

THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT

TEXT: ROMANS 13:1-5

INTRODUCTION:

1. The Paul said in Philippians 3:20, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."
"Conversation" here means, "citizenship."
2. As Christians, our citizenship "is in heaven." However, we are also citizens here on earth. Some Christians have said that Christians have a "dual citizenship," but I prefer not to say that because the Bible never uses that term, and it can be misleading.
3. The problem with the term "dual citizenship" is it implies that our allegiances are equal, but they are not.
4. The apostle Paul was a Roman citizen. When he was about to be scourged by Roman soldiers, Paul said to the centurion, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman (citizen), and uncondemned?"(Acts 22:25).
5. Our Lord said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" (Luke 20:25).
6. Daniel Webster said, "Whatever makes men good Christians makes them good citizens."
7. As good Christians, and good citizens, we are to pray for those in authority (I Timothy 2:1-3).
8. Titus 3:1 says, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work."
9. To "be subject unto the higher powers" (13:1) means we are to be submissive and obedient, except when the government's laws are contrary to God's laws.
10. That is why Peter and the other apostles said to the high priest and the council, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

11. This obviously means that if man's laws and God's laws conflict, we must obey God's law.

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY AS A CITIZEN

1. Martin Luther said, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone."

2. Romans 13 teaches that while we are here on earth we have a responsibility to obey human government because human government derives its authority from God (13:1).

3. God only established three institutions – the family, and government, and the church. Human government was instituted by God when Noah came out of the ark.

4. God ordained government for man's protection. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Genesis 9:6).

5. Twice in the book of Judges we read, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

6. The duty of the Christian as a citizen of heaven is spiritual – we are to pray, we are to read the Bible, we are to support our local church, we are to win souls, etc.

7. The duty of the Christian as a citizen of the USA (or other country) is secular – we are to obey the laws of our country (as long as they do not conflict with God's Word), we are to vote, we are to pay our taxes (Romans 13:6, 7), we are to salute our flag, and defend our country if called to do so.

8. But we are to try and keep these two functions separate. Too many people scramble them together and this often leads to confusion.

9. As Baptists we believe in the separation of church and state. Not the separation of God and state!

II. THE POWERS THAT BE ARE ORDAINED OF GOD (13:1).

1. The word “powers” (13:1) means “authorities.”
2. The government has no power (or authority) apart from God – “For there is no power but of God” (13:1).
3. Pontius Pilate said to our Lord, “Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” (John 19:10).
4. Our Lord answered him, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11).
5. The Bible clearly teaches that we are to submit ourselves to governmental authorities because they “are ordained (appointed) of God” (Romans 13:1; cf. I Peter 2:13-17).
6. In other words, God put them there. When Paul wrote this epistle, Nero, a very wicked tyrant (a sexual degenerate, murderer, etc.), was the Roman emperor.
7. Paul himself was imprisoned and finally executed by Nero, yet he never counseled rebellion or disobedience, except when human laws contradict God’s laws.
8. *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* says Nero “gave way to the greatest extravagancy of temper, and to the most atrocious barbarities. Among other diabolical whims, he ordered that the city of Rome should be set on fire...(he) contrived all manner of punishments for the Christians that the most infernal imagination could design. In particular, he had some sewed up in skins of wild beasts, and then worried by dogs until they expired; and others dressed in shirts made stiff with wax, fixed to axle-trees, and set on fire in his gardens, in order to illuminate them. This persecution was general throughout the whole Roman Empire; but it rather increased than diminished the spirit of Christianity.”
9. James Stifler wrote, “Civil government has its source in God, and all constituted power is appointed and ordained by him. The cruel abuses in governments are no necessary part of them and do not invalidate their divine charter any more than the abuses of marriage rob it of its

sacredness. Any government is preferable to anarchy, just as poorly enforced marriage laws are better than none” (*The Epistle to the Romans*).

10. Richard Halverson said, "To be sure, men will abuse and misuse the institution of the State just as man because of sin has abused and misused every other institution in history including the Church of Jesus Christ, but this does not mean that the institution is bad or that it should be forsaken. It simply means that men are sinners and rebels in God's world, and this is the way they behave with good institutions. As a matter of fact, it is because of this very sin that there must be human government to maintain order in history until the final and ultimate rule of Jesus Christ is established. Human government is better than anarchy, and the Christian must recognize the 'divine right' of the State" (*Prologue to Prison*).
11. There is an old saying: "People get the kind of government they deserve." This can be seen in the history of Israel, and here in our own country as well.
12. According to Bible prophecy, the world will soon come under the control of the antichrist. He will be the man the people want to lead them.
13. But God is working, and His plans are moving forward, though most people do not understand that. God uses one nation to chastise another nation. Nations rise and fall. Nations come and go, but God is behind them all, overruling in the affairs of men.
14. Psalm 66:7 says God "ruleth by His power for ever; His eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves."

III. TO RESIST THE GOVERNMENT IS TO REBEL AGAINST GOD (ROMANS 13:2).

1. The Bible teaches that disobedience to government is disobedience to God (13:2). The word "damnation" in Romans 13:2 is not referring to eternal damnation in hell. The word means "judgment" (see Scofield margin).
2. The same word is found in I Corinthians 11:29 – "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation (judgment) to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

3. James Stifler wrote, "Paul's words are unmistakable, and yet there stand (Oliver) Cromwell and (George) Washington."
4. Donald Grey Barnhouse preached a sermon on this subject, and he pointed out that when the First Continental Congress met at Philadelphia in 1774, they had no intention of going to war or even of separating from England.
5. Their goal was to develop a reasonable solution to their difficulties and to try and bring about reconciliation between the colonies and Great Britain.
6. But England forced the issue, and the Battles of Lexington and Concord led to the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War.
7. Sir T.M. Taylor said "that the Christian lives always in a tension between two competing claims; that in certain circumstances disobedience to the command of the State may be not only a right but also a duty" (*The Heritage of the Reformation*).
8. Paul himself was guilty (at least) one time of resisting authority. After the high priest Ananias commanded someone to smack Paul in the mouth, Paul responded by saying, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall" (Acts 23:2, 3).
9. Paul was rebuked and he apologized, explaining that he did not know that he was the high priest. Paul then quoted Exodus 22:28, "For it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts 23:4, 5).
10. Incidentally, this took place right around the same time Paul wrote this epistle (60 AD).
11. Romans 13:3 says, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." This is a general statement. As a rule, governments praise the good and they punish evil. The only people who should live in fear of the government's representatives (police, prosecutors, judges, etc.) are those who break the law (cf. 13:4).
12. It should be noted that on several occasions Paul found protection in Roman law (cf. Acts 22:25-30; 23:12-35).
13. The Bible says civil authorities serve us "for good" (13:4). We are to submit to them, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake" (13:5). Our conscience is to be enlightened by the Word of God.

CONCLUSION:

1. Before we conclude, let me say a few words about capital punishment (the death penalty). The “sword” in Romans 13:4 symbolizes the government’s right to inflict capital punishment.
2. This sword was worn by the Roman Emperor and his bodyguards.
3. Paul says the executioner is "the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4).
4. The civil authorities are called “ministers (servants) of God” in the temporal or secular sphere. Pastors are “ministers (servants) of God” in the spiritual sphere.
5. Many people see capital punishment as a political issue or an issue dealing with sociology (the study of social problems in society), or law and justice, etc., but it is primarily a Biblical subject and that is how we should look at it (Romans 13:4, 5).
6. Capital punishment was introduced when God ordained government after the flood. Genesis 9:6 says, “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”
7. The death penalty is taught all throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and it has never been repealed or abrogated.
8. I have heard people say that, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:24, 25) was the Jewish law and we are no longer bound by it.
9. It is true that, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc." is part of the Mosaic Law and it is true that we are not under the law. However, God instituted capital punishment hundreds of years before the law, and it was later on incorporated into the Mosaic law.
10. And when we come to the New Testament we see that capital punishment has never been rescinded.