

Subject: *God's Purpose for Government*

Scripture: *Romans 13:1-7*

This text is the most complete passage in Scripture on the God-given role of government. Now is a good time for us to think about God's purpose for government. Paul lays out some very important and basic teaching as to how Christians are to respect government and its officials. The Bible teaches the separation of church and state, but it does not teach the separation of God and government.

- 1) Every person should submit to government authority.
- 2) God possesses all authority and delegates that divine authority to human government.
- 3) People who resist government authority are actually resisting God's authority.
- 4) God intended for government to promote what is good and punish what is evil.
- 5) Government officials are God's servants to accomplish His will on earth.
- 6) People who do evil should be punished by the government.
- 7) Every person should respect and support government in several ways.

1. GOD'S ROLE FOR GOVERNMENT

A. God delegates His authority to government

God has delegated authority to four groups: 1) the government over its citizens; 2) the church over believers; 3) parents over children; and 4) masters over servants (employers over employees). We recognize God's authority over our nation when we pledge allegiance to our flag: "one nation under God." We acknowledge that we are under God's blessings and under His authority. The word *powers* (Gk., *exousia*) means authorities. Ultimately all authority rests in God. He delegates this authority to governments and government leaders.

Psalm 62:11 *God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.*

John 19:10-11 *Don't you know that I have power to crucify you, and I have power to release you? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.*

B. Government officials are God's ministers (servants) – A head of state is called the Prime Minister. The head of defense is called the Defense Minister. "Rulers" are those who occupy a position of government authority (federal, state, or local level).

C. Government is authorized to promote the public good – one of the best things any government can provide is law and order so we can live in peace.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 ¹*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;* ²*For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

D. Government is authorized to punish evil

If you do evil you should fear the consequences. "Revenger" is the same word used in Rom. 12:19 for "avenge" and "vengeance." God uses government as a revenger to execute wrath (God's wrath) on the guilty party. When someone is punished for their crime we say justice was done...that's right, God's justice. Ultimate justice is reserved for a future time and court, but God provides a measure of justice even now through human government.

The Bible gives several principles about crime and punishment:

- The punishment should fit the crime – **Deuteronomy 19:21** *And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*
- The punishment should be a deterrent to crime – **Deuteronomy 19:20** *And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.*
- The punishment should be carried out impartially – **Deuteronomy 13:6-9**⁶ *If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;*⁷ *Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;*⁸ *Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:*⁹ *But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.*
- The punishment should be carried out swiftly – **Ecclesiastes 8:11** *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

2. GOD'S REQUIREMENTS FOR CITIZENS

Look at a parallel passage in **1 Peter 2:13-17**¹³ *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;*¹⁴ *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.*¹⁵ *For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:*¹⁶ *As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.*¹⁷ *Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

A. Submit to all government authority

There have been many forms of government; some were good and others evil and oppressive:

Theocracy – rule by God

Monarchy – rule by a king

Dictatorship – rule by one person who was usually evil

Oligarchy – rule by a few people who were usually wealthy and powerful

Democracy – rule by all the people

Republic – rule by representatives of the people

In our country we have a democratic republic, but in Romans 13, they had a dictatorship. The Roman Empire was the governing power and it was a dictatorship. Slavery was widespread and personal freedoms were limited. We have some idea what it was to live in those days. Under Roman government Herod ordered the slaughter of all baby boys under the age of two, John the Baptist was beheaded, Jesus was crucified and thousands of others who rebelled against the government, James was executed by the sword. and Paul was beheaded under Emperor Nero.

B. Obey all civil laws (unless they violate God's law)

Acts 4:13-20

Acts 5:27-29

We must draw the line when government commands us to do what God forbids or when it forbids us to do what God commands.

C. Accept praise or punishment from the government

D. Pay taxes to the government

Matthew 22:21 *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

A man sent \$1,000 to the IRS with a note attached: "Here is the money I owe for unpaid taxes. I felt so guilty I couldn't sleep. If I still have trouble sleeping, I'll send \$500 more."

E. Pay respect to all government officials

“Render” means to pay something that we owe. It is not voluntary, but mandatory. God demands that we have respect for government officials. It doesn't matter if we agree or disagree with their policies. Remember it could be a whole lot worse.

Be thankful and respectful toward government officials. Don't resent them or rebel against them. Believers are citizens of heaven, but we are also to be good citizens on earth. Daniel Webster said, “Whatever makes men good Christians makes them good citizens.” In other words, you can't be a faithful Christian and not be a faithful citizen.

Today people are mostly concerned about their rights rather than their responsibilities. President J. F. Kennedy famously said: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”