

Romans 13:1-7 Answers God & Government

Context: The last section of Romans is generally about Service (Ro 12-16). In Romans 12-13, Paul detailed our service in relation to God (12:1-2), other believers (12:3-16), our enemies (12:17-21) and the government (13:1-14). Romans 1-11 is the “what”. Romans 12-16 is the “so what”. If you really believe Romans 1 – 11, then *this* (Ro 12-16) will be true in your life. Romans 1-11 is the foundation and Romans 12-16 the superstructure.

Key Text: The driving text for this whole section is **Romans 12:1-2**. In the rest of Romans we are studying what it looks like to present our bodies as living sacrifices that are transformed through renewed minds. Romans 12:9-21 list the marks of a true Christian.

Introduction: Romans 13 contains the “therefore” of our relationship to government. It is amazing that Paul would have written quite so positively about government, especially one as oppressive as Rome. The Christian attitude toward government is far different from that of first-century Judaism, which was known for its zealous opposition to Roman occupation of Judea (within a few years the Jews would openly revolt, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70). These same unbelieving Jews caused great civil unrest in opposition to the spread of the Gospel. Paul may have wanted the church to stand in stark contrast to the trouble the Jews made for the Romans. No matter what Paul’s motives, the fact remains the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to pen this passage and it remains God’s will for us with regard to civil government.

Jesus is Lord over all the kingdoms of the earth. Every government is in some way serving God’s purpose in Christ (Cranfield, p. 654).

ESV **Colossians 1:16** . . . by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him.

******What relationship should exist between Christians and the government (13:1-7)?** In general, Christians should submit to the government.

ESV **Titus 3:1** Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient . . .

ESV **1 Peter 2:13-14** Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

According to 13:1, who should submit to the governing authorities? “Every person” (in the church) should be subject.

1. Why do you suppose Paul emphasized that “every person” should be subject (13:1)? It is easy to imagine some in the church would reason that since they were now in God’s kingdom, obedience to earthly human kings was unnecessary or even treasonous. Although it is true that God’s kingdom is a higher authority than any earthly kingdom, the two are not necessarily incompatible. No Christian is to imagine himself exempt from this requirement of Scripture.

What is a synonymous way to say “be subject to” (13:1)? Alternatives include to be subordinate to or submit to or to obey. The Greek word is *hupotasso* (5293), a military term literally meaning to arrange under (as in a pyramid ranking of officers and men). Picture an organizational flow chart.

2. How would you define governing authority (13:1)? (The KJV has “higher powers”). In this case Paul means specifically civil government: people vested with power to make laws and enforce those laws with violence if necessary.

If Corporations were Governments: Imagine going into Walmart and being greeted by someone who says “Welcome to Walmart” and who then hands you a list of items, saying “Here is what you will buy today.” When you object, she pulls back her apron to reveal a pistol and says, “You will be buying these items.” That is how governing authorities operate.

Protection Racket: The mafia may approach a business and demand money in exchange for protection from other criminals. If the businessman pays, he will be left alone. If he refuses to pay, the mafia will send someone named Guido to cause him pain. In a sense any civil government operates the same way, making citizens an offer they cannot refuse. In exchange for taxes paid, the government will provide a police force or military to protect him. If the citizen refuses to pay the taxes, the government will send those same men to hurt the citizen. Lest we get too cynical, realize that government is a necessary organization ordained by God for the punishment of evil-doers. Accordingly, government is the only institution that can legitimately use force against someone who has not hurt anyone else (draft dodgers, tax evaders, etc.).

3. What reasons did Paul give to be subject to the government (13:1-2)? **1)** There is no authority except from God. **2)** All existing authorities have been instituted by God. **3)** To resist authority is to resist something ordained by God. **4)** Those who resist will incur judgment.

ESV John 19:10-11 . . . Pilate said to him [Jesus], “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”

Test Case: Was the authoritarian, slavery loving, anti-Christian Roman Empire established by God?

Test Case: Was the oppressive Islamic republic of Iran established by God?

Test Case: Was the brutal communist dictatorship of North Korea established by God?

God has decreed that there shall be government. That men abuse their power does not change the fact that God ordains government.

4. Why do you suppose Paul did not deal with situations where the government persecutes God's people and punishes them for doing good? It is more important that we be convinced to obey than we know all the exceptions to the rule. Back in Romans 8:35-36 Paul seemed to anticipate situations where the government is out of control, killing Christians because of their faith. He was not unaware of the possibility of government oppression. Yet he chose not to deal with that here. The main point is that we are to submit to the government. This is an important truth. It calls for a clear, unambiguous, straight-forward approach. If a teacher gets too bogged down in the "what ifs", the main point can be lost. We must get our minds off "Yeah, but" and "What if".

According to 13:2, if you resist authority, who are you really resisting? You are resisting what God has appointed.

Word Study: "Resists" (13:2) is from *antitasso*, the opposite of *hupotasso* (be subject, 13:1).

As much as we might not like it, the divine arrangement of society is: God > Government > Citizens.

What punishment will come to those who resist (13:2b)? They will incur judgment.

5. Who will carry out this judgment incurred (13:2)? The immediate source of judgment is the government. Police departments use guns, dogs, handcuffs, batons, riot gear, tear gas, tasers, jails, etc. in the execution of God's wrath.

******How can we live lives free from the fear of authority (13:3-4)?** Generally speaking, if we obey the law of the land we will have no reason to fear. When in Rome, do as the Romans and you will be accepted.

NAS **Ecclesiastes 8:5** He who keeps a *royal* command experiences no trouble . . .

Example: When do you most dread spotting a police car? When you are breaking the traffic laws (speeding, texting while driving, not wearing a seat-belt), you feel dread when you see a police car hidden in a shadow.

6. Based on 13:3a, what feeling should bad guys get when they see the ruler? They should feel terror (*phobos*). One purpose of government is to strike fear and terror into the hearts of those who resist the law.

How are government officials described in 13:4a? Twice the ruler is called God's servant (from *diakonos*).

7. What two reasons are given in 13:4 as to how a ruler is God's servant? The first reason given is because he exists for our good. The second reason given is because he is God's avenger to carry out God's wrath on evildoers.

8. In what way is even a godless government that persecutes the church a minister of God for our good (13:4a)? Without government there would be anarchy. There was relative peace in those countries controlled by the Soviet Union; when the Union fell, strife and unrest began. Even godless governments seek to control evil (theft, murder, rape, drunk driving, recklessness, etc). Ever since the Fall, man cannot survive without government to control evil (example: looting during a hurricane).

The Roman Empire ruled with a rod of iron, causing peace to break out all around the Mediterranean. They also built paved roads throughout the Empire and caused everyone to speak a common language (Greek). Peace from war, safety in travel, a good road system and a common language made for the rapid spread of the Gospel.

9. What in 13:4 indicates God gave government divine authority for capital punishment?

Paul stated the government does not bear the sword for nothing. The only real use a sword has is killing someone. There are American Civil War accounts of officers hitting retreating soldiers on the back with the flat part of a sword, but the purpose of a sword in the first century was as a weapon of destruction. The Roman soldier carried a sword, not a rifle.

ESV **Genesis 9:6** Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

ESV **Exodus 21:12** Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.

10. Back in Romans 12 we are told never to take revenge, but rather to leave room for God's wrath (12:19). Based on 13:4, in what form does God's wrath often come? God often pours out his wrath on the evil through the government. He will also do so for all eternity at the Great White Throne Judgment. Turning the other cheek applies to Christians as individuals, not to the government. It would be wrong for the government to turn the other cheek.

*****What two reasons are given in 13:5 to be in subjection?** We should obey to avoid God's wrath and for the sake of conscience.

11. What does our conscience have to do with subjection (13:5)? Our motivation to obey the government should be internal and not because of the external threat of punishment. Subjection is a matter of a conscience due to our faith in the Lord as sovereign over all governments. We realize that the ruler is God's minister, whether the ruler realizes it or not (Cranfield, p. 668). It is God's will that we are subject and our subjection honors the Lord. It is the right thing to do.

ESV **1 Peter 2:13-14** Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him . . .

******How does subjection to the government relate to paying taxes (13:6-7)?** We are to pay all taxes that are due to them. Part of living the transformed life of Romans 12:1-2 requires us to pay taxes to the government. (There is a big difference between tax avoidance and tax evasion).

ESV **Matthew 22:17** "Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" . . . Jesus . . . said ". . . Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

12. Verse 6 states "because of this" we pay taxes (referring back to 13:5); because of what?
Because because of conscience (13:5), we pay taxes.

What reason to pay taxes is directly stated in 13:6? We are to pay taxes because the authorities are ministers of God. This makes the third the Paul declares government authorities to be either servants (13:3) or ministers of God (13:6).

Word Study: "Ministers" (13:6), is from *leitourgos* (basis for liturgy); it refers to religious service to God.

Observe how Paul stated the simple fact that the Christians in Rome did in fact pay their taxes. The sentence is indicative, not imperative (Cranfield, p. 668). We pay our taxes because we realize the divine role government plays in God's purposes.

Tithing & Taxes: Old Testament saints we required to pay a tithe to the priests. New Testament saints are required to give also: in the form of taxes to the government. (Our giving to the church is on a voluntary basis).

13. In 13:6, government ministers are said to be "attending to this very thing"; what thing?
The thing they attend to is to ministering for God in the realm of executing wrath on evil-doers (13:4-5).

14. Why must you still pay taxes (12:7) even though you disagree with the way the government spends the money? When Paul wrote Romans 13 the Roman Empire was in full blossom and surely did not use all its money for godly purposes!

Example: Jesus knew the religious leaders would murder him (Mt 16:21, 17:22-23) and that the temple system had become corrupt (Mt 21:12-13). Worse yet, the chief priests who paid Judas the 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus probably got the money out of the temple treasury. Yet Jesus paid the temple tax (Mt 17:24-25a).

15. Based on 13:7, what besides taxes do we owe? We owe government officials not only taxes but also respect and honor. We are to respect the office even if we do not respect the person.

ESV **Acts 23:5** “You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.”

So What?

16. What do you need to do differently as a result of Romans 13:1-7?

17. How did David live out Romans 13 in 1 Samuel 24:1-7? It was within David’s power to kill the king, but he did not. David honored the one in authority, even though the king was evil.

ESV **1 Samuel 24:6** He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed."

ESV **1 Samuel 24:12** “May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.”

18. What obligation do we have toward the government besides being subject and paying taxes, based on 1 Timothy 2:1-2?

ESV **1 Timothy 2:1** . . . I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

19. How should the truths of Romans 13:1-7 impact our voting habits? The Roman Empire had morphed from a republic to more of a dictatorship. Many Western nations today are more democratic, allowing the citizens a role in decision making via the vote. Since every government is instituted by God, Christians are responsible to share in governing and work for the maintenance of a just state. We should vote, we should vote responsibly in the fear of Christ and in love for our neighbors and based on being as informed as possible about political issues (Cranfield, p. 663).

20. What biblical justification is there for civil disobedience? See *Acts 4:13, 16-19*. When the laws of government require you to violate God’s law, we must obey God rather than man. However, the New Testament examples of civil disobedience do not include armed insurrection.

21. Even if you have a biblical case for resisting the government, might you still suffer judgment (13:2)? God never promised there would not be consequences, so be prepared for punishment.

Georgi Vins: Russian Baptist Pastor Georgi Vins lived most of his ministry under Soviet Union. His father, an American missionary to Russia, was martyred by the Soviets in 1936. Georgi said: “We obey every law in our land, whether it appears to us to be just or unjust, except when we are told that we cannot worship God or obey the Scripture. But if we are persecuted, put into prison, or killed, it will be a result of our faith in Jesus Christ, not because we violated some law in our nation” (John MacArthur, *The Christian And Government* & www.findagrave.com).

Based on Romans 13, was the American Revolution “biblical”?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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