

The Christian's Attitudes and Actions Toward Governing Authorities (*Part 3*)

Romans 13:1-7

Thought for the Day: As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is our duty to be good citizens who are living in respectful submission to the governing authorities while maintaining a clear conscience before God.

As people who have been brought into right relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, how should our relationship with the Lord affect our relationship with governing authorities? What does "loving your neighbor as you love yourself" look like when your neighbor works for the government? As Christians, what attitudes should we hold and what actions should we take toward our government? We are living in a day in which the spirit of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:7), with the chaos and violence that comes with it, is sweeping over the earth. As the Day of the Lord approaches, we can expect an intensification of this spirit of lawlessness to take place. What, then, should be our attitudes and actions toward human government that was designed and intended by God to suppress this spirit?

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

- Just as a soldier submits to and obeys the orders of his superior officer, so we as Christian citizens, are to submit to and obey the laws of our governing authorities. (1 Peter 2:13-17)
- Human government was established by God to promote law and order on earth and the overall good of the civil society.

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

- As a general principle, to rebel against the governing authority is to rebel against God Himself; to disobey the government is to disobey God.
- When government is functioning in its proper, God-given capacity, those who rebel against the authority of the state should be punished; the judgment or punishment will come *through* the governing authority but it is ultimately *from* God Himself.

3 For 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 he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good.

- **Servant** – *diakonos* – *deacon*. Just as we have deacons in the church who serve the body of Christ, so government authorities are servants of God who are to serve the people for their good.
- These verses outline in broad terms what human government is supposed to do—why God created it. Government is to support and aid those who do what is right and to hold accountable and punish those who do wrong; to promote that which is good and restrain that which is evil.
- How are we to respond when government punishes those who are doing good and rewards those who are doing evil; when it promotes that which is evil and restrains that which is

good? (Isaiah 5:20; Proverbs 29:2; 28:12, 28)

- Regardless of what our government does, as Christian citizens we need to do what is good and right in the sight of God. (Romans 12:21; 1 Peter 3:9)

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

- In Roman government, the sword was a symbol of the power and authority of the ruler to enforce the law, even to the point of death.
- "Rulers must bear the sword; that is, they have the power to inflict punishment and even to take life... God has given the sword to rulers, and with it the authority to punish and even to execute. Capital punishment was ordained in Genesis 9:5-6, and it has not been abolished." (*Wiersbe, Be Right, p. 155*)
- All over the world, governments are doing away with capital punishment and decriminalizing many former illegal activities. This is another evidence of man's rebellion against God; governments are refusing to fulfill their God-given responsibility to punish evildoers and suppress evil. This is the spirit of lawlessness that is at work in our world.

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

- Two motives for submission to authority are given here: 1) Fear of punishment—the external motivation; 2) Maintaining a clear conscience before God—the internal motivation.
- However, if the government demands that we violate our conscience, then the Christian must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29; Daniel 3:16-18)
- Obedience to God and His Word must take priority over obedience to any government decree. But we must examine our motives. (1 Timothy 1:5)
- If we are acting or reacting in anger to the abuses of government, it is extremely unlikely that we are doing the will of God. (James 1:19-21)

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

- **Servant** – a term used to describe religious service. A government employee is actually a servant of God, whether he / she knows it or not.
- As a Christian government employee, it is important to remember that you are a servant of: 1) God; 2) the people; and 3) the government.
- Paul uses the same rationale here that he uses elsewhere to advocate financial support of those who are in full-time Christian ministry.

7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

- Some Christians feel that they should not have to pay taxes because the government uses the money for evil purposes. But if we refuse to pay our taxes, we are disrespecting the law, the officials who enforce the law, and the Lord Himself.

May God grant to us the wisdom, perseverance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit we so desperately need to be good citizens of our nation, state and town!