

# EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



## From My Window

Edward Gibbon was a prolific 18<sup>th</sup> century historian. His six-volume work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, is still considered a masterpiece of insight into Roman culture. Two things stick out to me about his work. First, the decline of the empire was tethered to a loss of civic virtue and duty among its people—they became lazy and uncaring. In short, Rome fell because its citizens only cared for the moment and what “pleasure” could bring to them. Second, though he was not kind to the Christian community, he believed that the reason it survived and thrived when persecuted was due to “the enthusiasm of the believers.” I pray that the church of Christ today will energetically embrace God in this way— “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.”



## 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual VBTS Commencement

On Sunday, May 1, 2022, the seminary held its 22<sup>nd</sup> Commencement in the auditorium of Colonial Baptist Church. This year, seven graduates completed their degrees. Congratulations to the class of 2022!

### Graduates, Pictured Above (From Left to Right)

- Caleb Sisson* – Master of Theology
- Christian “Drew” Johnson* – Master of Theological Studies
- Pete Schrader* – Master of Divinity
- Cara Wiebe* – Master of Biblical Studies
- Ethan Van Bruggen* – Master of Theology
- Brandon Parker* – Master of Biblical Studies
- John Ahern* – Master of Biblical Studies

## *“Responding to our Government and Each Other . . . biblically”*

### *Romans 13:1-7*

Over the past two years, no text has been argued more in the evangelical church than Rom. 13:1–7. Some use this text to affirm the necessity of COVID vaccinations—“our government demands this of us, and we must submit”; yet others use the same text and affirm the very opposite—“our government may demand this inoculation, but we are not called by Paul to obey but exercise a spirit of submission.” Using the same passage, good people are passionately lining up on either side of this issue. Is it possible to respond to our government and to fellow church members without agreement on COVID, yet without unkind words—either spoken or written? I think so, but only if you are willing to take a broader look at this passage. If so, here are two thoughts.

**First, the context of Rom. 13 must be embraced.** In Rom. 1–11 Paul presented a detailed exposition of *the gospel of God* (1:1) explaining God’s wrath against *all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men* (1:18), God’s gift of righteousness *through faith in Jesus* (3:22) to the *ungodly* (4:5), and God’s new order of life for justified sinners under *the rule of the Spirit* (8:2). However, Paul’s gospel is not complete. Therefore, he writes chaps. 12:1—15:13 pressing his readers to exhibit in their daily lives the change (transformation) which the gospel produces. His foundational point is in 12:1–2 urging believers *to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God*. To be clear, Calvin writes, Paul’s use of “bodies” does not mean “bones and skin, but the whole mass of which we are composed.” In Cranfield’s words, “we are wholly God’s property.”

Having stated the fact of this new transformation, Paul describes five “church matters” to be evidenced. In each case, the believer’s life is absolutely different from his pre-conversion days as one consumed with *the desires (lusts) of his or her heart* (1:24). In short, here they are: Paul expects believers to humbly serve one another (12:3–8), display genuine love—“not acting but real” (12:9–21), live as model citizens under your God-ordained gov’t (13:1–7), do no wrong to your neighbor (13:8–10), live each day in light of the “coming day” (13:11–14), and pursue peace and unity among the members of the church (14:1—15:13) . . . *so that together you may with one voice glorify God* (15:6–7). These “matters” function as a unit in this essay by Paul. Therefore, whatever one’s “conviction” about how to respond to the government’s requirement “to be taxed,”—or anything else the authorities may ask of its citizenry—the Christian’s response must fit within these “five displays” of transformation, *so that “together with one voice”* the church glorifies God! Don’t forget: the source of this “unified voice” is our transformed living.

**Second, the initial command of Paul to the church under gov’t authority is significant.** He states: *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities* (v. 1a). Paul’s choice of the verb “to submit” should capture our thinking. It is a term used by him to guide our personal relationships (Eph 5:21), our families (Titus 2:5), our church leadership (1 Cor. 16:16), and even our relationship with Christ (Eph. 5:24). In other words, it is a multifaceted concept that demands utmost care and tender responses. When this verb is used in respect to the church and governmental authorities, Paul reminds the reader, that God is the foundation of this directive as the Sovereign One (v. 1b). Therefore, any demand our gov’t asks of us should solicit a deep response from us: What does God’s word say about this? This means we should ask: Will my response hinder ministry to the body (12:3), or misrepresent genuine love for my church family (12:10), or detract from honoring my gov’t authorities (13:8), or make me ashamed at “his coming” (13:11), and most important, will it allow my assembly to publicly glorify God in our community (15:6)? So now, let us evaluate our responses to government and to each other . . . biblically.