



The Christian Response to Government

Romans 13:1-7

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If you have your Bibles with you this morning, I would invite you to take them and turn once again to the book of Romans. We're going to be looking at Romans, chapter 13, the first seven verses, the same passage we looked at last week. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 13, beginning at verse 1:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would open up your Word for us, that by the power of your Holy Spirit you would illuminate your Word for us, that our minds, our eyes, and our ears would be opened, that we would seek to know your will, that we would see the Lord Jesus Christ in your Word. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

Last week, we looked at this passage from Romans, chapter 13, and we looked at the foundation of government, that government is established by God, that God has given government to us and that God has a purpose for government. Government cannot be separated from God's providence, because government is a part of how he executes his providence in the world. We also saw that this is a very practical issue, because Christians cannot take themselves up out of the world.

Even though the believer is a citizen of heaven, he is still called to live for Christ in the world. So this morning, we will look at how the Christian is to respond to government. We're going to see three things from our text. First, we will see the *reasons* Paul gives for the Christian's response. Second, we will look at the *responses* themselves that we are to have. Finally, we will look at the *restrictions* upon government as found in this text. Reasons, responses, restrictions.

Reasons

Let's begin, then, with Paul showing us the reasons we are to submit to government and to relate to government. Paul begins with a very practical reason. This is helpful for us, because it makes it real. It's hard for us to latch on to a principle or to a theory if we don't think it's really going to work. I don't know if you've ever had the experience of dealing with someone about the theory of something mechanical or a mathematical theory or a scientific theory.

You can't get them to listen to what you're saying because they're not convinced it's going to work anyway. They have already said to themselves, "I'm not going to waste my time listening to this if it's not going to work." From our perspective, it is helpful for Paul to show us that what he is giving to us is very practical. It is something we can use in our daily lives. It is founded on a principle, and the principle is biblical and solid, but it has practical effect for us.

This is also very timely for Paul as he writes to the church at Rome. There are Christians in that church he is speaking to who have many reasons *not* to respond positively to government. First, you recall, we looked last week at the Jewish tradition. The tradition among the Jews was to resist all forms of government that were not Jewish. They had interpreted the Old Testament, specifically the book of Deuteronomy, to say that they were never to be ruled by anyone who was not a Jew.

So across the world, across the centuries, the Jews were always known as the worst of citizens in a state or an empire, because they felt that state had no legitimacy solely because it was not Jewish, so it could have no authority over them. Secondly, it doesn't help the church at Rome that the current government they are dealing with is thoroughly pagan. There were no elements of the true religion. If anything, the government of Rome pushed idolatry onto its citizens. It was actively against the true religion of the true and living God.

Thirdly, the government of Rome was aggressive. It was not hands off. It was not *laissez-faire*. It was aggressive. It had expanded itself through wars. It had conquered other peoples and had assimilated them into their empire. So what am I saying here? If you think it is difficult for *you* to react to government and that *you* have plenty to complain about, think again, because the people to whom Paul is writing are in a far worse situation, yet Paul universalizes his command.

He says in verse 1, "Let every person be subject, for there is no authority that exists except from God." He calls on every single person. Not just good Christians, not just Christians, but everyone. Everyone is to be subject to the governing authorities. There is no authority that is not of God. He's very emphatic about it. Actually, the very first word he uses in this passage is the word *every*. It's as if he's putting an exclamation point on it.

He also uses the Greek word for *soul*. Every *soul* is to be subject. Now, that doesn't mean you don't have to submit with your bodies. What it means is Paul says, "To the very fiber of your being, there is no part of any person anywhere in anyplace that is not subject to my command." Remember also that Paul tells us every government is established by God. There is no room for us to try to find an exception for our situation.

What is Paul's initial point, then? His initial point is that it will be bad for you to resist governmental authority. He makes this very clear and practical in verses 3 and 4. "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, then be afraid, because he is God's servant and he doesn't bear the sword in vain."

Rulers are a terror to those who act badly, to those who do bad works, not to those who do good. So if you don't want to be afraid, Paul says, you should do good, not bad. It's very practical, because if you *do* bad, then you *should* be afraid. Now, why is this the case? Because rulers are charged with keeping order and with punishing wrongdoing. If you break the law, you should expect the consequences to come to you. This should be very easy for us to understand.

We don't speed...why? I imagine if I took a poll of the congregation there might be one or two persons who would say, "Well, I like the better gas mileage I get." Everyone else is going to say, "Because I don't want to get a ticket. I don't want to break the law because I don't want to experience the consequences of this." This is how we live.

I remember when I was a young man first starting to drive and I got my first speeding ticket. As I was pulled over and the lights were on behind me and the officer was walking up, I was afraid. I was afraid of the policeman, yes, but I was more afraid of my father when I got home. I received the ticket, and like any good father, he made me understand the principle Paul is talking about here: if you don't want to suffer the consequences, don't do bad; follow the law. He made sure I paid the entirety of my fine with my own funds. No gifts. No charity. It was all on me.

That's a principle that's easy for us to understand. If we submit to the government, it will go well with us. We obey laws all the time, even, frankly, ones we think are stupid. Why? Because we don't want to go to jail. We don't want to be fined. So even laws we think have no business being on the books we obey, because we don't want to suffer the consequences. Paul is telling you that if you want to live a peaceful life free from punishment, you should not resist the government.

That's one reason we are to submit to the government, but there is also a second important reason that we are to respond to government in this way. It is the conscience. Paul points this out in verse 5. He says, "Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath..." He's picking up his previous point. Not only to avoid punishment. There's something else here. Perk up your ears. "...but also for the sake of conscience."

As soon as we hear this, we have two questions. What does Paul mean by the *conscience* and how, secondly, can the government control my conscience? Let's start by looking at the first question. What is the conscience? The conscience is that inner voice we have that speaks to us about our obligation to God. The word *conscience* actually means to know along with or to be aware along with someone else. It is our inner agreement with God's assessment.

Paul's frequent use of this word is with respect to his conscience toward God. In Acts, chapter 24, he writes, "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience both toward God and man." Then he writes to Timothy in his second letter, "I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience." "I serve God with a clear conscience," he says. So that's what the conscience is. It is that voice that speaks agreement with the Word of God to us and solidifies the Word of God in our hearts and minds.

Well, if that's the case, then how can Paul apply conscience to the government? If Paul is worried about the conscience he has toward God, how does the government come into the picture? After all, the government is not god. Some people in the government may *think* they are god, but the government is not god. It doesn't have that kind of authority over the Christian. So what does Paul mean here? Paul has been describing government in a particular way.

Government is not independent of God. Most governments have that view. They view themselves as being completely independent from God, completely their own source of authority and power. What we have to say, directly and frankly, is that they are wrong; they are not independent from God. All governments have been instituted by God, and God didn't institute these governments just to fill a void. God instituted government so his order for the world would be seen.

That's why Paul says to resist government is to resist God. Do you notice how he says that in verse 2? "Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed." When we experience the judgment for our wrongdoing Paul talks about in verse 2, it is more than a judgment from the government. We also experience the wrath of God that is carried out by his instrument. The government is the instrument that carries out the judgment of God. That's what Paul says in verse 4. Government is the "avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."

This should immediately remind us that what Paul is talking about are the legitimate, lawful acts of government. If he were referring to *everything* government did and if he were insisting that we submit to *everything* the government says, that would make no sense. After all, how could you do good if the government asked you to submit to evil? How could the government be carrying out God's judgment and wrath by promoting sin and wickedness? What we have to be seeing here are the legitimate, lawful acts of government.

So, our conscience, which looks to God, is already a limitation on government. We'll see more about that in just a bit. The key point here is that as we submit to government, we do so by looking past government in the sense of right and wrong and looking to God, the establisher of government. We respond to government not on its own authority but as an authority established by God. This is critical. It will help us to deal with specific, practical issues. We submit to government that is a creation of and is subservient to God.

Responses

Well, now that we've seen the reasons we are to respond to government...one practical, one theological...what should our response look like? Well, the first and foremost response we are to have, says Paul, is to do good. This seems overly simple, doesn't it? It seems so redundant on one level. Doesn't the Bible already tell us to do good? Why does Paul bring in the government here? Why is he so specific in verse 3 about doing good?

Why would the Christian need the government to make them do good? Isn't that what the Ten Commandments are for? What Paul is focusing on here is more than the moral law, that is, obeying God's law. It's more than a moral good. He is certainly including that, but there is more in what he is saying. God's moral law is a given. As Christians, we are called to obey God's law out of gratitude and love for what Jesus has done for us. Obeying the moral law is not optional for the Christian.

We should also know that God's law provides for a stable and blessed society. It would be hard to live in a society that did not have God's law. Could you imagine living in a society in which theft, murder, and lying were not only not punished but were positively encouraged? Could you imagine the chaos that would cause? So, of course it is God's law that gives us stability in society, the ability to interact with each other, the ability to even have community.

Paul is focused on us, as believers, living in a particular time and a particular place. Now, he has said that this applies to everyone in every place, but the generality is made up of particulars. It applies to everyone, but Paul is concerned that we, in particular, hear what he is saying. What he's saying is, as believers, we are called to do good in the place and at the time God has put us.

He is executing his providence through government, and just as he has done that, he is by his providence ordering our lives. Make no mistake about it: you live in the circumstances that you live now, in the place where you live, at the time that you live, because of the will of God. It is not an accident. It is not a circumstance only. God has decreed, according to his good and perfect will, that you are alive right now in this place.

So then, what does it mean for the Christian to do good? I think we can see what Paul is saying here at the end of verse 3. "Then do what is good, and you will receive his [the ruler's, the government's] approval." The word here for *approval* is also the word for *praise, encouragement*. What Paul is saying here is you are to do good because you will receive the praise, the approval, the encouragement of the government. So this is obviously something the government thinks is good and well. They want to encourage you to do more of it.

Now, don't lose sight that it is objectively good. Christians are called to do things that are objectively good according to the Word of God, but in addition to that, we are called to serve the society in which we live. Put simply, it is to seek the welfare and the benefit of the society in which we live. This is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah told the Jews when they were in exile. He said, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

What Paul is telling you today is that you are to live in such a way, as you obey God, as to be a blessing to the people, the society, and the government around you. Note the order. You are not to disobey God in order to "bless the city." You start by obeying God, but it doesn't stop there. Your obedience to God works itself out to the benefit of others around you. There is a very practical element to this. Often, if we are honest with ourselves, as Christians, our first instinct, our focus, is to fight the society and government we have in order to be faithful to God.

We think the only way we can be faithful to God is by being contrarian, by opposing our government, by opposing our society in all its aspects, perhaps even by retreating into a cloistered community in which no one can find their way in. This is not what Paul tells us. Paul is saying that you *are* to be faithful to God first, but because God has established government, your primary focus should be to serve rather than to fight. We are to focus on being a blessing to others around us, to be the very best citizens, to give no one a cause to ridicule God, to never bring shame on the gospel.

This was the case for the first Christians. They lived in a pagan society. They could not support everything Rome was for, but where they *could* support Rome, they did. They were a blessing to their community. Why? Because they served the Lord, and he had told them to do good. Now what does this look like for you today? One thing it looked like for us was service to our community during the hardship of Harvey. We serve to honor the Lord and to do good for our community.

Do you know what else it looks like? Prayer. You are to pray for the good of your community. You are to pray that they would seek the Lord. You are to pray that God would bring about justice and right in your community. That is to be our response to government. Our weapons are not carnal. They are not of this world. They are rather spiritual. Our response is *this*.

There is a second response we are called to make, and that is to acknowledge the legitimacy of government and to act upon that. This follows on directly from Paul's reason for believers to submit to government for the sake of conscience. He addresses it head-on in the area most likely for us to object to: taxes. Have you ever noticed how the Bible directly takes on our objections? The Bible doesn't leave us room to try to say, "Well, it applies everywhere but *here*."

The things we think are sure will give us an exemption from biblical principles the Bible takes on directly. It leaves us absolutely no place to hide. This is interesting, because, of course, no one likes to pay taxes. That is not a new phenomenon. That did not begin with the IRS, I assure you. No one likes to do this. As a matter of fact, our tax structure is set up with this truth before us.

Have you ever wondered why there is such a thing as a tax refund? When you get a great deal of money after you file your taxes, and you're excited, and you go on a vacation or buy a sofa or put a down payment on a car, and you think, "Wow! I just got all this money." No, you really didn't. The government held your money for a year without any interest and gave you back a little bit of it, and you're all happy about that.

The government knows this. That's why they set up taxes like this. If they had to send someone to your house once a month to say, "Hand it over," you would hate that person. We know it's true, because that's what the Romans did, and the Jews hated them. The tax collectors were the most hated people in all of society. They were below the scum of the earth. The most immoral people in society were above tax collectors, because no one likes to pay taxes.

Of course, you say to me, "But, Pastor, our taxes are horrible. Do you have any idea what kind of government waste there is? It's in the billions. I can't even read those reports about all the waste in government funding and spending. Of course, there's also the case that the government takes money from me to give it to somebody else. It redistributes wealth. It's not even using it to support its own tasks; it's redistributing wealth, and it's spent on the wrong things."

I have to tell you here, nothing is new under the sun. These are exactly the complaints the Romans would have had about *their* government. Taxes were wasted. By the way, they didn't have these reports. You can find them on the Internet. They always have some sort of memorable animal or phrase associated to them, you know, the "Golden Goose," or something like that, so you can look and see how all your money is wasted.

In Roman days, if you stood up and said, "This was waste," they cut your head off. You couldn't publish anything. They kept the waste under wraps. And they were all about redistributing wealth. Maybe not exactly in the same formula that we do, but certainly, both from one area of the empire to another area of the empire, from one class of society to another class of society. This is not new. So that's not an excuse we can raise to Paul. The Romans are right there with us.

Yet Paul tells us that because of conscience, that is, because we know God is in charge and that he has established government, you are to pay your taxes. That kind of hits home, doesn't it? There's a popular statement that is out today...you can see it on social media...that all taxation is theft. Now that sounds good initially, because we see government spending that's out of control. We see the government spending money on immorality, giving money to Planned Parenthood to kill children in the womb.

It sounds good to say all taxation is theft, but what Paul tells you is that's not true. He tells you that, as a believer, you *are* to pay your taxes. Why? Because government is a legitimate creation of God. It does his will. Paul actually refers to the authorities in government as *ministers of God*, and he uses an interesting term here. Earlier in this passage, he will call them *servants*, and he uses the Greek word we get the word *deacon* from.

You may remember the deacons were founded in Acts 6 to wait tables, to serve the congregation. Paul uses that phrase earlier, but here he uses the word *ministers*. He uses a word that we get our English word *liturgy* from. Now, when I use the word *liturgy*, hopefully you're thinking about worship and an order of worship. This word is related to worship. It was the word that was used to describe priests who were involved in the worship of God.

Now, why is that important here? It's because Paul is telling us that these authorities in the government are important and to be obeyed because of the office they hold. The priest was not important because of his own personal holiness. The priest didn't take an annual priestly certification exam. The priest was important because God had established the office of priest. Paul is drawing an analogy here between God's establishment of the government and God's establishment of the priesthood. Not that they are the same but merely that they are both important and to be taken seriously.

So, do not focus on the individual in government. If you do, you are going to drive yourself crazy. You're going to love the government and two years later hate the government, four years later love the government again, and four years later *really* hate the government, and then four years later *really* love the government. You'll drive yourself crazy. You cannot focus on the individual. You have to focus on God's authority he has given to government.

Paul is being very comprehensive here. The words he uses for taxation don't allow us any escape. The word for *taxes* here refers to direct taxation. We might see it as analogous to our income tax or our property tax, ways in which we are directly taxed, but Paul also says we're to give revenue to whom revenue is owed. These are indirect taxes. These are things like the sales tax or duties or customs, taxes that come to us indirectly, corporate taxes that we pay indirectly as businesses pass them on to us.

You can see Paul is being very comprehensive here. He uses four words...*taxes, revenue, respect, honor*...all to encompass the financial arrangements we have with government. Everything is included. Now why is this? It's

because Christianity does not cancel out the natural order of the world. It transforms our view of the world and its purpose, but it does not make the world go away. Just because we are citizens of heaven does not mean we do not live on earth and we do not have to be responsible in our community.

Think about it *this* way. We're told by the Scriptures that in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, that men and women are equally objects of salvation in Jesus Christ, and that's the truth. Does that mean there is now forever no distinction between men and women? Of course not! We see right now, today, before our very eyes, the chaos this is causing when people do not understand the plain biological fact that a woman is a woman and a man is a man.

Christianity doesn't wipe that away. As a matter of fact, we stand with God creating male and female. So we cannot backtrack and say, "Well, no, in *this* instance, however, as I have to deal with government, I want the world to go away. I want the world to be theoretical. I want nothing to matter." What Paul tells us is we are not *of* this world but we are *in* this world.

Restrictions

Well, we've seen the *reasons* for submitting to government. We've also seen Paul's direction as to how we're to *respond* to government, but then the question comes...*Is our submission absolute?* Some have tried to use Romans 13 to say that Christians must always obey their government no matter what, and as often happens in this instance, there are two opposite but equally pernicious errors.

One person will say, "Of course. What Paul is saying here is you have to submit to the government in everything. No matter what they say, you need to do it, and you need to be happy about it." Then the other side will say, "Well, Paul is absolutely saying here you have to obey everything the government says. Therefore, Paul is wrong and you don't have to listen to him. You don't have to listen to the government about anything." Both of them misunderstand Paul.

What we have to understand is that government has to be legitimate. Those who say government is never legitimate, that we never have to pay taxes, that anarchy is to be preferred to government, are not hearing Paul's message. Those who say that Christians are always to side with the government no matter what it does, sort of a "My country, right or wrong, no matter what," are not listening to Paul either. Really, there are only four logical ways to think about the relationship of God and government to the Christian.

I'm indebted to James Boice, who is now in glory, the former pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for these four categories. The first category would be that God is the only authority and that all government is illegitimate. Of course, that's not a proper category, because it goes against everything Paul has just been saying, that God has established government and that government is legitimate because God has put it in place.

The second category would be that government is the only authority and that God is out of the equation, so we are to yell out with the Jews, "We have no king but Caesar!" Of course, this clearly denies the sovereignty of God,

and it denies what Paul has been saying directly in our text, that God is the one who establishes government. So you can't leave God out of the equation.

The third way to look at this is with dual and overlapping authorities of God and government but with government in the primary or prominent role. In *this* sense, God is to be the servant of government. This denies, again, the legitimate purpose of government, that it is God's servant. Paul tells us that directly. Government can't be above God. Paul tells us that, by definition, government is the servant of God, serving his ends.

That brings us to the only logical conclusion we can reach: there is the authority of God, there is the authority of government, and they overlap, and God is supreme. That's the only option available. We see this position expressed most perfectly in our Lord's response to the question about paying taxes. If you have your Bibles with you, you could turn there with me to Matthew, chapter 22, beginning at verse 15. "Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying..."

Right away we have to take pause. The Pharisees and the Herodians hated each other. The only reason they're together is they hate Jesus more. They are deliberately trying to upturn Jesus. They are trying to trap Jesus. So they come with a question with a fake platitude. "Teacher, we know that you are true..." You can almost hear the sarcastic voice. "...and you teach the way of God truthfully, and you don't care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Well, now tell us. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

They think they have Jesus trapped, because they've just said, "Jesus, you don't feel pressure from anyone, so you wouldn't answer unless it was really what you believed, so whatever you say is going to be really what you believe. You have two options. You can say yes and then be seen as an infidel by the Jews or you can say no and get dragged away to jail by the Romans. Which way do you want to answer, Jesus? Yes or no?"

I'm so thankful for the opportunity to observe the wisdom and kindness and patience of Jesus. Here are men deliberately trying to trap him, and he uses it as a teaching point for you and for me. Don't think Jesus didn't have us on his mind when he said these words. "Why do you put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me a coin. Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said, 'Caesar's.' Then he said, 'Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'"

Jesus sets forth this principle here that government is a legitimate authority but it is not absolute. Government does not get the things of God. It is not entitled to everything, but it *is* entitled to its *own* things, to the things it is lawfully and legitimately over. What, then, are the limits on government? I think the most prominent limitation on government is the liberty of conscience. That is, the government cannot compel me to believe certain things. Especially, the government cannot get between me and God.

That's not to say governments don't try that all the time. There are governments around the world right now trying to get between Christians and their God. It's happening in places like China. It's happening in places like India. It's happening in places like Saudi Arabia. I just saw an article about Finland. Who would have thought about Finland as being some kind of radical nation?

Well, someone who's a politician referred to Romans 1 in public, and apparently that's somehow against Finnish law because it's anti-homosexual. So it's not that governments don't try to get between you and God. The point is they can't legitimately get between you and God, and if they can't legitimately get between you and God, you are not expected to submit to them in that. The submission principle of Romans 13 does not apply, because it's illegitimate.

Historically, this has been a great challenge to Christians throughout the world. It's one of the reasons we are so blessed to live in the United States. We have enshrined in our Constitution liberty of conscience, that the government cannot force us to hold certain beliefs, but if the time comes when this principle is done away with in our formal documents, that will be illegitimate itself and you will not have to submit to the government in that. You are not bound to submit by Romans 13 to that illegitimate use of government.

A second limitation would be in evangelism. The government cannot legitimately forbid me from telling others about Jesus, that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is even Lord over government. Perhaps the best example of this that we find is in Acts, chapters 4 and 5. Peter and John are preaching Jesus, and the authorities come up and say, "You can't do that anymore. You've got to stop."

They say, "We *can't* stop. We *have* to tell others about Jesus. It's who we are. You might as well just tell us to float the rest of our lives and not walk on the ground, like we're not bound by gravity. No. Who we are means we have to tell others about Jesus." Even threats and jail could not stop them.

A third limitation would be when we have to obey God's Word, especially with respect to morality. The government cannot make me declare right is wrong and wrong is right. It cannot compel me to sin. It has no legitimate authority in that area. Any attempt made by the government to do that is illegitimate and, again, it does not come under the submission principle of Romans 13.

So, what is the result of the government trying to place these illegitimate limits upon the Christian faith? What steps can the Christian take? This brings us to another area of restriction on government: civil disobedience. Now what do we mean by "civil disobedience"? This means opposing what the government is requiring in order to submit to a higher authority; namely, God. It means knowledgeably resisting government because we must obey God, and it means knowing the consequences of our actions.

The most common form of civil disobedience we see is protesting or resisting peacefully. This has been the method of the pro-life movement for decades. There have been isolated instances of violence within the pro-life movement, but they've always been met with round condemnation by the movement. Protesters, instead, make their views known and oppose the government's decision to support the killing of unborn children.

Often, these protesters are arrested or are fined, yet they persist. Why? To obey God, even knowing they will suffer. They know it is not a judgment that comes from God, but they're actually doing good instead of evil. Another less common but more significant form of civil disobedience is resisting the very state itself. If the state has become illegitimate, the Christian may oppose it in order to establish a legitimate authority.

Now what does *that* mean? It means the state is the servant of humanity, not the master. God has established it to be his servant, not the master. So if a state becomes a tyrant, if it disobeys God's law, it can be replaced with a legitimate government. One example of this that is much disputed (and we don't have time to go into detail on it) is the American Revolution in which an illegitimate government was replaced by a legitimate government.

The American Revolutionaries sought reform, sought to find a venue in Parliament, sought to appeal to the king, took every action they could until they believed they were out of options. Regardless of the details, I think we can all agree that the American Revolution was significantly different than the French Revolution, which sought to upturn society, upturn the government...so much so that they changed the names of the days of the week and of the months so they could upturn French society. There are two differing kinds of revolution there.

There is also the doctrine of the lesser magistrate. That is a principle that comes to us from the Reformers. A lesser magistrate can oppose a higher authority magistrate in order to meet the principles of government and its legitimacy. In other words, if the governor tells the secretary of state to steal an election, the secretary of state doesn't have to obey the governor. The secretary of state is actually bound to *disobey* the governor and to uphold the principles of the government. So, that's what we see the Reformers talking about in terms of resisting government.

Now, in conclusion, the issue of government is complex and controversial. We've looked briefly at many matters we could have spent a great deal of time studying. Christians of good conscience may differ as to the application of Paul's principles here, such as *when* it is permissible to disobey government or exactly what the practical limitations on government are or how best we can serve our community.

The important point for us to remember is that God is in charge of government. *He* has established it. *He* is the one who uses it, but at the same time, we must understand that government is affected by sin. Governments are full of sinners, so they do not always do the right thing. Sometimes we are forced to choose between government and God, between peace and conscience. The only way we can navigate these difficult waters is by being steeped in the Word of God.

So how do you spend *your* time? Do you never miss a newscast? Are you constantly posting articles to Facebook? Or are you reading God's Word? Are you praying? Are you sharing the gospel with others? *That* is our hope. It's the hope of our nation. It's the hope of the world. Never forget that you are following Jesus. Never take your eyes off him.