

The Christian Manual: Study 16, Romans 13:1-7

Romans Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: What is the Christian's relationship to worldly authorities?

Subjection

Section 1: Romans 13:1 God makes kings

13 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Chapter divisions were made by men. They weren't in the original text. This isn't a new chapter, but a continuation of what Paul's been saying. Paul just told us to not be conformed to the world. He told us to function corporately as the church and individually as Jesus would. This new reality would naturally lead us to the

question, "If we're not to be conformed to the world, then do we need to conform to worldly authorities? Shouldn't those in the kingdom of Christ reject the authority of rulers in the kingdom of Satan, the god of this world?"

Paul's answer cuts to the heart of these questions and helps us understand how God works in our world. Paul tells us that our rulers are not independent agents. They didn't get their positions by their slick campaigns or catchy slogans. They were put into place by God. Whether they know it or not, they're God's representatives. We are to be subject to them. The word subject comes from two words in the Latin: sub, meaning 'under,' and jectus, meaning 'to place.' Paul is calling us to place ourselves willingly under the authority of the government. We do this as an expression of our subjection to God.

Section 2: Romans 13:2 Rebelling Against the Government is Rebelling Against God

²Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Some position themselves completely against the government and seek to bring it down. They declare themselves members of the kingdom of God who refuse to submit to the rule of men. Paul completely contradicts that here.

But what if the government is evil? Does Paul mean that we are to subject ourselves to a government like that of Hitler? Here I feel we need to be careful and nuanced. We should never be against a government, per se. We should follow all laws that don't contradict the Law of God. However, if the government ever calls us to do that which would compromise our faith, if they ever command us to do evil or to stop proclaiming Christ, then we must respectfully decline. Our models for this careful disobedience are Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1:10-16 and Peter in Acts 4:1-21.

Here Paul is focusing on the everyday performance of government—the maintaining of social order—and our response to it under God.

Section 3: Romans 13:3-5 Those Who Fear The Long Arm of the Law

³For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

⁵Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

It's hard to imagine living in fear of being caught for having broken the law. Think of those who hide under face masks, who look over their shoulders, hoping they're not recognized by authorities. Many in our society look upon the police as the enemy because they walk in fear of incarceration for their lawbreaking.

We're called to better things. We're to obey the laws as if they came from God. This applies to little things. We should drive the speed limit, as if it were put there by God. We should use crosswalks, as if God painted the lines. We should never shoplift, even tiny things. We shouldn't pirate videos or use other people's passwords to steal digital property. We shouldn't cheat on our taxes. We should obey the school rules. We should be good.

Christians should be the most law-abiding citizens because they are not obeying the law only to keep from being caught, but, as Paul says, they do it from a clear conscience. They do it as an expression of obedience to God. They are His good citizens.

Section 4: Romans 13:6-7 Taxes

⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷Give to everyone what you

owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

My wife and I recently had a run in with the IRS. I've always been very careful to save receipts and spend hours getting everything ready for tax time. One year our tax man made a mistake and claimed our daughter as a dependent when he wasn't supposed to. As soon as we were made aware of the mistake, we paid back the difference. Unfortunately, this was not the end of it. The IRS badgered us for three years, refusing our tax return and assigning various penalties. We spent many hours on the phone with them, but the nightmare continued. Finally, I wrote my congressman and explained our situation. He contacted the IRS on our behalf and they sent us an apology letter and dropped the case. They even sent us a check for the penalties they had wrongly charged us.

The only way we could get out of this problem was that all records showed that we had a long history of good behavior. We had faithfully paid our taxes in full. We had never falsified anything.

Paul calls us to a level of obedience that reaches into our wallets. We are not to cheat on our taxes. We are to pay them in full. Again, we do this because the authorities are God's representatives for our good. We are to support them gladly.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

There's no area of life that is not underneath God's authority. God raises up rulers and He can dethrone them at his will.

A simple journey through Daniel makes this apparent.

Daniel 2:21a says, "He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others." 2:37-38 says, "You, O king, *are* a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory;³⁸ and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given *them* into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you *are* this head of gold."

Christians are to be in the world but not of it. John Stott gives two options for the Christian and the state: Retreat or engagement.¹ We either stand back or get involved. Jim Wallis criticizes a church that blindly agrees with the state without seeking to improve it.² We change the world by being changed by God and living for Christ with others in loving community. When we do this, the world's systems of exploitation will be threatened by us. Tony Campolo wrote, "Though the church commanded no armies, held no political power, it still was able to sufficiently threaten the lifestyle of the Roman Empire to warrant the wrath of its emperors."³

¹ *Involvement*, by John Stott, pg. 34-35. Jacques Ellul saw the same situation and accused Christians of not knowing how to engage the world, see *Perspectives on Our Age*, pg. 107.

² *Agenda for Biblical People*, pgs. 1-2, 17, 43.

³ *The Power Delusion*, by Tony Campolo, pg. 64



CONNECT

Jesus had this conversation with the Pharisees.

14 They came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? **15** "Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." **16** They brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." **17** And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him. (Mark 12:14-17).

You're going to meet in groups of four or five to discuss the following.

Imagine a new government has taken over the United States. It has become illegal to practice Christianity. Open confession of Christ, or evangelism will result in immediate execution. What would your response be? Would you...

1. Accept what is happening and do what the government says. After all, we are to obey the authorities God puts over us.
2. Join with a plot to kill the leader of the government.
3. Join the resistance and be a spy for those trying to overthrow the government.
4. Openly resist what the government—continue to worship and pray and suffer the consequences.



WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Section 1 Romans 13:1

Christians are to place themselves underneath government authority for the government above them is placed there by God.

Section 2 Romans 13:2

Rebelling against the government is rebelling against God. The Christians in Paul's time saw themselves as completely transformed, new creations. They questioned their relationship to all the old realities of their pre-Christian life. One of these realities was the government. Paul explains that Governments are not self-appointed, but that all governments are put in place by God. (See Jesus' response to Pilate in John 19:11).

Section 3 Romans 13:3-5

Here we see the real purpose of government in a fallen world. The government is established to maintain social order. The people who have something to fear from the police are those who break the laws. As long as we are upstanding law-abiding citizens, we should have nothing to fear from the authorities. This is the right thing to do. The only time we are allowed to stand against an edict from the government is when it contradicts what God has commanded us to do.

Section 4 Romans 13:6-7

Christians are to pay their taxes—all of them. We are not to cheat or to cut corners. Paying taxes is an expression of honoring God.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Section 1 Read Romans 13:1

1. What is our relationship supposed to be with our government? Why?
2. Do you believe that Communist governments, like China and Fascist governments, like Hitler's Germany, were put in place by God?

Section 2 Read Romans 13:2

1. Who established the government? In what way is the government part of God's plan for society?

Section 3 Read Romans 13:3-5

1. Who has a legitimate reason to fear the government?
2. How can we live without this fear?
3. Is there ever a reason to stand against the government?
4. Is it ever right for a Christian to protest?
5. What place does voting have in the Christian life?
6. Should Christians become politicians?
7. Should Christians join the military and try to overthrow governments?

Section 4 Read Romans 13:6-7

1. Why is it important to pay taxes? What do taxes represent? How does this fit into Paul's argument in verse 1.
2. How can Christians be subjected to the government and still be agents for change where it is needed?

HOW DOES IT APPLY?

It is so easy to become secular in our thinking. We just have to imagine that there are some areas of life that don't touch our relationship with God.

Consider driving the speed limit. What if other cars around you are driving faster? What if there's no police around?

The idea that there's an area of my life that isn't underneath the lordship of Christ is a lie. It's a fabrication invented by the evil one to create a separation between my devotion to God and my personal life. When I allow such divisions to occur, I slowly begin to distance myself from God and I live under the illusion that this is my life and not His.

The government—Federal, State, and local principalities—are not separate from God. He places people into government for the purpose of creating laws and maintaining an orderly society. Laws help to curtail the evil that people would do to each other.

When we obey the laws, like the speed limit, we must do it unto the Lord. We must see our God behind the laws, behind the legislators, behind the police. When we obey the laws of our land, we must do it as an act of worship.

Titus 3:1 Remind the people to respect the government and be law-abiding, always ready to lend a helping hand.

1 Peter 2:13-14 Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order.