

Our Responsibility to Governing Authorities

Romans 13:1-7

Introduction: In the normal course of life, Christians must submit to governing authorities in light of God's sovereignty and the consequences. But there are also times when Christ-followers must choose between obeying God and the state.

1. *OPENING QUESTION – By what framework do we interpret Romans 13:1-7?*

- A. We cannot interpret this in a postmodern way.
 - 1. Over the years people have put a Marxist, Socialist even Monarchist spin on this passage.
 - 2. We must interpret this the normal way: historico-grammatical-contextual interpretation.
- B. We should recognize the thorny interpretive problem in this passage.
 - 1. Paul makes statements here that seem absolute.
 - 2. Yet, three men – Peter, Paul and Daniel model an exception. Acts 4:19; 5:29; Dan. 6:10.
- C. We have another problem with the interpretation: institutions are very hard to analyze.
 - 1. Biblical institutions are God-ordained social structures governing behaviors in humans.
 - 2. There are three God-ordained institutions in the Bible: marriage, government and church.
 - 3. Institutions are complex, because humans are fallen. We can always envision exceptions.
- D. The interpretive framework for understanding this passage is “graded absolutism.”
 - 1. Graded absolutism says that biblical commands will sometimes conflict w/each other.
 - 2. When they do, we follow the higher moral law, and God suspends our duty to the lower.

2. *PROBING THE COMMAND – Why submit to government? Romans 13:1-7*

- A. The force – Notice that this is a very strong command. Romans 13:1a; 1 Peter 2:13-17
 - 1. The word, *submit*, has clear meaning in this context, and the gov't. was Rome: e.g. Nero.
 - 2. How this applies – every form, level, or quality of government. 1 Pet. 2:13-17
 - 3. How this applies – this should be the normal course of our lives.
- B. First reason – Human government is a divine institution. 13:1b-2
 - 1. God originates human government after the flood. Genesis 9:1ff
 - 2. God shows himself sovereign over human government. Dan. 2:21; Hab. 1:6-11
 - 3. Jesus reflects this submission in action. John 19:11
- C. Second reason – God works through human government. 13:3-5
 - 1. It is a minister of God for good. (Note how we even use minister in government today.)
 - 2. We should submit because of consequences and because of conscience.
- D. Application – We therefore should pay taxes, & show respect as our normal predisposition. 13:6-7

3. *CLOSING QUESTION – But do we always have to obey authorities?*

- A. Current situation – Here's why this is such an important question.
 - 1. Many Christians down through the years have used Rom. 13 as a biblical reason to resist.
 - 2. Some Christians today question the nature of the U.S. founding documents.
 - 3. Some people question whether civil disobedience is justified. Ex: Bonhoeffer.
- B. 1st Application – Normally, we should obey governing authorities. But, there are times to resist.
 - 1. When repressive governments mandate clear immorality: e.g. China and abortion.
 - 2. When repressive governments outlaw ministry: e.g. North Korea.
 - 3. When repressive governments are killing people: e.g. Hiding Place.
- C. Application – Sometimes we need to ask, “Am I called to be part of the system, a Daniel?”