

## The Christian & Civil Government

**Text:** Romans 13:1-7

### Introduction:

1. Paul continues his practical exhortations to consecrated, Christian living.
2. Paul has just dealt with our Christian duties both towards those within and those without the household of faith in 12:9-21. The fact that he has called for a life of strict separation from conformity to this world's system (Vs. 1-2) does not mean we are to disdain and disrespect human government.
3. This lesson: Paul explains that government is a God-ordained institution which is to be upheld by the Christian.

### I. The Ordination of Civil Authority (Vs. 1-2)

#### A. The Acknowledgment of rulers (Vs. 1a)

1. "every soul" = idiom meaning "every person"
2. 'subject' = to arrange under (e.g. like soldiers arranged under a general); to be subordinate to. Submission to authority a prominent theme in the Scriptures. For example:
  - a. Wives to their husbands (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18)
  - b. Church members to their leaders (Heb. 13:17)
  - c. Believer's one to another (Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5)
  - d. Children to their parents (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20)
3. "higher powers" = lit. "authorities set over"; "the ruling authorities" (Sorenson)

#### B. The Appointment of Rulers (Vs. 1b)

1. 'for' = reason for the submission
2. "no power but of God...ordained of God" = God is the author of human government and is ultimately the one who sets up and removes rulers
  - a. Daniel 2:20-21 *"Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding."*
  - b. Daniel 4:17 *"...to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."* (Also 4:25; 4:32; 5:21)
3. The three institutions ordained by God: 1. The Home 2. The Government 3. The Church

#### C. The Admonition concerning rulers (Vs. 2)

1. "resisteth" = to oppose

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2. “resisteth the ordinance of God” = opposition to lawful demands made by God-ordained authorities are ultimately rebellion against the God who appointed those authorities.
3. ‘damnation’ = judgment, condemnation. Rebellion against lawful and legitimate demands made by civil government evokes the wrath of the state.

### II. The Objective of Civil Authority (Vs. 3-4)

#### A. To Praise the Upright (Vs. 3-4a)

1. “not a terror to good works but to the evil” = the purpose of government is not to strike fear into the hearts of those upholding the law but those who disobey it
2. Note: While the primary challenge in these verses is to believers and their responsibilities towards civil government, they do also outline the central duty of government – the punishment of evil doers and the rewarding of those who abide by the law, the maintenance of law and order. So, a Divine benchmark is set not only for the believer but also for the civil powers. (Refer Vs. 6 – “continually upon this very thing”)
3. 1 Peter 2:13-14 *“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.**”*
4. “minister of God” = officials viewed as servants of God

#### B. To Punish the Evil (Vs. 4)

1. “sword” = symbolic of the authority of the state to execute firm punishment of infractions of the law, even capital punishment.
2. Note: The sword is born by the governmental powers, never the church.
3. “a revenger to execute wrath” = justice is to be meted out to those who practice evil. Note: The trend towards obstruction of justice in our judicial system today is anti-biblical.

### III. The Obligations to Civil Authority (Vs. 5-7)

#### A. Submission (Vs. 5)

In summation, two reasons for the Christians submission are outlined in this verse:

1. Because of fear (5a). This is the lesser of the two reasons. Fear of the consequences are a deterrent to crime but for the believer there is a higher motivation.
2. Because of faith (5b). The believer’s subjection to God-ordained authorities is necessary for the maintenance of a clear conscience.

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- a. Paul's testimony - Acts 24:16 *"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."*
- b. Our conscience is informed by the truth of God's Word. The believer submits to earthly authorities because of his understanding that these authorities are appointed by God.

### B. Taxation (Vs. 6-7a)

1. The reason for taxation (Vs. 6)
  - a. "For for this cause" = the cause outlined in Vs. 3-4 (maintenance of law and order)
  - b. "God's ministers" = three times government officials in these verses are described in this way (twice in Vs. 4 and once in this verse). Civil officials may not even believe in God but in reality, they are His servants to restrain evil.
  - c. Note: The best rulers are those who view themselves as servants under the Higher authority of God.
    - i. This is why we have in general, experienced good governance in our nations history due to the Judeo-Christian influence.
    - ii. Copy of Parliamentary prayer read at the commencement of each sitting day (both House of Representatives & Senate):

The President, on taking the chair each day, shall read the following prayer:<sup>1</sup>

Almighty God, we humbly beseech Thee to vouchsafe<sup>2</sup> Thy special blessing upon this Parliament, and that Thou wouldst be pleased to direct and prosper the work of **Thy servants** to the advancement of Thy glory, and to the true welfare of the people of Australia.

Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

2. The responsibility of taxation (Vs. 7a)
  - a. 'render' = pay
  - b. 'dues' = debts, that which is owed
  - c. 'tribute' = typically a tax levied annually upon houses, lands and persons
  - d. 'custom' = indirect taxes on goods, tolls

### C. Recognition (Vs. 7b)

1. "fear...honor" = we are to appropriately respect civil authorities

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Senate/Powers\\_practice\\_n\\_procedures/aso/so050](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/aso/so050)

<sup>2</sup> To grant or give

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2. Examples: Using their proper titles, conveying respect in our demeanor & body language (e.g. with the police), avoidance of unsubstantiated rumor and slander (e.g. media reports)

### Conclusion:

1. This is where the rubber meets the road in the Christian walk. Do we have a testimony of upright, law-abiding citizens or is our testimony marred by our disregard for law and order?
2. Excerpt from NBC Covenant: *We further covenant to maintain family and secret devotion; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; **to walk circumspectly in this present world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements and exemplary in our deportment;** to avoid all tattling, backbiting and excessive anger; to abstain from everything that will cause our brother to stumble or that will bring reproach upon the cause of Christ; and to strive to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, that amidst evil and good report we will **humbly and earnestly seek to live to the honour and glory of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us***