

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #46

Romans 13:1-7

Is it ever Biblically right for citizens of the United States to resist and even disobey the government? I believe the Biblical answer to this question is “Yes.”

- 1) We should refuse to obey the government if it says we cannot teach the Scriptures, specifically about faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 5:27-29). In those cases we must obey God, not man.
- 2) We should refuse to obey the government if it demands that believers perform immoral or non-Christians actions. In Genesis, the governmental leaders of the city of Sodom went to Lot’s house and demanded that he turn over the two angels to them for their deviant homosexual practices and Lot refused and God honored him for it (Gen. 19:1-11).

During the days of Hitler, Christians in Germany were told that they could not have anything to do with the Jews other than to persecute them and kill them. Dietrich Bonhoeffer took a stand against Hitler and formed an underground church which eventually got him hanged.

- 3) We should refuse to obey the government if the government becomes a threat to the welfare of innocent citizens. When Saul was king of Israel and wanted to kill King David, David did not just submit, he fled (I Samuel 20). When King Herod put Peter in jail and the angels broke him out, he didn’t just submit and stay in jail; He got out of there (Acts 12:1-19).

However there is a general principle that God wants applied in the Church Age. Apparently there were some in the Church of Rome who were suggesting the real mark of spiritual integrity was to always stand up and speak out against godless political leadership.

WE DEMONSTRATE THE TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WHEN WE HUMBLY SUBMIT TO AND SUPPORT GOVERNMENTAL LEADERSHIP WHICH GOD HAS ORDAINED.

1. “Christians must subject themselves also to the wicked and unbelievers.”
Dr. Martin Luther - great reformer of the 1500s.
2. “Obedience to government is demanded on the grounds of their official station.”
Dr. Charles Hodge - theologian and gifted linguist of the 1800s.
3. “When you resist government, you resist God Himself.”
Dr. W. H. Griffith Thomas - great teacher, preacher, and lecturer of the early 1900s.
4. “Paul refutes the idea that Christians should disobey and rebel against authorities.”
Dr. Warren Wiersbe

5. “These seven verses contain the clearest and most specific New Testament teaching on the Christian’s responsibility to civil authority. Every Christian, no matter what form of government he lives under, is under command from the Lord to maintain proper and useful submission to that government ...”

Dr. John Mac Arthur

There are three reasons why we would submit to governmental leadership:

REASON #1 – Because God has ordained all government. **13:1b-2**

The starting point of all voluntary submission is the Sovereignty of God. The prepositional phrase “from God” or “by God” is the same word “υπο” which occurs twice in this verse. This little preposition indicates that God is the cause and the agent behind all government (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 460). Now the word “established” (τασσω) means to assign or appoint. It was a military term used for one who would appoint various responsibilities or give out various orders (*Ibid.*, p. 440).

We may cite four Biblical examples of evil leaders God raised up: 1) Pharaoh (Exodus 9:16); 2) Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:17, 25, 32); 3) Cyrus (45:1) called God’s anointed; and 4) Nero.

When Paul was writing this, he primarily would have had in his mind Nero. Nero was the most ungodly political leader there ever was even during his tranquil period. Some will say, “Yes, but Paul wrote this during a tranquil period.” According to Titus 3:1, Paul had already served one jail term, and according to I Peter 2:13-17, when Peter wrote this Christians were being killed. C. I. Scofield said, “The Apostle points out that orderly government is part of God’s provision, even in a wicked world” (Reference Bible, NASV, p. 1574).

As I understand Scripture, it seems we have six Biblical responsibilities as Christians to all government:

- 1) Obey it (unless they demand we do something immoral or unbiblical);
- 2) Respect it (realize the leader is there by God’s sovereignty);
- 3) Support it (pay our taxes);
- 4) Pray for it (for salvation and for God’s direction);
- 5) Tell it God’s truth (communicate God’s Word even when it may contradict the leader’s opinion).
- 6) Vote - it is our privilege and responsibility to vote.

Jesus, when facing Pilate, Personally demonstrated this fact. He willingly submitted to Pilate, but He certainly told Him the truth of God’s Word - John 19:9-22 (v. 11).

Suppose one says I am not going to obey this mandate; I don’t agree with it and I will not submit to it. Paul spells out two very negative results for such a person.

Negative Result #1 - Refusing to submit means a person rejects God . **13:2a**

That word “resist” is one that means to “stand against” or “do battle against.”

What Paul is saying is that when we take a stand against the ordained governmental authority of God, we are standing against God; we are fighting against what He ordained.

Negative Result #2 - Refusing to submit means a person will receive judgment . **13:2b**

The verb “receive” is a future tense verb in the indicative mood. What this means is it is a fact that if we take a stand against God-ordained authority, we will in the future receive a condemnatory judgment of God.

This judgment would occur after the violation and may occur partially in this life and ultimately at the judgment seat of Christ. In a similar context, Proverbs 24:21-22 gives a similar warning to believers not to oppose leadership.

REASON #2 – Because God has a purpose for all government. **13:3-4**

R. A. Torrey said, “Even bad government is better than no government at all.”

Purpose #1 - Our government is to punish those in society who are evil . **13:3a, 4b**

Purpose #2 - Our government is to praise those in society who are good . **13:3b, 4a**

On a local, state, national, and universal level, it is the responsibility of government to decide who will be praised and who will be punished. It is not the responsibility of the Christian to decide.

This responsibility has been ordained by God and given to political leaders, and God will hold those leaders accountable for what they did with the power He gave them.

The word “sword” (**13:4**) is one that refers to a destructive weapon that speaks of punishment even to the extent of bodily harm and death. God has given this kind of punishment responsibility to government. The government must decide which individuals or nations should be praised or punished.

Now God holds governmental leadership in high regard; in fact, He calls them His “ministers” (**13:4a**). That is the same word (διακονος) from which we get our English word “deacon.”

God considers all political leadership to be in a sacred ministry service for Him.

REASON #3 – Because God expects submission to all government. **13:5-7**

There are two areas that Paul points out in which we are to be submissive:

Area #1 - Submission in conscience . **13:5**

In order for us to have a good conscience before God, we must submit to God-ordained leadership.

We want a conscience that is sensitive and honest. We want a conscience that becomes quickly convicted at the slightest wrong. When our conscience is so programmed that we watch our speech and guard what we say about leadership, we have a conscience that is pure before God.

Area #2 - Submission with money . **13:6-7**

The religious leaders hated the authority of the Roman government.

Paul lists four ways to submit to government: two are tangible and two are mental.

(Way #1) - By paying taxes . **13:7a**

This was like a federal tax.

(Way #2) - By paying custom . **13:7b**

This was more like a state income tax.

(Way #3) - By paying fear . **13:7c**

Fear is a reverence that is actually owed to leadership which God has ordained.

(Way #4) - By paying honor . **13:7d**

We are to be esteeming leadership as something of great value.

We cannot stop David Letterman or Jay Leno from mocking our governmental officials, but we can certainly stop ourselves. Let us purpose to be men and women who fear and submit to God and to His appointed leaders.