

God's Civil Servants
Romans 13:2-4
August 3, 2022

Immediate Context

13:1-7 is about submission to government

Every person, without exception, is responsible before God to be subject to the governing authorities (1a).

We are to be subject to all governing officials who are in positions of authority over us, including federal, state, and local authorities.

Being subject to them includes obedience as to the Lord, acknowledgment of their authority over us, and genuine honor and respect.

Civil government has been instituted by God, and all governing authorities without exception have been sovereignly appointed by Him (1b).

God has conferred on every ruler the authority they possess, making their authority a delegated authority.

Question: What are some laws that you have a hard time following, not for moral reasons, but because they feel like an inconvenience?

The folly of resisting governing authorities (2)

“Therefore”

- Because all governing authorities are “from God” and “have been instituted by God” (1b)

“Resisting” the authorities is the opposite of being subject to them.

The nature of resisting governing authorities—resisting God

The consequence of resisting governing authorities—incurring judgment

- This judgment is explained in verse 4b
- It is God’s judgment that comes through the agency of the governing authority
- It may not always occur, or it may not occur immediately, but we are to expect it
- Anything less is grace

The governing authority as God's servant for your good (3-4a)

3 "For"

- Introduces another reason to be subject to the authorities

The apostle is speaking in general terms

Rulers are to judge "conduct"

1. Conduct in the domain over which God has given those rulers authority
2. This domain is not that of the inward feelings, but involves external deeds
 - God judges the heart (1 Sam 16:7; 1 Cor 4:5)

By God's design, rulers evoke in us fear of punishment for evil conduct

- In this way God is restraining evil

"approval"

- A good standing as a law-abiding citizen

4 "he is God's servant"

1. Often unknowingly
2. He is not God, nor is he independent of God
3. He carries out God's purpose

Question: Verse 4 says the governing authorities are God's servants for our good. What are some ways that government benefits us? Compare what we see in Judges when there was no ruler and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

We are to be subject to the governing authorities, recognizing that they are God's servants for our good.

1. It is easy to lose sight of this when some of their values, aims, and policies are evil
2. But imagine what our nation would be like if it had no government!

The governing authority as God's servant carrying out God's wrath (4b)

4b "But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain..."

Does not bear the sword to no purpose

God has given human government authority to punish those who violate its laws, even with capital punishment for the most serious violations

Be afraid, for governing authorities use the authority given them by God to punish wrongdoers

The Bible teaches that there are things the Christian should fear

4b "...For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."

When rulers punish those who do wrong in God's sight, those rulers are agents of God's wrath and serve Him.

Civil punishments are designed by God to restrain evil (verse 3) and to administer justice, to administer appropriate retribution.

As believers, there are other motivations that are to be more prominent in our lives than this motivation for resisting temptation.

1. Love for God and love for Christ
2. Hatred of anything offensive to the God we love
3. Our new identity in Christ
4. Commitment to God's glory
5. Giving account to Christ on the final day

However, if we lose sight of these motivations, we should be moved by fear of God's wrath wielded by earthly rulers, to resist temptation to commit great evil.

There is nothing un-Christian about reporting crime to the authorities

Conclusion

We should be thankful to God for the governing authorities He has placed over us.

We should pray for them (1 Tim 2:1-2).

We should be subject to them in the fear of God and as worship to Him (12:1-2).