

Romans 13:1-7

In many areas of life, what we think, say and do, often can be characterized by a swinging pendulum.

The swing of the pendulum is not just restricted to the more ordinary circumstances of our lives, however. It can also affect our belief and practice in the Christian life. As true as it is that Christ has inaugurated the new heavens and earth, this does not mean that believers are free from the authority of the civil government here on earth.

Summary

In Romans 13:1-7, Paul addresses the question of how Christians, as living sacrifices, are supposed to relate in principle to the civil government; being the best citizens of their respective societies because they are united to Christ.

1. Necessary Appeal

Let me appeal to all of us to come to Holy Scripture with a teachable spirit, willing to be instructed and, where necessary, as with all of God's Word, that it would transform us and bring us into greater conformity to the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

2. Overall Context

First, we have to think about the biblical context for this passage.

Paul has been speaking about what it means not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (**Rom 12:2**) and has shown us what it means to be a living sacrifice (**Rom. 12:1**). The apostle has addressed the issues of how, as living sacrifices, we relate to one another individually as the body of Christ (**Rom. 12:3-13**), to our enemies (**Rom. 12:14-21**) and NOW, he addresses, how, as living sacrifices, we are to relate to the civil government (**Rom. 13:1-7**).

Secondly, we must also consider the historical context of this passage.

The Jews had many questions regarding the rights of the Roman government.

E.g. The Jews asked Jesus whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar (**Matt. 22:17**). During this time, revolutionary movements wanted to throw off the bonds of their Roman overlords (**Acts 5:36-37**). In addition, the Roman government enacted unjust laws, such as the expulsion of Jews from Rome (**Acts 18:2**). This type of law likely caused suffering for many Christians.

3. Exhortation to Submission vv. 1-2

What counsel does Paul give to the congregation at Rome, the church that lived in the capitol city and at the heart of the Roman Empire? (**Rom. 13:1-2**)

The Christians in Rome were supposed to submit to the Roman government. Why? Because God establishes all institutional authority. We are citizens of the kingdom of God but we nonetheless live in this world. Whilst we live in both realms, we have an obligation to submit to the authority of both. We must also understand that God is sovereign over both realms, and we must recognize that both kingdoms serve the same sovereign Lord but each realm has a different function. **The kingdom of God** is an institution of special, or saving grace, and the state is an institution of common, or preserving grace.

We are not to think that we are not subject to the authority of civil governments just because Christ has come. Furthermore, we cannot argue that had Paul known of the later injustices that the Roman government would commit under Emperor Nero, he would have said something different. We must not think, however, that we owe blind allegiance to the civil authorities. Rather, our ultimate allegiance is to Christ, and when the civil authorities and their laws contradict the revealed will of God; we have an obligation to obey God rather than man (**Acts 5:29**). Even then, this does not give Christians license to disobey the lawful ordinances of the government. If we resist the government without warrant, Paul states we will suffer the consequences (**Rom 13:2**).

4. Christlike Disposition

This passage of Scripture has important implications for the way we are to pursue our calling as living sacrifices and to ensure that we are not conformed to the world.

Paul shows us that Christians must submit themselves to the authority of civil government, even though it is a common grace institution.

Even corrupt governments maintain civil order (E.g Daniel in Babylon).

All this presses the question and perhaps makes us a bit uncomfortable in the process: Do we submit to the governing authorities? Does our submission to the government reflect the world's conduct or our union with Christ?

Christ was not hindered in His earthly ministry and therefore had no reason to fear the civil government. Even when the civil government unjustly persecuted our Lord and put Him to death, He never once murmured, insulted, or was disrespectful to the governing authorities. Are we living sacrifices in this regard?

Are we like Christ? Are we sons of the living God?

We are most certainly citizens of the kingdom of Heaven, but we also live under the authority of the civil government.

Our salvation in Christ is no excuse for unlawful disobedience even to unjust governments. Our prayer should be that, rather than be swept up by the conduct of the unbelieving world, we would heed Paul's divinely inspired, Christ-shaped, counsel.