there is occupational authority (slaves are commanded to submit to their masters). There is educational authority (teachers are sometimes referred to as master).
2. The problem with the sinful human heart is we despise all authority, beginning chiefly with the authority of God. God has the right and the power to rule and we must submit to His dominion.  
In addition, God has delegated authority upon the earth and commands us to be in subjection.  
**Romans 13:1** – “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.”
3. As we go through this passage Paul gives several motivations for our obedience.
  - A. In **Verse 2** Paul states that disobedience to the civil magistrate is disobedience to God who placed him in power.  
**Romans 13:2** – “Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”
  - B. In **Verse 3** Paul states the motivation of the fear of punishment from the hand of the civil authorities.  
**Romans 13:3** – “For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same;”
  - C. Again, in **Verse 4** Paul sets before us the fear of the sword as a motivation for obedience.  
**Romans 13:4** – “for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.”
4. As we come to **Verse 5** Paul summarizes our motivations for obedience.  
**Romans 13:5** – “Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience ' sake.”

5. The concept of the conscience is important in the epistles of Paul. Of the 29 times the word is found in the NT 20 are in Paul's epistles. In addition to this four are in Hebrews which many think was written by Paul, and 2 are in Acts where Paul is speaking in his defense. This means 26 of the 29 times.  
What does Paul mean by the word here and how is he contrasting it with the word "wrath?"
- I. By wrath, Paul is speaking of the punitive consequence of disobedience
- A. We can see this in terms of the penalty inflicted by the state  
**Verse 3** – "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil."  
 KJV – "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil."  
**Verse 4** – "But if you do what is evil, be afraid"  
 "an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."
1. The civil authority has the power to enforce it's will upon its citizens.  
 Their power to punish evil doers causes fear  
 We can see this in our own civil government
    - a. We are permitted to self-report our income and taxable deductions but there are stiff penalties for filing inaccurate tax returns. The fear of the IRS encourages obedience.
    - b. There are posted speed limits with stiff fines for disobedience. The fear of getting a ticket brings compliance.
    - c. There are thousands of laws that demand our obedience with many penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment. These penalties are designed to create enough fear to result in obedience
    - d. When you erase the fear you erase the deterrent to lawlessness.
  2. The ultimate penalty is the sacrifice of life – the civil magistrate has the power of the sword.  
 For wrath's sake obedience is the logical decision
- B. This is true of all sorts of authority – the fear of wrath or penalty results in compliance.
1. Parents have the power of the rod  
**Proverbs 22:15** – "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him."  
**Hebrews 12:9** – "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?"
  2. The church has the power of accountability. We hold one another to high standards. We have the power to censure and the ultimate threat of excommunication. This should strike fear into the heart of those who stray. Paul refers to this action as delivering "such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh"
  3. Employers have the power of the purse – to give increases in salary and the have the power of termination – a powerful motivation.
  4. Teachers have the power of the grade and they can increase the workload.
- C. The ultimate fear of wrath is from the hand of God  
**Romans 13:2** – "Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 13:2** – “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”

1. Since disobedience to the civil authorities is equated with disobedience to God rebellion brings a person under the judgment of God
2. God’s wrath should be a powerful deterrent to sin. It is one aspect of coming under conviction. For the first time we find ourselves lost and condemned and under God’s judgment.  
**Hebrews 10:31** – “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”
3. While the wrath of the state and the wrath of God’s judgment are powerful deterrents to disobedience they are not the most powerful.  
Paul states:  
**Romans 13:5** Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience ' sake.
4. Paul describes the ultimate motivation for obedience as “conscience sake.”  
What does Paul mean by this.

## II. Our ultimate motivation for obedience

### A. What is the nature of the human conscience?

1. It is the inward voice that discerns between right and wrong.
2. Its existence is also a testimony to the mercy of God.
  - a. God uses it to restrain the utter wickedness of our hearts
  - b. Knowing the wickedness of man it's a wonder we have a conscience at all.
3. The conscience is shaped by several influences
  - a. It is shaped by moral values instilled in is from our youth
  - b. It is shaped by the mores of society  
Society often shapes morality – There was a time when sex outside of wedlock was considered shameful, divorces were relatively rare, drunkenness was considered great sin  
People naturally want people to think well of them.
  - c. It is shaped by God’s Law which is written upon the hearts of men.  
The conscience is God’s revelation of Himself upon the hearts of men.  
**Romans 2:14-15** – “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;”
4. The conscience isn’t an infallible witness, particularly in the life of an unbeliever.
  - a. Many justify themselves clearing their conscience of wrongdoing.  
**Titus 1:15** – “Unto the pure all things *are* pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving *is* nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.”

- b. Before Paul was converted he considered himself blameless. He thought persecuting Christians was doing the work of God. He wrote to the Philippians:
 

**Philippians 3:4-6** – “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: <sup>5</sup> Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”
- c. Christ slew his conscience and declared him vile and wicked.
- 5. In the believer the conscience is taught and corrected by the Word of God.
 

**Psalms 119:11** – “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

  - a. It is that inner voice whereby the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. It is a warning system for the soul much like pain is a warning system for the body.
  - b. The conscience is used by the Holy Spirit as a gate to keep us from sin. It is that small voice within that tells us, “I shouldn’t be doing this.” “I need to do this.”
  - c. By conscience here Paul is speaking of our subjection to God.
- B. What is the ultimate rule of our conscience?
  - 1. What ultimately motivates our obedience?
    - a. Is it the wrath of God? Is it the fear of hell? Do we come before God as an overbearing tyrant who rules with rod of iron? No!
    - b. For the Christian our ultimate motivation for obedience is our love for God—a God who is merciful, gracious, and full of goodness.
    - c. There is an infinite difference between legal obedience (the fear of wrath) and evangelical obedience (the obedience from a conscience in love with Christ).
  - 2. I think this is the distinction Paul is making here – “not only because of wrath, but also for conscience ' sake.
  - 3. Not just because we fear the punishment but we don’t want to displease the one we love
- C. This is the heart of Christianity
  - 1. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands with Christ in mind. Jesus is their motivation for obeying their husbands.
 

**Ephesians 5:22** – “Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”
  - 2. Slaves are commanded to submit to their masters with Christ in mind
 

**Ephesians 6:5** – “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;”

3. Our ultimate service is to Christ. He is our motivation for obedience in all things.

**Ephesians 6:6-7** – “not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. <sup>7</sup> With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,”

4. When the motivation is Christ our duty becomes our delight; obedience becomes our delight. We don't obey the civil authorities with bitterness but with joy.

Samuel Bolton speaking of the difference between legal and evangelical obedience: “The one kind of man does duty as a sick man eats his food, not out of desire for it and delight in it, but because he knows he will die if he does not eat; yet he has no desire or stomach for it. But the godly man does the duty after the manner in which a healthy man feeds, not merely because he needs food, because he desires it and delights in it.”

**1 John 5:3** – “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”

- D. This is the ultimate rule of obedience
  1. The parent gains respect at first through the fear of the rod but his ultimate goal is to win the hearts of his children.
    - a. Through their love, compassion, and mercy their children despise the thought of offending them.
    - b. Their ultimate obedience comes when they come to know Christ and understand their submission to their parents is pleasing to their Savior.
  2. Our obedience to the civil authorities comes not out of fear of punishment but out of our desire to please our Savior.
  3. We obey the speed limit; pay our taxes; respectful to our leaders. All because we love Christ.

#### Conclusion:

1. Yes, the sword of the civil government is fearful. Even more, the wrath of God is a terror. But we do not obey out of fear but out of love.
2. May every duty, every work of service, every act of obedience have but one motive—the praise and glory of the God who has captured our heart.