

The Christian's Relationship to His Government

Romans 13:1-7

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Introduction: Opening illustration: "Heavenly citizens in an earthly society." Consider an example of the ruling authorities in Paul's day. Nero was the Emperor upon the throne. His mother, Agrippina (sister of Emperor Caligula, who had tortured & murdered thousands of people for sheer pleasure) had her husband (Nero's step-father) assassinated by the use of poisoned mushrooms. Nero himself would later kill his stepbrother, Britannicus (who was only 14 years old). Fearing later that his mother (Agrippina) would attempt to exercise the power of his throne, Nero killed her. His first wife, Octavia, was banished to an island & later killed. His second wife, Poppaea, was also murdered at Nero's order. Such were the sordid state of affairs represented in rulers of Paul's day. Yet Paul begins this chapter with a command, "*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.*" What does Paul mean here & how does it apply to our culture & society today? Specifically, what is the believer's relationship to his government? Our text centers upon 2 requirements: (1) Be subject; & (2) Pay tribute, & 2 reasons: (1) For wrath's sake; & (2) For conscience's sake.

I. Be subject (:1-5)

A. The **exhortation** (indicated):

1. Who?

- a. Who is to submit? > "*every soul*" – both believers & non-believers (saved & unsaved).
- b. To whom do we submit? > "*higher powers.*"
 - (1) "Governing authorities" (NKJV & NASB).
 - (2) Human governments (kings, magistrates, officials) & other God-appointed authorities.

2. What?

- a. "*Be subject*" (also used in Titus 3:14 & I Peter 2:13).
 - (1) "Arrange oneself under" (used of a soldier's absolute obedience to his commander).
 - (2) Submission to the authority of another [Note: the absence of such submission > the sinful reaction to authority (I Sam. 15:22-23; Rom. 3:18); the shameful result of anarchy (Judges 21:25). Because of man's sinfulness, he needs authority over him.]
- b. "*The powers that be*" (authorities on earth).
 - (1) The government over citizens. (3) The parents over children.
 - (2) The church over members. (4) The employer over employees.
- c. "*No power but of God*" (:1) >
 - (1) All authority comes from God (See John 19:10-11).
 - (2) Authority is derived from, defined by, & delineated (limited) of God (Pro. 21:1).

3. Why? (:5)

- a. For wrath's sake > the fear of **government** (even the unsaved do this).
 - (1) Government is ordained of God – to resist such is to resist His will & receive "*damnation*" (temporal judgment, in the sense of punishment or condemnation).
 - (2) Government is to repress evil & promote good. As such it is not to be feared except by evil doers. [Note: "*sword*" – symbol of government's power to punish, even unto death (see Gen. 9:6, Mt. 26:52; & Acts 25:11 – warrant for capital punishment) & "*minister*" – "*diakonos*"- "servant" (our "deacon").]
- b. "*For conscience sake*" > the fear of **God** (only believers understand this).
 - (1) Submission to government demonstrates obedience to God (cf. I Peter 2:13-17).
 - (2) Submission to government allows the Christian to maintain a good conscience.Note: Paul speaks of government that is ordained of God to restrain evil & reward good in this wicked & fallen world. He does not speak of blind obedience to power's abuse.

B. The **exception** (implied):

1. The extent of our obedience > The Christian lives in tension between 2 competing claims: obedience to God & to man. Devotion to one's obedience to God at times leads to the duty of disobedience to man.
2. The example of disobedience > Acts 4:19-20; 5:29 (& cf. Ex. 1:17; Dan. 3:16-18; 6:7, 10).
3. The emphasis upon rightful obedience > Matthew 22:21, Caesar's earthly things & God's spiritual matters?? "When Caesar claims divine honor, the Christian's answer must be 'No.' For then Caesar (whether he takes the form of a dictator or a democracy) is going beyond the authority delegated to him by God, & trespassing on territory which is not his. But Christians will voice their 'No' to Caesar's unauthorized demands the more effectively if they have shown themselves ready to say 'Yes' to all his authorized demands" (F. F. Bruce).
[Note: According to I Peter 2:13-17, this world is not transformed by revolutionary activity, but by Christians who live as good citizens (cf. I Tim. 2:1-2). They should be model citizens, not known as trouble-makers.]

II. Pay tribute (:6-7)

A. Why?

1. Support of government ordained by God > Since government is for the benefit of society & the punishment of evil doers (& reward of those who do good), we should willingly support it.
2. Support of government officials > "Public servants" – "*ministers*" – "*leitourgos*" – a religious or civil servant; used of priestly service in Romans 15:16.

B. What? "*Render*" – signifies the payment of something owed, not a voluntary contribution.

1. Render "*tribute*" – land & property taxes (see Mt. 22:17-21 & 17:24-27, temple tax).
2. Render "*custom*" – tolls, customs, revenue, duty on goods.
3. Render "*fear*" – reverence to superiors, regard & hold in esteem.
4. Render "*honour*" – respect to equals, attitude of reverence (see I Peter 2:17) .

Conclusion: What is to be our relationship to government found from this passage? We are to "*be subject*" & to "*pay tribute.*" Why? Because: (1) it is God's will ("*ordained*"); (2) it is God's blessing (to restrain evil & reward good); (3) it is God's instrument (His "*ministers*"); & (4) it is God's service (one way of serving God). But what then are our responsibilities? Edmund Burke declared, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." Consider these alarming statistics: In 2020, less than 63% of American citizens voted. It is estimated that 33% of evangelical Christians fail to vote on a consistent basis. As many as ½ of all evangelicals (50 million) are not even registered to vote, & of those who are, only 50% actually voted in the 2012 presidential election (hence, only 25% of Christians voted).

Listen to these words of former presidents: "Now, more than ever before, the people are responsible for the character of their Congress. If the next centennial does not find us a great nation, it will be because those who represent the enterprise, the culture, & the morality of the nation do not aid in controlling the political forces" (James Garfield, 1881). "If the people fail to vote, a government will be developed which is not their government. The whole system of American Government rests on the ballot box. Unless citizens perform their duties there, such a system of government is doomed to failure" (Calvin Coolidge, 1923-1929).

Often the excuse is, "My vote doesn't matter; it won't make a difference." One vote can be extremely important (consider past examples). Proverbs 29:2 states, "*When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn.*"

Consider this evening not only your relationship to your government, but your responsibilities as well. Two questions in closing: "Are you registered?" & "Do you plan to vote?" Let us be mindful of our Savior's words, "*Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; & unto God the things that are God's*" (Matthew 22:21).