

Romans

Dual Citizenship

The issue of Christian responsibility to civil authority is the focus of this chapter. We no longer rule over our own lives, submitting to the desires of our flesh. Rather, we submit ourselves to God as living sacrifices. So, how does that relate to the government? How were Christians in Rome to think of the Roman empire? In considering this question, we can remember that Jesus prayed not that we would be taken out of the world, but that God would keep us from the evil one. We are to be among society with people in the world, and as Christians, we currently have a sort of “dual citizenship:” one of earthly address and one of the heavenly kingdom. Thus, since engaging with the world while we await Christ from heaven is part of the gospel plan, we are to do so in ways that represent Christ and his holiness well.

VERSES 1-7

The proper attitude of Christians toward civil authorities

VERSES 8-10

Loving our neighbor, fulfilling the law

VERSES 11-14

Everything is to be done in light of our coming hope

Christian Submission

In our culture, we tend to resist authority, but the concept of submission is godly and fundamental to Christianity. **The idea that “no one can tell me what to do” is not a Biblical one.** In dying with Christ, our lives belong to God and we are subject to His authority. Additionally, there are spheres of human authority that are instituted by God where submission also takes place: within the family, within the church, and under the government. Within families, wives submit to their husbands and children submit to their parents. Within the church, the assembly submits to eldership and pastoral care. Romans 13 will show why Christian citizens are to peacefully submit to the laws of civil authorities.

Historical Context

The Hebrews especially struggled with this concept of subjection to civil authority. Israel was once a sovereign nation, so after coming under the Gentile rule of the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and finally the Romans, they were difficult to occupy because they rebelliously wanted their nation back.

They expected a political, military Messiah to overthrow the government and reinstitute Israel's reign. Needless to say, the humiliated, crucified carpenter was not what they were expecting. Radical groups like "the zealots" cropped up and often tried to assassinate Roman officials. . Finally, in 70 AD, Israel's rebellion was squashed when General Titus destroyed most of Jerusalem.

Chapter Highlights

VS 1-2

"Be subject to the higher powers" - the phrase translated "higher powers" means "ruling authorities," like how Caesar was supreme ruler of Rome. Verse 1 says these authorities are ordained of God, meaning they are arranged under his ultimate authority the way soldiers are arranged under a higher ranking official. God is on the throne, and every power in creation is subject to His will and reign. We all answer to God, and that should inspire a deep sense of accountability for both us and them. This doesn't mean we blindly obey them, binding all our actions and will to them the way we do for our Lord, but Scripture calls us to subservience, reasonableness, and honor towards them. This section is also not saying that every government or political leader is handpicked and personally appointed by God, but that all human authority is under the umbrella of God's authority. This is in accordance with what Jesus said to Pilate in John 19: **"You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above."** It is God Whom we honor with our peaceful submission to them, even if humans unjustly mishandle their position.

VS 3-5

We are not to do evil in resistance to these civil authorities. Though imperfect, they are a temporary ordination from God for the promotion of good and restraining of evil. In that way, they are servants of God and part of how His wrath is revealed against evil today. It is notable that in executing justice against evil, these civil servants use a sword, which is in stark contrast to the pastoral rod that church elders and parents use for correction. Though many civil authorities will misuse the sword for evil against God, our job is to do good anyway.

*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;
Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the
praise of them that do well.
For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:
As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.
Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*

I PETER 2:13-17

Anarchy is not a Biblical model for society. Order and justice matter to God. Beginning in Genesis 9 with the Noahic covenant, God stopped letting evildoers run rampant with no accountability for their crimes. If we need a reminder of what the world looks like with no government, it can be seen in the chaos of a world that God decided needed to be entirely flooded. Even though at times these authorities are corrupt and commit great evil, their purpose from God is to function as a check against mankind's sinfulness. Even Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus were called God's servants/ministers because of the role they played.

Since authorities are often evil, what are the limits to what we submit to? **Under what condition is it right to resist what they tell us to do?** The answer can be summarized by something Peter and John said in Acts in the face of being told not to speak of Jesus: "We ought to obey God rather than men." If ever submitting to the government's commands would inhibit us from submitting to God's commands, we must obey God. When Pharaoh commanded all the midwives of Egypt to kill Hebrew babies, they honored God and disobeyed the king. Likewise, Daniel didn't eat food offered to idols when he was told to. Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego didn't worship the statue of the king. Daniel prayed when it was illegal to do so. Esther appeared before the king even though it was forbidden. These are examples of proper civil disobedience, but these are extreme situations, and generally, the call is for submission (as can be seen in the majority of these believers' lives.) If we are brought before a court with a sentence against us, or if we suffer, it should be for Jesus' name's sake (which often happened to Christians during the time Romans was written.) It should not be because of wicked crimes. A Christian is to be a good citizen, until being a good citizen means being a bad Christian. Our Christian duty is to submit to civil authorities lovingly, with honor, and respectfully. We can see it as an opportunity to deny our own will and exalt the lordship of Christ. With this heart, we shouldn't get excited about the rare instances where resistance is necessary. 1 Timothy 2 even says that prayers of thanksgiving should be made for civil authorities. So, let us drop the mockery and cruelty so often associated with speaking of people in these positions. Let us do good out of a desire to honor God in all aspects of life. The government has its place: keeping the peace and punishing evildoers. But the church has a different purpose: evangelize every nation, under every kind of government, bringing them under the true authority of God. Thus, it is proper for there to be a separation of church and state.

VS 6-7

"For for this cause pay ye tribute" - The word translated "tribute" is only ever used Biblically of taxes. Even when those in charge use taxes for ungodly reasons, we are to pay them. We are to obey the law, even if we think the law is silly.

VS 6-7 CONT.

Jesus spoke on this topic by saying, “Render to Caesar unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” Roman coins bore the image of Caesar, but we bear the image of God. So we can respectfully give Caesar his coins, so to speak, but we are to give God what is due him: our whole self.

VS 8-14

“Owe no man anything, but to love one another” - This doesn’t mean we have to pay for everything in cash, but generally we are not to be those who leave our debts unpaid. However, the ongoing debt of love should always be continually paid. Loving our neighbor fulfills all the commandments of the law. So, let us not walk in wantonness, with no respect for self-control or purity. And just as importantly, let us not walk in strife and envy. Don’t let politics give opportunity for division among the church. We ought to cheerfully submit regardless of election outcomes. We don’t take thoughtful provision for fleshly desires, but for service to our Lord. Put on the Lord Jesus, and don’t put yourself in the way of temptation and the wisdom of the world.

Conclusion

The day of Christ is drawing near, and when we live in view of that, these commands will seem reasonable. It is when this temporary age is most precious to us that these earthly matters wrongly seem to carry the utmost importance to us. In any type of society, we can live redeemed lives in view of the day when every kingdom will be absorbed into Christ’s kingdom, both good and bad. Someday soon, every authority will come to acknowledge and praise him. He shall reign with all authority in both heaven and earth. He will be THE higher power, avenger, rewarder, and king.

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