

29. The Christian and the State

Romans 13:1-7

Having dealt with the practical implications of the gospel for believers in the church and toward all men in general, Paul now moves his focus to the implications of the gospel for believers toward the state. All this follows on from the general principles laid down in Romans 12:1,2, as to how Christians are to offer up their bodies as living sacrifices to God without conformity to the world. How then does this apply in the area of government?

Please Read Romans 13:1-7

Verse 1: Every human being (therefore including the Christian) is to submit to those that are above them in authority and government (1 Tim 2:1,2; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-17). In all ordinary circumstances we are to obey those above us, whomever they might be, for they have placed in that position by God (Jer 27:5-8; Dan 2:21; 4:17; Jn 19:10,11; Rom 9:17). This is so for both good and bad government and rulers. These all act with delegated authority from God, for there is no authority apart from that which has been given by Him.

QUESTIONS: How will a Christian exercise submission to the governing authorities? Please give examples.

When is it permissible and expected for a Christian to disobey the government? Explain why this is permissible? Consider Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-32.

How can you explain election results and the sovereignty of God in the appointment of government?

Verse 2: Because of the doctrine taught in verse one, disobeying those in authority over us is actually resisting God Himself, for He is the One that has appointed them to their

governing role. To resist the government in this verse is to oppose the government in any form when it does not go against His revealed will. To obey legitimate authority is to obey God, for He has placed the ruling authorities in their position. Therefore to disobey the ruling authorities is to resist God, and the offender can expect to fall under the judgment of both the government and God for his actions.

QUESTION: Is there any ground for a Christian being involved in a revolution? Explain your answer using examples if possible.

Verses 3,4: Verse 3 further explains verse 2, showing how judgment will fall upon those that resist the divinely appointed authority. Government has a God given mandate to uphold order in society, and to do so they may and must turn to punishing evildoers. This is one of the chief roles of government, and by doing good the Christian ought to be free from fear of the government. Those that work evil however, do have reason to fear the government, for the government should seek to stamp out evil.

By obeying the authorities over us, believers should receive a favourable opinion from the authorities (1 Pet 2:13,14). In fact, the government is God's means of helping and protecting people from wickedness (1 Tim 2:2).

For those that disobey and practice evil, punishment will be their lot. This is so because one of the aspects of authority given to the ruling authority is that of being God's instrument to bring judgment to pass upon evildoers. Government is God's appointed means for dealing with evildoers in society.

QUESTION: What role, if any, does capital punishment have in society (Gen 9:6)? Who is responsible for the issue of capital punishment? Explain.

Verse 5: On the basis of the preceding verses, Paul exhorts believers to submit to the ruling authorities. This is to be so not just for fear of punishment, but also in order to obey God and have a conscience free of accusation before God (Eph 6:1,5,6; 1 Pet 2:13). To obey the government then is part of the offering of our bodies as living sacrifices to God and being not conformed to the world.

Verse 6: Since the ruling authorities are ordained of God to serve as His instruments for the well being of society and to punish evildoers, we are to pay taxes to finance them in their God appointed roles of maintaining order. In fact, the collection of taxes by the government is a stewardship to which God has appointed them.

Verse 7: Because of the doctrine of the preceding verses, whatever is due to whomever is in authority over us, we are to give. If it is a financial due, if it is respect and reverence, or whatever it might be, we are to give it as unto God Himself.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: Explain by giving specific examples, how Romans 13:1-7 is commonly disobeyed by Christians today?

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

How does Romans 13:8 find practical relevance in a Christian's life?

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