

38:55

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Introduction

When we talk about our government today, everyone has an opinion. Some people want to be factual. Some people want to give facts about decisions that are made by those who are in authority over us. And you can agree, or you can disagree with the decisions that are made by those who are in authority positions over us in the government. But some take it to an extreme, a sinful extreme of name calling and slander. Sadly, this happens even amongst Christians. But listen, Christian, this should not be. It should not be among us. No one should come into our church and hear us name calling and slandering government officials -- not the president, not the vice president. No government official should be slandered in this place.

Today, you have slogans that are used to curse the President. You even have bumper stickers that people put on the back of their cars, usually it's trucks. But they have bumper stickers on there that actually do use curse words, to curse our president. There are many who mock him. And they use dishonorable speech against him and many other people in our government. But Christian, this should not be so. Not in God's Church.

Listen to what Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1. "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, **2** for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. **3** This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, **4** who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim 2:1-4)

That is God's desire, that even our politicians would be saved. Notice Paul does not say pray for kings and all those who are in authority, who *agree with you* on political matters. It's not what he says, We must pray for all of those who are in authority over us, no matter where they land on the political spectrum. We're to treat them with honor and respect.

Brett Laird, in his book, "Family, Government and Church," I would encourage you to get a copy of that book and read it. Family, government and church. He says this, *"we can hate and mock government officials, or we can pray for them and preach Christ to them. But we can't do both. Government officials should be the subject of our prayers -- not the object of our ridicule. He finishes and he says Christian, do not mock your mission field."*

We are not to mock our mission field. We are ambassadors for Christ. And we should not make a mockery of our office -- of our duty as ambassadors of Christ --by mocking and ridiculing our government officials. Remember, they are people who have been created in the image of God, just like you and I. And so, we must do what we learned last week in Romans 12:14, where Paul tells us, "[Bless and do not curse.](#)" (Rom 12:14)

So, before we jump in our text of scripture here tonight, let me just remind you of this truth that God gives us in His Word, that we are to be people who bless and do not curse. That is our duty as believers. Now as we come to Romans 13, obviously this is a hot topic. It's a hot topic in our nation right now.

For hundreds of years, many would read this passage and for the most part, they would not have any trouble just taking it at face value and doing exactly what it says, submit to the government. And the reason why is because the government, for the most part, stayed in its lane, they did not try to overstep the bounds of authority that they have been given by God. But obviously, in our day, there's been a lot of overreach by government officials, which puts the spotlight on this passage, these seven verses right here. It's caused great confusion amongst believers. But I want us to work through this passage, and hopefully this will be clear for you tonight.

We're going to take this passage here, these seven verses, and we're going to break it down into three points.

- The first point is the rank of government.
- The second point is the role of government.
- And then finally, our third point will be the responsibility to government.

Now, before we jump into these three points, let me just help you understand how God has established authority within society.

[How has God established authority?](#)

Well, there are three spheres of divinely delegated authority, three spheres;

Family

First, there is the family. There is the family, there is authority that God has given to parents. You remember in the garden, God established marriage between one man and one woman, they were given a mandate then to fill the earth and subdue it. This means they were to have children. And as parents, they were then given authority over those children. You and I are commanded in Ephesians 6:4 to train up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, right? That is our duty and our responsibility as parents. But along with that authority that God gave to parents, parents were also given a rod. They were given a rod, and the rod has to be used by parents for this purpose -- are you're ready? To restrain evil. To restrain evil.

As one commentator says, *God graciously gave parents the rod before He ever gave government the sword. God gave parents the rod and He told parents to use it.* Proverbs are full of wisdom that tells us how we as parents are to use the rod.

- Listen to [Proverbs 22:15. Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.](#)
- [Proverbs 23:13-14, Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.](#)
- And then [Proverbs 13:24. He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.](#)

God says that parents who do not use the rod and spank their children hate them. They hate their children. They don't love them -- they let them do whatever they want to do. That's not loving. God commands parents to spank their children when they're disobedient. Because -- listen to this -- the most dangerous threat to a child is his own sin. The most dangerous threat to a child is his own sin. The rod teaches that child obedience, which is an act of love toward that child. Sadly, we have many children and adults in our society today who have never been lovingly disciplined by the rod. When children are not taught restraint, and the consequences of sin, then they will act out in their sin, and they will cause total chaos in society. It's been on display for us, hasn't it? Why is there been total chaos? Because those children and adults that are out in the streets rioting were never given the rod. They never had loving parents, who taught them to restrain themselves and obey authority. But God established the family. Within the sphere of the family, the parents have authority.

The Government

The second sphere of divinely delegated authority is the government. The government. When parents have failed to restrain evil in the heart of a child, the child will act out eventually. Right? That's what they'll do. It's in their heart. And who will then have to step in? The government. The government will step in. The government is actually a blessing to society. Did you know that? A blessing to society why? Because when the government does its job, the way that God intended it to act, it will restrain evil and protect the innocent. It's a blessing. What did God give the government to help restrain evil? Look at [Romans 13:4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear](#) (notice this) [the sword for nothing;](#)

God gave the government the sword. He gave the parents the rod and He gave the government the sword. If parents don't discipline with the rod, then the government will discipline with the sword. It's pretty simple. That's how it goes in society. That's why we have police today. And why we love police. And we support our police. We are grateful for our police because they are using the sword to restrain evil, which is what God ordained them to do.

The Church

Then there's a third sphere of divinely delegated authority, and that is this, the church, the church, God has given the church spiritual leaders as under shepherds of the true shepherd. Christ is the head of His church, but He has given authority to the shepherds of His church to lead, feed and protect the flock. [Hebrews 13:17](#) says [Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.](#)

As spiritual leaders, we -- the elders of the church -- are commanded to exhort, encourage and implore the sheep. That's our job. That's our duty. And part of fulfilling the leadership role of elders in the church then is to practice church discipline. If you've gone through the membership class, we've talked about church discipline, you understand church discipline, and what Scripture says about it. Church discipline has been given to the church to restrain sin in the church and keep Christ's church pure. That's the purpose of it. It's not that we want to kick people out of the church, we don't want to excommunicate people. We want people to be in the church. But we want the church to be pure. We want their lives to be pure. And we want to see sin restrained in the church. It's a way to bring wandering sheep back into the fold and help them walk in obedience instead of in sin. It's a way for the church then to restrain evil and -- listen to this -- promote good. It's what the church is called to do. We restrain evil, and we promote good.

And so those are the three spheres of authority that God has given to a society to restrain evil and promote good, the family, the government, and the church. Specifically, tonight, we're talking about the sphere of the government. What God says in regard to living within the sphere of the government.

1. The Rank of Government

So, let's look at our first point here, the rank of government. Now, as we look at the context here, we can see that at the end of chapter 12, Paul says in verse 17, [never pay back evil for evil to anyone.](#) ([Rom 12:17](#)) Then in verse 19, he says, [Never take your own revenge.](#) ([Rom 12:19](#)) And then in verse 21, [Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.](#) ([Rom 12:21](#))

And although Christians are not to avenge themselves, this does not mean that the government should abstain from punishing evil. It's their job, that's their duty. In fact, it is their duty and responsibility to do this in society, as that is why God has established them.

Look at chapter 13, verse 1. [Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. \(Rom 13:1\)](#)

Now, notice what Paul says there he says, "every person". Who is wrapped up in that statement, every person? Everybody, every soul. That's what he's saying there every single soul. That means every male, every female, every unbeliever, every believer, every citizen and listen, every politician. They're included in every person. Everyone is. What are we called to do? To be in subjection to the governing authorities.

That word subjection there was a military term that means to line up under to place or rank under or to subordinate to. It means every person is called to do this. No one is exempt from being in subjection to governing authorities. This is why politicians get speeding tickets just like you and I, at least they should. Because they are under the governing authorities. And in our land, what's the ultimate governing authority? It's the Constitution. The Constitution is the highest law in the land, and therefore even politicians are under that governing law. Everyone is.

Now -- who establishes the authority figures that we have in our land? And the politicians who are to rule the land under the Constitution -- who establishes them? Answer? God does. God does. Look at what he says in verse 1, continuing in verse 1, ["for there is no authority except from \(who?\), from God". "And those which exist are established by \(who?\) by God."](#)

God puts kings in places. Sure, we can play a part in that, but ultimately, in God's sovereign plan, in His sovereign will, He is the one who puts kings in their places. In fact, that's what Daniel 2:20 says. Daniel said, ["Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him.21 "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings. \(Dan 2:20\)](#)

God does that. And all of those who have been established as rulers, they do so under the sovereign hand of God. This is exactly what Jesus said to Pilate in John 19:10, right? [Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; \(John 19:10\)](#)

The only authority that you have Pilate is given to you from My Father, He is the one who gives authority. And so, the authority that even Pilate had, was delegated authority from the Father. And all governing authority is delegated authority. The authority has been delegated from God, and therefore they are under the rank of God. What are we called to do then? We're called to be in subjection to them. They're under the rank of God. And we are called to be in subjection to them, to come underneath them. Why? Look at verse 2. [Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. \(Rom 13:2\)](#)

Paul is saying here, if you resist the authority over you, then you are in opposition to that which God has ordained. You're ultimately in opposition to God, because you're opposing that which God has established and ordained. What will the outcome of that opposition be? Notice what he says there in verse 2. Condemnation. Condemnation will come. Now this condemnation that he's talking about here

is not talking about eternal condemnation. But this is judgment that comes from the rulers that you disobey. You disobey them -- consequences are coming. Condemnation is coming, judgment is coming upon you from those very rulers that you disobey.

In fact that Greek word there - condemnation -- there means a legal decision, a legal decision rendered by a judge, a judicial verdict. Paul is saying here, if you resist the governing authority, the governing authority will judge you and you will pay the consequences for resisting. Now, some people look at Romans chapter 13 in verse 1. And they read this, [every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities \(Rom 13:1\)](#). And they view the rest of life and Scripture in light of that one verse.

As one pastor put it, it is like the authority of government becomes the exception clause to every other command. But that's not how we are to read the Scriptures. So, let me ask you, is there ever a time where we are allowed to disobey the governing authorities? Answer? Yes. Yes, there is.

- How about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in [Daniel chapter 3](#)? Did they disobey the governing authorities? You bet they did.
- Or Daniel and [Daniel chapter 6](#), who knew about King Darius' decree, and yet he still went and prayed to God.
- Or listen to [Acts 4:18-20](#). [And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."](#)
- Or [Acts 5:27-29](#). [When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, \(what did they answer?\) "We must obey God rather than \(who?\) men."](#)

You see, when government calls us to sin, or to do something that goes against God's clear commands, we then disregard the government, and we obey God rather than man.

Just like in a family situation, in the family, wives are called to submit to their husbands, right? But if the husband tells the wife to sin, what does she do? She obeys God rather than her husband. So that she does not fall into sin.

And even within the realm of the church, the sphere of the church, if the elders call someone to sin, the believer is not called to submit to the elders and sin against God in that instance. There are times that we will have to disobey government and obey God. What are those times? I can't give you every situation tonight. We don't have time.

But let me just give you some advice from again from Brett Laird's book ["Family, Government and Church."](#) He says this. *Jesus told His disciples to be as shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.*

In yellow light issues, we talk about yellow light issues. Those are areas that are not easily discernible. He says it is important for believers to be shrewd, having a well-considered and smart strategy for

defending and advancing the best interests of the church without needlessly offending government officials. But it is also vitally important to be innocent as doves, never using evil means to accomplish righteous ends, and treating government officials with kindness, respect, submission and honor the Lord has commanded.

That's some good words of wisdom. Now we must understand that as believers, we are not to have a defiant attitude, just waiting to disobey the government. That is not to be our attitude. We are never to have an attitude of defiance against our government. We must have an attitude that desires to submit to the government, because that's what God has commanded us to do. And therefore, as citizens who are under the authority of what God has established, we should desire to submit to the government.

But when they call us to do something that is sin, or that goes against God's direct commands, then we disobey the government. But we must remember that God has established the government, and therefore we must submit to them unless they overstep their bounds and tell us to do something sinful, or against a clear command that God has given us.

And what are their bounds? Well, that leads to our second point here, the role of government.

2. The Role of Government

Look at verse 3, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;" (Romans 13:3)

In verse 3, Paul tells us that when we act in good behavior -- that is when we obey the law and do good -- then we don't need to fear the government. When do people need to be afraid of the government? When they do what? Evil. When they do evil. There should be a fear of punishment for law breakers for breaking the law, because the government's role is to punish evil. But if you do what is good, then Paul says you'll receive praise from them. That means you received commendations, approval, recognition from them.

Now, does this mean that every government always acts the way it's supposed to? No. Why? Because of the depravity of man, the depravity of man not only from leaders but also from people.

John Calvin argues that God uses wicked rulers, as the scourge to punish the sins of the people. Put another way, we get the rulers that we deserve. But when government functions the way that they're supposed to, then they will praise and protect law-abiding citizens, and they will penalize and punish law breakers. That's what they have been established by God to do. And why are they to do this? Look at verse 4, "for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." (Rom 13:4)

Notice what he says there, the government is *a minister of God*. The Greek word there is *deaconos*, from which we get "deacon" from. They are ministers, they are deacons, they are servants of God. Oftentimes, we think of ministers as only as those who serve in the church. But God has put governing officials in place to govern -- not in the church -- but on the earth, over the nations, over the land. And because we understand that they are God's servants, we must show them honor and respect. Because they are ministers of God.

One commentator says, "*Christians ought to lead the way in showing honor to human authorities, because we understand they are appointed by God.*" We should be leading the way in showing honor and respect to them. What have they been appointed by God for? Notice what it says there. For good. For good. That means government's responsibility is to praise good and to punish evil. They're to be promoters of good and punishers of evil. And this means that how they govern, they will be held responsible to God, for every decision that they make, in how they govern the land.

And when they govern the wrong way, and punish the good and praise the evil, they will be held accountable before God for this. And so, the first and foremost role, responsibility of government is to punish evil. And that's why Paul goes on and he says, "it does not bear the sword for nothing;" The sword there is a picture of punishment and not just to lock someone up, but even to administer --listen - the death penalty. The death penalty. You may have an opinion on the death penalty, but let me tell you that the death penalty is biblical. It is biblical. In fact, it was established all the way back in (do you know where it was established?) Genesis chapter 9. Genesis chapter 9 verse 6, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man." (Genesis 9:6)

All the way back in Genesis chapter 9, God established the death penalty. The death penalty is biblical because it conveys that we are to honor and respect those who are created in the image of God. Everyone is. Male and female -- created in the image of God. And we are to honor and respect people who are created in the image of God.

And so not only does the government bear the sword, it also -- notice at the end of verse 4 -- "it is an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." (Rom 11:4)

Simply stated, God uses civil government to punish those who practice evil. They are an instrument a tool in His hand to punish evil. Not only will evil doers get what is coming at the end of chapter 12 and verse 19, where God says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." (Rom 12:19) But God also uses the government to punish evil-doers and bring divine wrath upon them as well -- while they're living on the earth. And it is then that wrath that would motivate us to obey. Look at what he says in verse 5.

"Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. (Rom 13:5)

Paul gives us two motivations there for obedience:

1. First, because we understand that if we don't obey, we will receive punishment, right? You will receive the ticket. Your fine is due because you did not obey the law. You didn't obey the speed

limit. Punishment comes. Wrath comes. So that motivates us then to obey, I don't want to get another speeding ticket. So I'm going to go the speed limit.

2. But second, a second motivation is for conscience sake, for our own conscience. It's the believers conscience that tells us to obey the authorities that God has established as servants on this earth. And our conscience should drive us to be obedient. It's like that time when you were speeding, and you look down at the speedometer, and you thought, I better slow down, or I'm going to get a speeding ticket. And then three seconds later that cop passes you by. Hmm and you go, "whew, glad I listened to my conscience", right? Your conscience got you out of trouble. You obeyed it. You listen to it. The conscience is a good thing. And your conscience will keep you out of trouble.

And so that there is the rank of government and the role of government.

3. The Responsibility to Government

Let's quickly look at our third and final point here the responsibility to government. Look at verse 6. *"For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Rom 13:6-7)*

Isn't this what Jesus said and Mark 12:17 After being asked whether or not he should pay taxes to the evil Roman governing authorities? What did Jesus say? *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar and to God the things that are God's. (Mark 12:17)*

What are we to do as believers and US citizens? Listen, church, pay your taxes. We are called to pay our taxes, not to cheat on our taxes...to pay. Notice at the beginning of verse 6, we do it because of this. Because of what Paul? Because of our conscience. That's what he was just talking about. In verse 5, because of your conscience, we pay taxes to maintain a good conscience. If you cheat on your taxes, what is your conscience going to do? It's going to eat you up. It's going to convict you, and convict you, and convict you. But he says, we're to be good citizens and pay our taxes.

We pay our taxes to our government because they're servants of God. Again, not in the sense of a practicing spiritual oversight. But as those who rule on the earth, they are God's servants, and they are, do our taxes for the work that they do.

One commentator says this, *"by implication Romans 13:6 also says that the taxes collected are to be used by government to get the job done of restraining evil and keeping an orderly society, not to enrich the government officials themselves."*

Now, does this then give us an out? If we find out that they're enriching themselves with our taxes? No, it doesn't. It doesn't give us an out. We are still to pay our taxes. We give unto Caesar the things that

are Caesar's, and we give unto God what is God's. And what belongs to God? Let me remind you of Romans chapter 12 in verse 1. "Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (Rom 12:1)"

What do we give unto God? Our heart, our lives. Everything that we have belongs to Him. That's what we're called to do. As believers, who live in this world, may we honor the Lord, in our submission to the government.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for the clarity of Your Word, and the conviction of Your Word that tells us what we are to do. Father, help us to have an attitude of submission and obedience to You ultimately, and an attitude of submission to our government, as You've called us to do. Father give us wisdom and understanding, and help us to understand and know the times when we are not to submit to them. Lord, we can't do it on our own. And may it never be our desire to disobey them. But may we live as light in this world -- as salt and light -- in this dark world. Father help us to have a heart for those who are in authority over us. God, we pray for them and we pray for their salvation. We pray for our president, we pray for his salvation. While he is still breathing, Lord, I pray that You would draw him to repentance and faith that he would come to know You. We pray for our vice president as well that she would do the same thing. We pray for our governor -- for Governor Walz -- Lord, may You bring him to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Lord, may that be our desire, as we know it is Your desire -- that You desire all men to come to repentance and faith. Lord, help us to live in light of this truth that we have learned here tonight. For Your glory alone, we pray in Christ's name, Amen.