

Romans 13:1-7

Introduction

Even though 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. General Principle Revisited

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 and how Christians are to live as living sacrifices in our various relationships (**Rom 12**) and NOW, he addresses, how, as living sacrifices, believers are to relate to the civil government (**Rom. 13:1-7**).

The Christians in Rome were to submit to the Roman government (**Rom. 13:1-2**).

Why? Because God establishes all institutional authority.

Christians are citizens of Christ's kingdom and they are citizens of earthly realms.

They have an obligation to submit to the authority of both.

2. Detailed Responsibilities vv. 3-7

Paul outlines some details of the general principle how Christians must respect civil government (**Rom. 13:3-4**). Civil government, as an institution of God's common grace, is typically not a terror to good conduct.

In the event that a government does become a hindrance to good conduct, then we have an obligation to obey God rather than man (**Acts 5:29**).

Paul does not address every single case here, he merely establishes a general principle.

If you follow Christ and pursue what is good, generally you will have no reason to fear the sword of the state.

Civil government is God's servant, to execute temporal judgment on evildoers (**13:5**).

As a living sacrifice, the Christian is supposed to be a model citizen rather than one who rejects or rebels against the authority of the state.

Paul gives several general examples of what it means to be subject to the authority of the civil government (**Rom. 13:6-7**).

Taxes, revenue and respect and honor are not merely the demands of the governing authorities but ultimately commands from God incumbent on all Christians.

3. Christlike Disposition

All this presses the question and perhaps makes 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? Does our tax return reflect the word honor? Or do we indirectly, steal from the government?

Do we believe that the government is in the hands of the wrong political party, which therefore entitles us to cheat the government out of legitimate tax revenue we owe?

Does our behavior reflect one of respect, and honor for the government? Or does it reflect one of grumbling, murmuring under the breath, insults, and arrogance?

Do we join in the chorus of political rancor and the culture of insult, disrespect, and even unlawful protest?

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?

It is also important that we see where Paul sets the limits for the civil government.

Paul does not assign the responsibilities of the church to the civil government.

God has given the church, not the state, the responsibility of preaching, teaching, and propagating the gospel. The civil government has the sole task of maintaining the civil peace and punishing evildoers.

The state bears the sword of steel and the church the sword of the Spirit, the Word.

Why do so many within the church think that mere political reform or the enactment of legislation will change our nation's spiritual climate?

A common grace institution can never bring true spiritual reform.

Paul's whole point is that the church wields the sword of the Spirit, which it uses to bring the nations into submission. The church should never think that the sword of the state is more powerful than the sword of the Spirit.

The world around us engages in all sorts of rebellious behavior against their governments. Such conduct is antithetical to how Christians are supposed to behave. As those who have been united to Christ, we are to conduct ourselves as living sacrifices.

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.