

POWER TO THE PEOPLE: REVISITING CIVIL RESISTANCE IN ROMANS 13:1–7 IN LIGHT OF THE NOAHIC COVENANT

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ABSTRACT

Romans 13:1–7 has been the most important text in scripture for Christian reflection on political authority, yet what it does not say has left Christian social ethicists and political/legal theorists with many lingering questions, especially about the proper response to unjust magistrates. To what resources should Christian thinkers look to illumine the gaps left by the Pauline silence, and just how absolute or relative did Paul intend his remarks in Romans 13:1–7 to be? This article presents a twofold thesis in response to this twofold question. First, it argues that the Noahic covenant, Genesis 8:21–9:17, is an important, although overlooked, background resource for interpreting Romans 13:1–7. Second, this article illustrates the practical benefit of reading Romans 13 in light of the Noahic covenant by offering a new argument for why Christians should not interpret Paul's unqualified command to submit to civil authorities as absolutely forbidding resistance to unjust magistrates. Paul's words about magistrates in Romans 13 have not superseded the obligation to pursue justice that God gave to the human community as a whole in the Noahic covenant. Thus the primal obligation resting in the people implicitly qualifies Paul's instructions.

KEYWORDS: civil resistance, Romans 13:1–7, Genesis 8:21–9:17, Noahic covenant, Noahide laws

Romans 13:1–7 has been the most important text in scripture for Christian reflection on the nature and legitimacy of political authority, for obvious reason. Easy to miss in debates about the text is that Paul speaks quite clearly and leaves little room to wonder about his general view of civil government: God has appointed civil magistrates, God commissions them to enforce justice,¹ and Christians (and indeed all human beings) are to submit to them, honor them, and pay taxes. With few exceptions, the broader Christian tradition has accepted these ideas, which have formed the core of Christian political and legal thought.

1 In this article I usually refer to *enforcing* justice rather than simply *doing* justice, because the two biblical texts on which I focus, Genesis 9:5–6 and Romans 13:1–7, speak about *rectifying* justice rather than *primary* justice. Primary justice refers to the obligation to treat people justly by giving them their due: a professor who gives an A to a student doing excellent work treats her justly; a shopper paying the store's price for an item before leaving with it treats the shop owner justly. Rectifying justice refers to the just remedy for a violation of primary justice. Genesis 9:5–6 and Romans 13:1–7 speak of the authority to render rectifying justice, not the general obligation to pursue primary justice. On the distinction between primary and rectifying justice, see also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), ix–x.

Many important questions remain, nevertheless, thanks mostly to what Paul does not say. Perhaps most striking is that Paul describes civil officials as acting justly. He writes not a word about magisterial injustice—even though he had plenty of personal experience with it. This in turn provokes readers of Romans 13 to wonder whether and how Paul might have modified his call for submission had he been thinking of unjust magistrates. It is tempting to conclude that Paul was simply not thinking about unjust authorities and thus to leave things there, but the moral questions that unjust laws and governments provoke are so acute (and unfortunately so common) that Christian social ethics and Christian political and legal theory can hardly find this course satisfying. To what resources should Christian political, legal, and moral thinkers look to illumine the gaps left by the Pauline silence, and just how absolute or relative did Paul intend his remarks in Romans 13:1–7 to be?

In this article I pursue a twofold thesis, corresponding to this twofold question. First, I argue that Genesis 8:21–9:17, which recounts God’s covenant with Noah after the great flood, is an important background resource for interpreting Romans 13:1–7, although commentators have almost entirely overlooked it. If we wish to understand and apply Paul’s teaching in Romans 13, we most likely should read it as building on a foundation laid in Genesis 8–9. Second, to illustrate the practical benefit that reading Paul in Noahic perspective might provide, I offer what I believe is a new argument as to why Christian ethicists and Christian political and legal theorists should not interpret Paul’s unqualified command to submit to civil authorities as absolutely foreclosing a right (or even responsibility) to resist unjust magistrates. I argue that the obligation to do justice that God gave to the human community as a whole in the Noahic covenant has not been superseded by Paul’s high words about magistrates in Romans 13, and thus that this primal obligation resting in the people as a whole implicitly qualifies Paul’s instructions. I take up these two issues in order.

THE NOAHIC COVENANT AS BACKGROUND TO ROMANS 13:1–7

In this first section I argue that the Noahic covenant, Genesis 8:21–9:17, is important background for interpreting and applying Romans 13:1–7. For precision and clarity, I do so through two sub-claims. I argue first that Paul very likely wrote Romans 13:1–7 with the Noahic covenant in mind, and would have been pleased for readers conversant with the Hebrew scriptures to understand his words as building upon Noahic foundation. I then argue that, even if Paul did not have the Noahic covenant in mind when writing Romans 13, the Noahic covenant is still important background for Christian ethicists and legal and political theorists seeking to be faithful to Romans 13 while contemplating a variety of circumstances that Paul did not address.

Romans 13:1–7 and the Jewish Tradition of the Noahide Laws

Did Paul likely have the Noahic covenant in mind when writing Romans 13:1–7? The first part of my argument offers evidence for this conclusion in the Jewish tradition concerning the seven laws God gave to the sons of Noah—that is, to the Gentiles. I claim nothing dogmatically, but suggest that Paul knew about this Jewish tradition, such as it was in his day. Thus it is plausible that Paul would have associated his teaching in Romans 13 with Noah and, by extension, with the Noahic covenant of Genesis 8–9.

The Noahide laws refer to seven general moral obligations that bind Gentiles and form the basis for relationships between Gentiles and Jews. According to Jewish theology, Jews alone are bound by the laws of Sinai, but God holds Gentiles morally accountable through the Noahide laws. These

laws prohibit six things—worship of idols, taking God’s name in vain, murder, sexual immorality, theft, and eating flesh torn from a living animal—and require one thing, the enforcement of just laws through a legal system.² Why are these called the *Noahide* laws? The rabbis who developed this tradition believed that God imposed moral requirements upon the human race before the covenant at Sinai, and Noah’s place in Genesis—as a righteous man and the father of humanity after the great flood—made him the paradigmatic Gentile in moral relationship with God. Jewish tradition did not assert that Genesis 8:21–9:17 directly commanded all seven laws, although this text does touch directly or indirectly on four of the seven: it speaks indirectly to the morality of sex (9:1, 7), murder (9:5–6), and formation of just legal systems (9:6) and explicitly forbids the eating of blood from an animal (9:4).³

One of the seven Noahide laws is of particular interest here.⁴ Paul’s teaching that God has ordained civil authorities (Romans 13:1–2) to administer justice (13:3–4)—in context, Paul speaks specifically about the authorities of pagan Rome—corresponds closely to the notion that Gentiles should enforce just laws. As Markus Bockmuehl puts it, Romans 13 reflects “a point of view that is remarkably compatible with later rabbinic ideas of the legitimacy of Gentile government—along with the Noahide obligation to establish and honor civil authorities and law courts.”⁵

Was Paul consciously promoting this Noahide law in his epistle to the Romans? This seems possible only if the Noahide law tradition already existed in Paul’s day. Unfortunately, it is impossible to say exactly when the tradition originated. Among extant sources, the first explicit reference to it appears in the *Tosefta*,⁶ a collection of material explaining Jewish law that is commonly dated to the late second century C.E., although there is good reason to think that the pertinent text in the *Tosefta*—*Abodah Zarah* 8.4—originates from no later than the early second century.⁷ Thus perhaps only half a century separates the writing of Romans from an explicit statement about the seven Noahide laws. Furthermore, rabbis must have been talking about the idea of the seven Noahide laws for quite some time before they began recording it as part of their oral tradition. We cannot know for just how long they were talking about it, but the book of *Jubilees*, written some two centuries before Romans, says that Noah passed along moral commands to his children after the great flood. Several of the commands it mentions correspond to the seven Noahide laws.⁸

2 See, e.g., Michael J. Broyde, “The Obligation of Jews to Seek Observance of Noahide Laws by Gentiles: A Theoretical Review,” in *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, ed. David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman, and Nathan J. Diament (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1997), 109–10; Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 150, 160. See generally David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983).

3 For relevant discussion, see Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 150–51; Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew*, 151; David Novak, *The Jewish Social Contract: An Essay in Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 50.

4 On the obligation of Gentiles to administer justice through courts of law, see especially Nahum Rakover, *Law and the Noahides: Law as a Universal Value* (Jerusalem: The Library of Jewish Law, 1998).

5 Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 137.

6 See Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew*, 3. The relevant part of the *Tosefta* begins in this way: “Concerning seven religious requirements were the children of Noah admonished.” Jacob Neusner, *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew with a New Introduction* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 2:1291–92.

7 See Klaus Müller, *Tora für die Völker: Die noachidischen Gebote und Ansätze zu ihrer Rezeption im Christentum*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1994), 47–48; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 159.

8 The relevant section is *Jubilees* 7.20: “During the twenty-eighth jubilee . . . Noah began to prescribe for his grandsons the ordinances and the commandments—every statute which he knew. He testified to his sons that they should

Jewish teachers, therefore, were associating Noah with a universal human morality for quite some time before the birth of Saul of Tarsus. And if this idea was circulating for so long, Paul, born in the Diaspora and trained by elite teachers in Jerusalem, almost certainly knew about it.⁹

Thus it is quite likely that Paul associated Gentile morality, and specifically the obligation to enforce just laws through a legal system, with the Old Testament figure of Noah. But would he have associated this obligation with *the Noahic covenant* as recorded in Genesis 8:21–9:17, which is my chief concern in this study of Romans 13? It seems unlikely that a learned rabbi, thinking about Noah, would not have thought simultaneously about the biblical texts that narrate Noah's story. But rather than jump to a hasty conclusion, I now turn to Genesis 8:21–9:17 itself and consider whether an affirmative answer to this last question is justified.

The Substantive Similarities of Romans 13:1–7 and the Noahic Covenant

The main concern at this point in the discussion is whether Paul wrote Romans 13:1–7 with the Noahic covenant in mind. Paul's likely familiarity with the developing Jewish tradition of the Noahide laws makes such a premise plausible but does not prove it. To test its degree of plausibility I now turn to the Noahic covenant itself. Noting the extensive substantive similarities of Romans 13:1–7 to the Noahic covenant, Genesis 8:21–9:17, and especially to Genesis 9:5–6, I argue that these similarities make it highly plausible, even likely, that Paul had the Noahic covenant in mind as he wrote Romans 13.

To appreciate the following argument, readers should keep in mind that Paul must have known the Hebrew Bible extraordinarily well. As N. T. Wright has put it, "Israel's scriptures were as familiar to Paul, and as readily available in his well-stocked mind, as Beethoven's sonatas to a concert pianist."¹⁰ Furthermore, many New Testament scholars commenting on Romans 13:1–7 remark that Paul was evidently drawing on old Jewish beliefs embedded in the Old Testament, and these scholars are surely correct.¹¹ Therefore, if we can identify an Old Testament text that is relevant to civil law and government and that makes numerous claims substantively similar to

do what is right, cover the shame of their bodies, bless the one who had created them, honor father and mother, love one another, and keep themselves from fornication, uncleanness, and from all injustice." See *The Book of Jubilees: A Critical Text*, trans. James C. Vanderkam (Lovanii: E. Peeters, 1989), 2:46–47.

9 The perception of Noah and the meaning of the Noah stories among Jewish communities during this time period are complicated subjects. For general discussion, see, e.g., Jack P. Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1968); Dorothy M. Peters, *Noah Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Conversations and Controversies of Antiquity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008). Such studies indicate that Noah was a pervasive topic of conversation in Jewish circles, which seems to confirm the likelihood that Paul would have been aware of the developing tradition of the Noahide laws.

10 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1:13.

11 See, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, "Romans 13.1–7—A Charter for Political Quietism?" *Ex Auditu* 2 (1986): 64–65, 67; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 764, 770; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 794, 798; Ben Witherington and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 309, 311; Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 467; Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 37–38; N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 10:717, 718; N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 65–66; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 789; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 682; Leander E. Keck, *Romans* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 314; Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans*

Romans 13:1–7, it would be compelling to conclude that Paul was not oblivious to this text while writing Romans 13:1–7. As I now argue, Genesis 8:21–9:17 (and especially 9:5–6) is such a text. It is relevant to civil law and government and contains numerous substantive similarities to Romans 13:1–7. What is more, I believe that it displays more points of substantive similarity to Romans 13:1–7 than any other single text in the Old Testament. I mention seven substantive similarities specifically.

A first and striking point of similarity is that both texts describe civil authority as delegated from God. Both Paul and the Noahic covenant identify God as the one who holds ultimate judicial authority and claim that God commissions human beings to exercise this power on his behalf. In the Noahic covenant God addresses “Noah and his sons” (Genesis 9:1) and asserts his ultimate authority: “For your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man” (9:5).¹² God possesses supreme judicial authority, but immediately proceeds to delegate it: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (9:6). Contrary to common opinion, the text appeals to the image of God probably not in order to highlight why murder is so bad but in order to explain why God delegates such a profound authority to human beings.¹³ And if so, the most noteworthy thing about the text is not the nature of the punishment but the identity of the one who administers it.

Paul also emphasizes God’s delegation of authority to human beings. In the text immediately preceding 13:1–7, Paul commands Christians not to repay evil for evil or to take vengeance (12:17, 19). Instead, he explains, “leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (12:19). God has the ultimate authority to judge and punish. But then a few verses later Paul explains that civil magistrates are “instituted” (13:1) and “appointed” (13:2) by God; they are God’s “servant[s]” (13:4) and “ministers” (13:6). They avenge and carry out God’s wrath on wrongdoers (13:4), the very task that belongs to God (12:19). Thus, both Paul and the Noahic covenant describe a profound delegation of judicial authority from God to his human servants.

A second point of similarity between Romans 13 and the Noahic covenant is that coercion undergirds civil authority. The Noahic covenant speaks of civil authority being exercised by means of *bloodshed*: “whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). Paul writes that civil officials “bear the *sword*” (Romans 13:4). As discussed next, these texts authorize coercion only in pursuit of justice, never for the sake of arbitrary violence. But the sobering fact remains that both texts highlight the threat of violence that lies behind legitimate civil authority.

A third point of similarity is that both Romans 13 and the Noahic covenant portray civil authority as delegated from God for the purpose of enforcing justice, and specifically retributive justice. In the Noahic covenant, Genesis 9:6 makes this clear: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.” Put briefly, the punishment is *blood for blood*. This expresses the *lex talionis*, the law of retribution, most famously known through the later biblical phrase, “eye for an eye,

(Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 397; Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 79, chapter 5; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 136–37.

12 Unless otherwise noted, English translations of scripture are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001).

13 For arguments in favor of this view, see, e.g., W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 163; Stephen D. Mason, “Another Flood? Genesis 9 and Isaiah’s Broken Eternal Covenant,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 3 (2007): 192–93; David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 116–17.

tooth for a tooth” (see Exodus 21:23–25; Leviticus 24:18–21; Deuteronomy 19:21). The *lex talionis* does not communicate that the ideal of justice lies in bodily mutilation, but in the principle of proportionality: the punishment ought to fit the crime. Evil actions deserve a fitting retribution. A wrong merits a proportionate penalty in response.¹⁴

State-enforced retributive justice has its critics, but Paul is not among them. Nicholas Wolterstorff claims that Paul ascribes no retributive function to magistrates in Romans 13,¹⁵ but that is certainly incorrect. Paul’s terminology in 13:4 alludes back to what he says at the end of Romans 12: while Christians should “repay no one *evil for evil*” (12:17), should not “*avenge*” themselves, and should “leave it to the *wrath* of God” (12:19), Romans 13:4 says the civil official “is the servant of God, an *avenger* who carries out God’s *wrath*” on the one who does *evil*.¹⁶ Civil authorities, according to Paul, are responsible for doing what Christians (in their private capacity as Christians) are not to do.¹⁷ But what exactly are Christians not to do? They are not to seek retributive justice through the *lex talionis*, paying back “evil for evil” (12:17). This implies that the civil magistrate, entrusted by God with the task withheld from private Christians, must administer this retributive justice. The nature of the justice God commissions human beings to pursue is therefore the same in Genesis 9:6 and Romans 13:4.

Fourth, both the Noahic covenant and Romans 13:1–7 describe God as delegating coercion-backed authority to pursue *protectionist* ends, but not *perfectionist* ends. Here I borrow terms sometimes employed in political theory to discuss the purpose of civil law and government. Perfectionism claims that the “task of the state is to promote virtue in the citizens” while protectionism holds that the “task of the state is to protect citizens from being wronged.”¹⁸ My point here is an extension of the previous one. The responsibility to pursue retributive justice presented in Genesis 9 and Romans 13 is protectionist in nature.¹⁹ The use of coercion to promote the virtue of citizen or community is absent in both texts.²⁰ Whether either text should be read as prohibiting governments from pursuing perfectionist functions altogether is another question we need not

14 For penetrating discussion of these and other issues pertaining to the *lex talionis*, see William Ian Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

15 See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 85–87; Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 198.

16 The similar terminology is easy to see even in translation, but is especially evident in the original Greek. Christians are not to return κακον for κακου (Romans 12:17), while magistrates are to punish those who do κακον (13:4). Christians are not to avenge (εκδικουντες) themselves, for vengeance (εκδικησις) is the Lord’s (12:19), while the magistrate, as servant of God, is to be an avenger (εκδικος) (13:4). Christians are to leave place for God’s wrath (οργη) (12:19), while the magistrate, again as God’s servant, is to be an avenger unto wrath (οργην) (13:4).

17 Among New Testament scholars who see a similar connection between Romans 13:3–4 and these earlier verses in Romans 12, see Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 759; Moo, *Romans*, 792, 802; Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” 717–18; Jewett, *Romans*, 796.

18 Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, 101.

19 Wolterstorff offers an explicitly protectionist interpretation of Romans 13:1–7 in *The Mighty and the Almighty*, chapter 8. N. T. Wright does not use the language of “protectionism,” but he seems to make a similar point in remarking that the “appointed task” of the “temporary subordinates” is “to bring at least a measure of God’s order and justice to the world.” Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” 719.

20 Perhaps the only statement in 13:1–7 that sounds remotely perfectionist is Paul’s comment that the one who does what is good will receive praise from the magistrate. This comment is enigmatic, but the most thoroughly documented study of this statement, of which I am aware, argues that Paul referred to the honor that Roman officials rendered to wealthy public benefactors, not to the promotion of community virtue. See Bruce W. Winter, “The Public Honouring of Christian Benefactors: Romans 13.3–4 and 1 Peter 2.14–15,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34 (1988): 87–103.

consider here. For now I simply observe that perfectionist responsibilities are noticeably absent in both Genesis 9:5–6 and Romans 13:1–7. This is another feature these texts share in common.

A fifth point of substantive similarity between Genesis 8:21–9:17 and Romans 13:1–7 is worth noting even though difficult to explain adequately in two paragraphs. Both texts embed their instructions about judicial authority in the context of a general, minimalist moral structure. Neither text is morally vacuous or relativistic, but each is morally thin. The Noahic covenant is concerned about human moral conduct, especially in community, but mentions only three matters specifically: procreation (Genesis 9:1, 7), proper eating (9:3–4), and doing justice (9:5–6). These moral issues are substantive, but minimalist, providing a guide for the human community to survive but no instructions about how to thrive. In many respects this observation goes hand-in-hand with the previous discussion about the Noahic covenant's protectionist but not perfectionist tenor.

Romans 13:1–7 also communicates matters that are morally substantive, yet minimalist. Comparing 13:1–7 with what comes before and after is necessary to appreciate this claim. The whole of Romans 12 unfolds against the background of Paul's initial exhortation for Christians to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God and to be transformed by the renewal of their minds (12:1–2). He proceeds to describe the love, humility, joy, patience, and generosity that should mark the Christian community (12:3–21). Paul resumes this line of thought in 13:8–14, urging believers to show the love that fulfills the law and to pursue a life that abhors all "works of darkness," in light of the immanent coming of Christ. Romans 12:1–21 and 13:8–14 present a very thick morality. In comparison, what comes in between is strikingly minimalist. In 13:1–7 Paul uses only generic moral terms: "good" (*αγαθος*) and "bad" (*κακος*). Civil magistrates are to punish those who do bad works and praise those who do good works. Christians, therefore, should "do what is good," submit to their magistrates, and render them honor and taxes. Commentators from a variety of theological perspectives recognize the striking difference in moral depth between 13:1–7 and what precedes and follows, although they often differ about the implications for Christian personal and social ethics.²¹ At present I simply observe again the close similarity between Romans 13:1–7 and the Noahic covenant.

Two final and connected similarities round out this discussion. The sixth is the universal—rather than particular or parochial—flavor of both texts. The theme of universality pervades Genesis

21 From a Mennonite perspective, John Howard Yoder recognizes the clear differences between Romans 13:1–7 and what precedes and follows, concluding, "The function exercised by government is not the function to be exercised by Christians." See Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), 199. For Yoder, this means that Christians should not participate in these government functions. Other writers, sympathetic to a liberationist perspective, also see 13:1–7 as very different from the surrounding material, and believe Paul's conservative posture here exposes contradictions in his thought. See, e.g., Neil Elliott, "Romans 13:1–7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997): 186, 203; Neil Elliott, "The Letter to the Romans," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah (New York: T & T Clark, 2009): 210; Jewett, *Romans*, 803. Another approach, to which I am sympathetic, defends a "minimalist reading of Romans 13," but not in a way that makes Paul's thought internally inconsistent or makes the Bible politically irrelevant. See Gerrit de Kruijf, "The Function of Romans 13 in Christian Ethics," in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Jonathan Chaplin, Robert Song, and Al Wolters (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002): 233–35. Among other scholars commenting on the distinctiveness of the Romans 13:1–7 ethic in comparison with surrounding texts, see Robert H. Stein, "The Argument of Romans 13:1–7," *Novum Testamentum* 31, no. 4 (1989): 326; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Paul's Stoicizing Politics in Romans 12–13: The Role of 13.1–10 in the Argument," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, no. 2 (2006): 163–72. Among scholars noting the lack of anything distinctively Christian in 13:1–7, see Keck, *Romans*, 324; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 771.

8:21–9:17. God enters the covenant with Noah, his sons, and their offspring after them (9:9), which in context indicates the entirety of the subsequent human race. The covenant extends beyond humanity to “every living creature” (9:10, 12, 15–17), which explains why God’s ordering of the post-flood world extends to animals as well as humans (9:2–4). God’s promise to maintain the regularity of “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night” (8:22) and to preserve the earth from another devastating flood (8:21; 9:11, 15) suggests that the covenant extends even to the inanimate natural order. All of this implies that the divine delegation to enforce justice (9:5–6) enfolds and benefits the entire human race.

Romans 13:1–7 points in the same direction. Although this text lacks the cosmic dimension present in Genesis 8–9, Paul has the whole human race in view. Paul wrote this letter to the church at Rome, and thus addressed Christian believers particularly. But he makes clear that duties toward civil authorities apply to all people. He begins by exhorting “every person” to be subject to the governing magistrates (13:1). In fact, the phrase Paul uses here, *πασα ψυχη*, also appears in the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Genesis 9:10, to describe God’s covenanting with every living creature. In the latter part of 13:1 Paul also says that there is “no authority” that is not ordained by God; put positively, God ordains every existing authority. Paul motivates obedience by appealing both to the common fear people experience when they run afoul of sword-bearing magistrates (13:4) and to the pangs of conscience (13:5), another universal human attribute, which Paul has mentioned earlier in Romans when showing that all people, Jew and Gentile, are accountable before God (2:14–15). Thus both the Noachic covenant and Romans 13:1–7 describe God’s delegation of judicial authority as matters relevant to the whole of humanity.

The seventh and final similarity I mention is that both the Noachic covenant and Romans 13:1–7 lack a redemptive element. Both biblical texts present God as creator and sustainer, but not as redeemer. In the Noachic covenant God promises in various ways to preserve the natural order and human society: God will prevent another great flood (Genesis 8:21; 9:11, 15), sustain the regularity of times and seasons (8:22), and maintain boundaries between animals and humans (9:2). Even the covenant’s moral requirements—regarding procreation, eating, and doing justice—are all basic necessities of societal survival. But the Noachic covenant lacks key aspects characterizing God’s later biblical promises of salvation, such as the forgiveness of sins and an eschatological new creation. This covenant promises to keep evil within certain bounds, but never to conquer evil once and for all.²² Romans 13:1–7 is similar. While Romans as a whole contains one of the most detailed and extensive discussions of salvation in the Christian canon, Romans 13:1–7 is like an island, without reference to Christ or any redemptive benefit in him. As many New Testament scholars comment, this text is theological rather than Christological, practical rather than soteriological.²³ It deals with how God has ordered this present creation, but does not describe or anticipate a coming new creation. This corresponds to the previous point. If God’s work of delegating authority to do justice is for the human race universally rather than for the Christian community particularly, it makes sense that Paul roots this work in God’s identity as universal creator and sustainer.

In this section thus far I have described seven important points of similarity between the Noachic covenant recorded in Genesis 8:21–9:17 and Romans 13:1–7. These similarities are not incidental or vacuous, but of substantive theological and practical import. To emphasize their significance, I

22 See VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, 104–7.

23 See, e.g., Dunn, “Romans 13.1–7,” 65; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 771; Stein, “The Argument of Romans 13:1–7,” 329–30; Hultgren, *Romans*, 467; Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” 717, 721; Keck, *Romans*, 319, 321; Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric*, 396; Stanley E. Porter, “Romans 13:1–7 as Pauline Political Rhetoric,” *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 3, no. 6 (1990): 131–32.

close this section by claiming that Genesis 8:21–9:17 appears to have more extensive similarities to Romans 13:1–7 than does any other Old Testament text. Such a claim is difficult to prove, but to test its accuracy I suggest a brief comparison with the Old Testament texts that are its most likely competitors. As mentioned above, commentators on Romans often note that Paul’s teaching about civil government picks up on themes common to an established Jewish tradition. These commentators cite numerous Old Testament texts in which they see this tradition grounded. Most of the repeatedly cited texts, such as Isaiah 42:2–4; 45:1–13; and Daniel 2:21, 37–38, 5:21, teach that God raises up political rulers for his own purposes—an important claim, to be sure, but getting at only one of the many things taught in Romans 13:1–7. Jeremiah 27:5–17 makes the same point, and adds that the people (in this case, exiled Jews) ought to submit to the ruler God placed over them. Daniel 4:17, 25, 31 also affirms that God raises up political rulers for his own purposes, but adds that these rulers ought to do justice. Commentators sometimes also cite Proverbs 8:15–16, which highlights rulers’ task of doing justice, communicates the theme of universality, and lies embedded in a creation-order rather than redemptive context.

I agree that these Old Testament texts provide important background for understanding Paul’s claims in Romans 13:1–7. But this brief survey suggests that my conclusion is sound: the Noahic covenant has a far more extensive range of similarities to Romans 13 than does any other Old Testament text.²⁴ And this conclusion supports my chief claim in this first part of the article: it is highly plausible that Paul had Genesis 8:21–9:17 in mind when writing Romans 13:1–7. To put it another way, the extensive substantive similarities of Genesis 8:21–9:17 to Romans 13:1–7 make it quite unlikely that Paul, a rabbi with elite training in the Hebrew scriptures, was completely oblivious to the former text when writing the latter. Thus, the Noahic covenant ought to be deemed important Old Testament background to Paul’s teaching about civil government and submission to it.

ACCOUNTING FOR THE NOAHIC COVENANT, IN ANY CASE

I have presented reasons to think that Paul had the Noahic covenant in mind while writing Romans 13:1–7, and thus that the former is important background for interpreting the latter. But such a conclusion seems impossible to prove with certainty, so I have spoken in terms of probability and likelihood. What, then, if Paul did not in fact have the Noahic covenant in mind when writing to Rome? In this brief section I suggest that Genesis 8:21–9:17 is still relevant for interpreting Romans 13:1–7 even if this is the case. It should still be relevant for New Testament scholars interested merely in the narrow question of what Paul meant to say when penning Romans 13:1–7, but especially so for Christian social ethicists and Christian legal and political theorists wishing to explore Romans 13 not simply for its own sake but for broader questions about the nature and extent of civil authority and people’s obligations toward law and government.

One issue that often arises in scholarly literature on Romans 13:1–7 is whether Paul wished to address the particular needs of a particular church or intended to lay down general truths

24 In light of these similarities between Romans 13:1–7 and the Noahic covenant (and to a lesser extent many other Old Testament texts), I disagree with Oliver O’Donovan’s claim that Romans 13 presents a new characteristic of civil government following Christ’s exaltation, even though I am sympathetic to his claim that the state’s sole authority is rendering judgment. See O’Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 4.

applicable far beyond his original audience.²⁵ It is probably unhelpful to overthink this question. Undoubtedly Paul wrote with a particular audience in mind, as he did in every volume of his extant corpus, since he wrote letters rather than theological treatises. But in Romans 13:1–7 Paul writes to the Roman church while signaling in many ways that he presents general truths of universal applicability, as argued above. He begins by exhorting “every” person to be subject to civil officials, since there is “no authority” except those God has instituted (13:1). He continues to speak in general terms, describing the exercise of authority and submission to it in generic moral categories of “good” and “bad” (13:3–4) and appealing not to any parochial knowledge for motivation but to the universal human “conscience” (13:5; cf. 2:14–15).

By speaking in these universal and general terms he communicates that he means to teach nothing new or hidden. He wants his readers to live according to what they already know, or at least should know. Evidently he feels no need to elaborate the specific content of the “good” and “bad” in political life. The basic idea that it is good to submit to civil magistrates—who punish evildoers and praise the good—would have been familiar to Paul’s Gentile readers living in Roman culture,²⁶ as it would have been to his Jewish readers who found this and other aspects of Romans 13:1–7 in the Old Testament. Many Christians in the Roman church probably wondered whether the new and radical message about Jesus Christ and his coming kingdom had rendered the existing authority structures irrelevant. That they might have suspected this is completely understandable, but Paul explains that this is not the case, as he did for readers in other churches, too (see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 7). It is as if Paul tells them not to expect any innovative political teaching to arise from the Christian gospel. They need to stay the course and not neglect their ongoing responsibilities, which they know even through the testimony of conscience. Paul, in effect, instructs them not to find a secret political theory embedded in Romans 13:1–7 but to look to those ordinary and recognizable sources readily available to them.

This provokes the further question of how and why Paul could have offered such instructions. He could only have done so if he believed that God had structured the world in an orderly way and established a natural moral law accessible to all people and known by them to at least some significant degree. That Paul did believe these things is evident from many things he wrote, not least of which is an extended discussion earlier in Romans (1:18–2:16).²⁷ From where did Paul derive such convictions? Surely the theology of creation and providence that he learned from the Old Testament was as important as anything. And where in the Old Testament would he have imbibed this theology? Only a couple of texts (Genesis 1 and Proverbs 8:12–36 come to mind) can rival Genesis 8:21–9:17 as a source for the idea that God has structured the world in an orderly way and established a natural moral law.²⁸

Thus, even if Paul was not thinking explicitly about the Noahic covenant when writing Romans 13:1–7, the Noahic covenant is still important background, for Genesis 8:21–9:17 would have shaped the theological ideas that enabled Paul to say what he did. It is likely that Paul was thinking about the Noahic covenant when writing Romans 13:1–7, but, even if he was not, Paul’s words ought to be read in light of this Old Testament covenant.

25 Although most commentators believe that Paul had specific circumstances of the Roman church in mind, some have helpfully noted how difficult, or even impossible, it is to reconstruct the social-political situation facing Paul’s original readers. See, e.g., Stein, “The Argument of Romans 13:1–7,” 327; Hultgren, *Romans*, 467–69.

26 See, e.g., the discussion in Engberg-Pedersen, “Paul’s Stoicizing Politics,” 167–69.

27 For a recent discussion of Paul’s view of natural law in this extended text, see VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, chapter 5.

28 For discussion of natural law in the Noahic covenant, see VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, chapter 2.

REVISITING CIVIL RESISTANCE IN ROMANS 13:1–7 IN LIGHT OF THE NOAHIC COVENANT

To this point I have tried to establish the first part of my twofold thesis, namely, that the Noahic covenant is an important background resource for interpreting Romans 13:1–7. To demonstrate the importance of this conclusion, however, it would be useful to identify some practical way in which the Noahic covenant helps to illumine Paul’s teaching. Thus in this final section of the article I address one practical issue that has bedeviled readers of Romans 13 for a long time: does Paul mean to foreclose any possibility of disobedience or resistance to civil authorities? If not, why not, and under what circumstances might disobedience or resistance be permissible? Taking the Noahic covenant into account points to some answers.

It takes little imagination to understand why Romans 13:1–7 would prompt serious questions about civil resistance. Paul tells his readers to be submissive to their political officials and explains that God has authorized these officials to do justice. Hence, his readers need not fear them if they do what is good. Well, the mildly attentive reader wonders, that works when magistrates do what they are supposed to do, but what if they act unjustly? What if magistrates persecute those who do good? Does the obligation to submit extend to these circumstances? Such questions are not just theoretical. Magistrates often act unjustly and thus people who do what is right sometimes fear them. Readers of scripture know such things not only through personal experience but also from elsewhere in the New Testament. Roman governor Pontius Pilate sent Jesus to the cross. Roman officials maltreated Paul, as described, for example, in Acts 16:16–40; 24:26–27, and the other apostles declared unambiguously that they would obey God rather than the civil authorities who ordered them not to preach in Jesus’ name (Acts 4:19–20; 5:29). Thus how can readers of the New Testament contemplate Romans 13 and not wonder why Paul speaks in apparently such a naïve and unnuanced manner?

Some scholars claim that the answer lies within Romans 13:1–7 itself, thus suggesting that Paul does in fact provide necessary nuance. Stanley Porter, for example, argues that Paul only means to commend obedience to just magistrates. A key part of his argument is that Paul, by describing the magistrates as *υπερχουσαις* (13:1), refers to them not as the “governing” or “higher” authorities, as often rendered in English translations, but as those who are *better*, that is, morally superior.²⁹ Thus Paul commands obedience only to just magistrates. Wolterstorff arrives at a similar conclusion, but by different means. He argues that interpreters of Romans have too often taken 13:1 on its own and treated it as the controlling statement for the larger text. Instead, they should see 13:4–5 as key, meant to amplify what Paul writes in the earlier verses. Paul, therefore, does not mean to say that whichever magistrates are in power have their position because God has placed them there. Rather, Paul says that God appoints magistrates to do justice—whichever magistrates are in power, however they got there. Hence civil officials who promote injustice act outside of their divine authorization and hence people have no obligation to submit to them under these circumstances.³⁰

Porter and Wolterstorff make interesting cases, but neither is fully convincing. Porter’s translation of *υπερχουσαις* is theoretically possible, but contextually unlikely. If Paul meant to tell the Roman Christians to submit only to morally superior magistrates in the first clause of Romans 13:1, it is strange that, in the very next clause, he says they should do so because God has ordained *all* magistrates: “For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been

29 Porter, “Romans 13:1–7 as Pauline Political Rhetoric,” 123–24.

30 Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, 92–95, 117.

instituted by God” (13:1). Also worth noting is that 1 Peter 2:13–14, when giving instructions very similar to Romans 13:1–7, uses the same Greek word at issue to describe the emperor, but in a way indicating status rather than moral excellence (understandable since it was likely referring to Nero!).³¹ Wolterstorff’s case is stronger. Romans 13:4–5 does emphasize that God has commissioned magistrates for a purpose: to enforce justice. Civil officials that commit injustice indeed act outside the scope of divine authorization. Nevertheless, the text does not say that God has appointed magistrates (who happen to exist) to do justice, but that God has appointed magistrates, and commissioned them to do justice. According to Paul, all existing magistrates are divinely appointed. Paul’s words indicate that it is a travesty when civil officials perpetrate injustice, but he says nothing to indicate that disobedience, resistance, or revolution is justified in such circumstances. If Romans 13 leaves a place for resistance, it is not because the text itself says so.

At the end of the day, Paul simply does not address the issue of whether, and what sort of, exceptions there may be to his general teaching in Romans 13:1–7. What he writes is just that: general. It is entirely plausible that there may be exceptions to his general statements. Many biblical texts give broad exhortations about a particular issue without mentioning exceptions, while other biblical texts provide exceptions for the very same issue. Some texts, for example, simply prohibit killing, divorce, and work on the Sabbath; others provide nuance demonstrating that readers should not take the former prohibitions absolutely.³² Could Romans 13:1–7 be the former kind of text, providing a broad exhortation without mentioning exceptions that do exist? Yes, it could. As considered above, Paul signals in several ways that the radical message of Jesus and his kingdom did not usher in a brand new Christian political theory, which readers should expect Paul to unpack in these seven verses. He encourages them instead to stay the course, sticking with already well-known political ideas and adhering to the testimony of conscience. And among the sources to which Paul might be pleased to find his readers looking to round out their understanding of civil responsibilities, the Noahic covenant would surely be high on the list—at least if my earlier argument was sound. Thus we finally come to the specific question: does the Noahic covenant shed any light on whether Romans 13:1–7 leaves space for disobedience or resistance to unjust magistrates?

If the Noahic covenant simply said all the same things as Romans 13:1–7 it would probably offer little help. But what if we explore how these texts differ? One very noticeable difference, I suggest, may hold the key for our inquiry.

The difference I have in mind is that in the Noahic covenant God delegates authority to the human race in general, while in Romans 13:1–7 God delegates authority to civil magistrates in particular. In Genesis 9:5–6 God first states that he himself will require a reckoning from the one who sheds human blood, then says: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by *man* shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” The Hebrew word translated “man” is not gender specific, so it might be rendered in this way: “Whoever sheds the blood of a human being, by a human being shall his or her blood be shed, for God made the human being in his own image.” God entered this covenant with the survivors of the great flood, and with their offspring after them (9:9), and thus 9:6 gives a judicial commission to the human community as a whole, without further specification. According to Paul, in contrast, God commissions “authorities” (εξουσια) and “rulers” (αρχοντες)

31 Here the king (or emperor) is described as *υπερχουσι*, in distinction from governors who are sent for the punishment of evildoers and praise of those doing good.

32 Of many possible examples, I mention the following: on killing, compare Exodus 20:13 with Exodus 21:15–17; on divorce, compare Mark 10:11–12 with Matthew 19:9; and on the Sabbath, compare Exodus 20:8–11 with Matthew 12:9–13.

(Romans 13:1, 3). As Paul describes it, only certain members of the human community bear the sword and carry out God's wrathful vengeance on the wrongdoer (13:4).

Sketching out a broad biblical theology of civil authority is a task for another day, but such a project would need to account for this movement from Genesis 9 to Romans 13. Somehow the authority residing in the human race generally comes to vest in particular people who hold civil office. In one way or another, the human community, to which God originally delegated authority, has in turn rightly delegated that authority to civil magistrates. Whatever the details, a theology of authority developed along these lines would have to acknowledge that Romans 13 does not simply supersede the Noahic covenant. The divine delegation of authority to civil magistrates, in other words, does not cancel out the original divine delegation of authority to the human race. This is because God established the Noahic covenant "while the earth remains" (Genesis 8:22). Christian thinking about social ethics and political/legal theory ought to recognize the Noahic covenant as still in force, as God's ongoing means for sustaining the human community and the broader natural order. Thus the general human commission to enforce justice must continue to stand somewhere behind magistrates' specific commission to do so. And this general human commission implies that *anyone* who sheds human blood ought to be held accountable—even magistrates.

If these conclusions are true, the human community as a whole must retain a right—probably better, an obligation—to correct, resist, or remove magistrates who fail to perform their divine commission to enforce justice. Romans 13:1–7, along with a number of other New Testament texts—such as Matthew 22:15–22; 1 Timothy 2:1–2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–17—makes clear that God will primarily hold magistrates responsible for ensuring the presence of justice in a particular polity. But if the Noahic covenant remains in effect, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the people as a whole remain ultimately responsible before God. This is not an individualistic responsibility residing in each person, but a corporate responsibility residing in the people as a community. Individuals, of course, may have to take special action in particular circumstances, in large or small ways, but even in these cases the individual must in some manner be acting on behalf of the larger body.

Old Testament prophetic oracles against the foreign (Gentile) nations provide corroborating biblical evidence for this claim. These oracles, present in many Old Testament prophetic books, are of special interest because the Gentile nations were not, like Israel, in relationship with God through the covenant at Sinai. Instead, these Gentile nations, like all civil communities today, were in covenant with God only through the Noahic covenant. One of the things evident in the foreign-nation oracles is that God held the people in general responsible for civil injustice, but held their rulers particularly responsible. For example, while Isaiah 13 proclaims judgment against the city of Babylon generally, Isaiah 14:3–20 directs judgment specifically toward its king.

To clarify my thesis, I conclude this section by briefly discussing four points. First, the residual authority of the people discussed above lies not in the *Christian* community, but in the *human* community. When Paul describes the moral life characterizing the "one body in Christ" (Romans 12:4–5), he prohibits the enforcement of justice (12:17, 19) that he describes as the task of magistrates a few verses later (13:4). Furthermore, when persecuted for the faith, Christians' great calling is not to secure justice for themselves but to suffer with patience and charity.³³ The residual authority to enforce justice rooted in the Noahic covenant rests in the human race as a whole; it does not rest in the church as the body of believers.

33 Among New Testament texts discussing this theme, see, e.g., Matthew 5:10–12, 43–48; and 1 Peter 2:13–25.

Second, despite some resemblances, my thesis is not a theory of popular sovereignty, at least not without significant qualification. What I propose is not that the people are sovereign, and hence the source of all political authority, but that God is sovereign and the source of all authority. God has delegated authority, but has done so in a twofold manner, to the human community generally and to civil magistrates in particular. I offer no opinion about the proper way/s in which magistrates attain their offices. When the people as a community need to restrain or remove their magistrates, they may do so not because they themselves are sovereign, but because the sovereign God has entrusted this responsibility to them.

Third, my thesis does not claim that rebellion against magistrates is anything but a last resort, or something very close to that. A corollary of any Christian social ethics or political/legal theory must be that all people are sinful and hence sin will inevitably pervade all governments and legal systems. The purpose of the Noachic covenant, observed above, is not the defeat of evil but the restraint of evil. The fact that Paul felt no need to discuss resistance, even when writing to Christians living under a Roman government undoubtedly much worse than those presiding over first-world nations today, provides a sobering reminder that even governments that permit or perpetrate many evil things may carry out their judicial function in ways tolerably sufficient to preclude rebellion. As Christian political thinkers have long recognized, acts of revolution tend to wreak much harm, often bringing greater injustices than those thought to justify revolution in the first place.³⁴ Of course, a community may potentially take many steps short of outright rebellion or revolution to promote justice in its laws and government, and there seems good reason to think that smaller steps are generally preferable to larger ones.

Fourth and finally, the people's residual authority to enforce justice, for which I am arguing, is present in a way that cannot be defined precisely. Genesis 8:21–9:17 and Romans 13:1–7 do not provide an exact calculus for determining when a magistrate's or a government's promotion of injustice reaches a point that triggers the people's right or obligation to resist. But that presents no objection to my thesis. Paul was not a biblicist, believing that scripture provides a detailed answer to every moral question. As argued above, Paul suggests in several subtle ways that his readers may look in a variety of directions to find resources to guide their lives in civil society. Furthermore, commentators often point to Proverbs 8:15–16 when discussing the Jewish roots of Romans 13:1–7. Proverbs 8:15–16 situates political rule in the context of *wisdom*, and wisdom entails perception and insight about proper moral conduct that goes far beyond memorization of discrete rules. In fact, instruction about justice pervades the book of Proverbs as a whole, and this instruction addresses both the people generally and rulers specifically.³⁵ To do justice requires wisdom, and wisdom's task is to perceive what is right in concrete circumstances even when no explicit rule exists. When and how should the people exercise their residual responsibility to see that justice is done? It is ultimately a matter of wisdom, and thus impossible to specify with precision ahead of time.

CONCLUSION

Christians have often placed a burden on Romans 13:1–7 it is unable to bear, seeking answers to questions it does not address. As the New Testament's most extensive discussion of civil authority, Romans 13:1–7 should retain an important place in Christian thinking about social ethics and legal

34 See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas's discussion in Book 1, Chapter 6 of *De Regimine Principum*. For English translation, see R. W. Dyson, ed. and trans., *Aquinas: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

35 See, e.g., VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, 382–85, 399–404.

and political theory, but it needs to be read in broader biblical and moral context. In this article I have argued that the Noachic covenant of Genesis 8–9 provides crucial background for reading Romans 13:1–7, and that reading Romans 13 in this way clarifies whether Paul meant to prohibit resistance to civil magistrates in all circumstances. According to the Noachic covenant, God commissioned the human community generally to pursue and enforce justice, and Paul, with his attention to magistrates, must have meant to focus that obligation rather than nullify it. Although scripture itself offers no precise guidelines about when disobedience, resistance, or even rebellion against authorities may be the righteous course, the primal obligation that the Noachic covenant ascribes to the people as a whole continues to stand behind, and hence to qualify, Paul's exhortations in Romans 13.

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