

Romans 13 – God and Government

They used to say you shouldn't talk about religion or politics in polite company. Today we will! We are going to talk about some biblical principles of interacting with our government as we get into Romans 13 today.

We live in perilous times politically. If you see what is happening in Africa, where Muslims are killing Christians without any consequences; or if you look at the barbarians raging in France, burning down historic buildings and looting businesses; or look at the fraud going on in Ohio where taxpayer money is stolen by the hundreds of millions of dollars and given to questionable characters; you will glimpse the importance of civil government and what happens when it is AWOL or corrupt.

Scripture promises us that one day, the government shall be on His shoulders.

Isa 9:7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Rev 11:15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."

Yet in our day, the government is still on our shoulders of men.

To be certain, the church is the most important entity on earth during our time and building the Kingdom of God must be our focus. But we must not neglect the reality that the government makes an impact on our lives. This may be why Paul implores us to pray for our leaders:

1 Tim 2:1 I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. 2 Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.

We pray for our leaders so we can live peaceful lives. **The reason we want to live in peace is so that the gospel can go out to everyone. Fulfilling the Great Commission can be helped or hindered by whether we live at peace, thus the need for government and laws.** Note, we don't pray for our leaders so they can solve all our problems.

Roman Context

Citizens in Rome had no real say in how their government did things. The emperor ruled as he wished, but there was strong system in place to maintain physical security, proper functioning of cities (food distribution, water, disputes), and public works (roads, aqueducts, forums, statues and arches), especially in Rome and Italy. There was a strong sense of civic pride in Italy during that period as the seat of power over much of the civilized world. So when we read what Paul says to us in Romans 13, let's keep all this in mind.

Government is of God

*Rom 13:1 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. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 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, 4 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. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 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.*

Verse 1 tells us “*For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*” Paul is assuring us that God plays a role in the affairs of men. If you recall from our study through the book of Daniel earlier this year it was clear that God institutes the governing authorities and that God sets up kings and removes them at will.

Dan 2:20b “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. 21a He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings;

We also see in the account of Jesus before Pilate the idea that human governments are unknowingly subservient to God's authority.

John 19:10 So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” 11 Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.

God uses ungodly governments to accomplish his purposes, sometimes in very specific ways. When Judah was carried into captivity and the first temple destroyed, God called an ungodly king, Cyrus the Persian to allow the rebuilding of the temple.

Isa 44:28 who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

Isa 45:1 Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed:

*3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, **who call you by your name.***

*4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, **I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.***

*5 I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; **I equip you, though you do not know me,***

6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other.

Isn't this remarkable? I call you by name, though you do not know me.

This becomes an issue of trust in the Lord in many circumstances. Can we trust that Jesus is truly on the throne? And that **God's sovereign will IS directing even nations as they rise and fall today?**

Rom13:2 says, "*Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*"

This is a hard teaching, and one we have to wrestle with as Christians **and as Americans**. This was a dividing line among the Colonists during the American Revolution. Almost half the people felt it was wrong to oppose King George III of England because that was God's established governance. Those who came down on the side of resisting the King claimed it was legitimate, biblically, to oppose tyranny and injustice. Because they had exhausted legal and peaceful means to address the issues, and because the active conflict was initiated by the British, they could claim self-defense in the war that followed. Of course, we look at the fruits of liberty that came from this nation, and we feel justified.

I won't decide for you today who was right, but it is worth noting that both sides of the issue were invested in a biblical justification for their actions.

Let's hold this truth firmly: God is the one who institutes governments.

What is God's Purpose for Government?

Continuing in Romans 13:

*3 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, 4 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.*

Government is meant for our good. The key role of government is to keep the peace and enforce law and order.

- It is to enforce just laws.
- Protect innocent people.
- Allow the peaceful operation of civil society
- Punish those who do wrong
- Keep the barbarians at bay

[Next Slide] There is no biblical basis for government being our means of education (that role is given to the parents), or providing income (that falls on men to provide for their families), or to care for the poor (that falls on individuals and the church). One of the biggest problems in our day is **we look to the government to solve problems that they are not meant to solve**, and generally the results are disastrous. Many of our problems in our culture can be traced to fatherless homes. And since the 1960s when the Great Society welfare programs started to eliminate poverty, fatherlessness has exploded.

Should we always obey Government?

5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

So we have this command to be in subjection to government. Is this absolute? **Let's apply good biblical exegesis and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.**

Remember when the disciples started preaching that Jesus had risen? And the Jewish authorities told them to stop?

Acts 5:27 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!

So here is a clear boundary on this command. If government asks you to do what is contrary to the direct commands of God, we very clearly should resist.

Also consider the story of Rahab hiding the spies in Jericho before Jericho was conquered. She could see the power of God coming and knew which side she wanted to be on.

Another interesting story is **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian who opposed the Nazi regime. He helped lead the Confessing Church, which resisted Nazi efforts to control German Protestantism, and wrote influential works including *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*. His Christian convictions led him to support resistance to Hitler; arrested in 1943, he was executed at Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945.

In his 1933 essay on the church and the “Jewish Question,” he argued that the church had to do more than care for victims of state violence: it might have to “jam a spoke in the wheel” of the state itself. His later participation in the resistance, including the conspiracy against Hitler, came from that ethic of responsibility—not from treating resistance as an easy or rule-free choice. For Bonhoeffer, Romans 13 describes legitimate authority serving justice; it does not make an unjust regime’s commands morally true. In a conflict between the state’s demands and obedience to Christ, he believed Christian responsibility could require disobedience—and, in extreme circumstances, resistance.

To summarize so far:

1. We must recognize God’s sovereignty in the affairs of nations
2. Know that government is intended for our good, but we should not look for government to do what God has called us to do as families and the church
3. We should submit to government, except when it violates God’s clear commands.
4. When government is actively harming those they are supposed to serve, we may be called to disobey or resist that government.

Paying Taxes

Rom 13: 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 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.

These are the parts of scripture you really want to try and find a way around. But Jesus made it pretty clear, and now Paul rehearses this for us again. There were two tax questions that Jesus answered when he walked the earth.

- The Roman tribute tax

Mat 22:17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ... 19 Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20 And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

- This tax was instituted by Rome to do what they do
- Taxes and respect are owed to governing authorities.
- But our whole lives, body, mind, and soul belong to Jesus
- Honoring God's law and submitting to governing authority are not mutually exclusive

- The temple tax (Matt 17:24-27)

Mat 17:24 When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" 25 He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" 26 And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. 27 However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

- Instituted to support temple worship and maintenance
- Jesus used this opportunity to claim his divinity by saying "the sons are exempt". In other words, the Son of God shouldn't have to pay.
- Proves his divinity by telling Peter to fish for a 4 drachma coin

Jesus pays this simply to "avoid giving offense", he foregoes privilege and models Rom 14:13 "to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall."

How should Christians Participate in Government?

So let's wrap this up. **[Next Slide]** How should we apply these scriptures to our life in America in 2026? The context of how we do government here and now compared to the Roman empire when Paul was writing provides a stark contrast. We have a participatory

form of government, but many are discouraged that it is a hopeless system, and it doesn't really matter whether we vote or not because they're all bad choices.

[Next Slide] Remember, your welfare depends on the welfare of the place you live.

Jer 29:7 But 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.

Despair should never be the view for believers. We have to live with some holy tension in our lives.

God ordains governments and nations	We have a role to play
We should submit to the legitimate authority of gov.	We should seek to change or improve the gov. when we can
Gov is generally corrupt – I don't want anything to do with it	The welfare of the nation affects my personal welfare
My choices are usually bad vs worse	The goal is to maintain a peaceful life as long as possible to preach the gospel

- Is it good to vote? The opposite question is what happens when you don't?

I'll admit, sometimes it really is the question of how fast the government is going to crash the plane. Does it matter if they are actively destroying the country, or just doing it passively?

But yes, it does matter. If we keep the perspective that the ultimate goal is to spread the gospel, the longer we can live in peace, the better to have more time to share with more people.

- Can you vote for a non-Christian?

Often politicians claim to be Christian, but don't really live like it. Other times you may have a non-Christian whose policies align better with Christian values than the opponent. I will vote for the non-Christian in that scenario.

- Is abdication better?

Do we just throw up our hands and say whatever happens, happens? Que sera, sera.

Passivity is seldom the best course of action.

What am I going to do? I'm going to vote for those that I think are more aligned with biblical principles and against those that are actively seeking to destroy our nation and our constitution. I'd be happy to share that with you personally later.