

Submitting to Civil Authorities (13:1-7)

- Romans 13:1-7 outlines the Christian's attitudes & responsibilities to civil authorities. Paul sees the need that Christians be seen as good citizens.
 - The Jews hated being under Roman rule & were notoriously rebellious (Acts 18:2; Deut 17:15).
 - The Roman authorities often viewed Christians as a Jewish sect, so they were suspicious of Christians.
- As believers, we have dual citizenships: while we live in this world, we are also citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20). We should live responsibly in both realms.

1. The Origin & Authority of Civil Government (13:1-2)

- Our relationship to the Government is summed up in 1 word – “subject” – we are to get in line under its jurisdiction and show support. There are no qualifications, no limits, and no conditions to this command.
 - It applies to everyone – literally to “*every soul*.” It is a duty incumbent on everyone (cf v5).
 - “*Higher powers*” = governing authorities, further defined in v3 as rulers or civil authorities. Believers are to submit to whatever form of government they reside under, godly or ungodly.

Basic role of citizens, including Christians – we are to be model citizens.

- When Paul wrote these words in Romans 13:1-7, the emperor on the throne of Rome was none other than the evil and despotic ruler, Nero, who later had Paul beheaded. Yet, Paul wrote, “*Let every soul be subject...*” (cf 1 Tim 2:1-2). The Apostle Peter likewise taught this duty (1 Pet 2:13-14) - we are to submit to every human institution (whether it be a monarchy, democracy, totalitarian state, etc.). Under Nero's reign, Christians suffered greatly. Peter's execution was ordered by Nero.
- After stating the position, Paul goes on to explain the reason: “*For there is no power but of God.*” Governing authorities that exist have been appointed by God for all powers or authorities come from God. “*The powers that be are ordained of God*” - the powers that exist occupy a divinely appointed office, even those that are evil, which God often uses for His divine purposes. All governments are ordained of God & not merely a human invention. No official holds his place except by God's permission.
- Paul's basis for subjection rightly begins with the understanding of the sovereignty of God, that government is a divinely-appointed institution. No government has ever been as pagan as the government of ancient Rome. Yet Paul said all authority comes from God. Jesus reminded Pilate that the only reason he was in power is because God had put him in power (John 19:10-11). The same was said of Pharaoh (Ex 9:16) and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:20-21; 4:17,25,32). God establishes kings and dethrones them.

- To resist legitimate authority legitimately exercised is wrong, for it means resisting what God has set in place (“ordinance”). And the one who resists brings judgment or punishment (“damnation”) upon himself. The Bible does not speak for or against any political system. Nowhere in the New Testament did Jesus ever advocate that His followers were to rebelliously change the form of government or even try to reform society.

2. The Purpose of Civil Government (13:3-5)

- The 2-fold purpose for government is to: (i) protect law-abiding citizens; and (ii) punish law breakers. Part of the way God restrains evil is through various government agencies - judicial system, police, army, etc. Christians who obey the law & refrain from evil have nothing to worry about. Paul wants his readers to be law-abiding citizens, assuring them that they will be commended. Christians should be the best citizens of all.
- The government is *“a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”* In its function of suppressing evildoers, the civil authority bears the sword, an instrument of justice and punishment. By the term “sword,” Paul means the penalties for disobedience, including capital punishment. In the Roman Empire, criminals were typically executed by beheading with a sword (crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals of the lowest classes). Paul, speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has no doubt that the State has the legitimate authority to execute criminals. Capital punishment was instituted by God Himself after the worldwide flood (Gen 9:6) – before the Law was given. It upholds the sanctity of human life, and to enforce the penalty of a life for a life.
- Paul describes the person who bears the sword as God’s “minister” 2X (v4). Paul uses a word in Greek from which we get our word “deacon” or servant. The ruler is God’s servant, no less. Though most of these men are not saved, yet they are God’s servants in the sense that they are carrying out God’s will by punishing those who do evil. We need to submit ourselves to the law and obey it to avoid the “wrath” of the civil authorities. But the Christian should obey the law for “conscience’s sake.” This makes keeping the laws of our land not just a matter of outward compliance, but also of inward obedience to God.

3. The Support & Respect of Civil Government (13:6-7)

- Governments should be supported (v6). If civil authorities are to perform the work God intends them to do, they must have the funds. Paying taxes is a necessary part of maintaining the government. We are obligated to pay taxes. The tax collectors are God’s “ministers” (or, “priests” in receiving tithes and offerings and sacrifices). Governments have this right given to them by God to collect taxes. The Jewish priesthood in our Lord’s time was very corrupt, but Jesus approved of the widow paying her Temple Tax (Lk 21:2,3). Jesus

validated the right of government to tax its citizens and the need to pay taxes (Matt 22:19-21)

- Government should be respected (v7). Christians should have a respectful attitude to those in high places, not for secular reasons such as that they are important or wealthy or powerful, but because God has made them His ministers. Even if we cannot respect the person for their positions, their beliefs, or their actions, we still owe them a debt of respect because of the position they occupy. They would not be serving there unless they had been allowed to by God. Paul owed a great deal to the protection that the Roman authorities gave to him (Acts 22:24-29). Yet he has often been in prisons in the Roman empire and has been frequently flogged (2 Cor 11:23); so, he was not unaware that the authorities could be unjust. Rulers must not misuse the authority that God has given them, but Paul’s point is that that does not alter the fact that it was God who gave it to them.
- Is there ever a time believer’s obligation to civil authority is negated? Yes. We submit to the government up to the point when obeying the government means disobeying God. Examples – the Hebrew midwives before Pharaoh (Exo 1:17); Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:19-20); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego before Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3); and Daniel before Darius (Dan 6). The position the Scriptures uphold is one of biblical submission, with a Christian being allowed to act in civil disobedience to the government if it commands evil, such that it requires a Christian to act in a manner that is contrary to the clear teachings and requirements of God’s Word.
- We are to render to Caesar ONLY the things that are Caesar’s, for we are to render to God what is God’s. We also owe a debt of obedience and honour to God. Just as the Roman denarius bore the image of Caesar, man bears the image of God. This means that we belong to God. He rightfully owns us, our possessions, our money, and our time. If we are not yielding ourselves completely to His sovereign lordship, we are disobeying the supreme authority of the universe!

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