

How does our relationship with God shape our relationship to government?

Trent Cornwell / General

Review of Romans

- In Romans 12-16, we see the **daily life applications** of the Gospel Paul laid out in Romans 1-11.
- First 8 chapters Paul walks systematically through the Gospel.
- He begins with our sinfulness and need for a Savior.
- Then moves to God's merciful provision in Christ and what it means to be justified by faith alone and then all the spiritual blessings that come through being united to Christ.

[Romans 12:1](#) “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

Paul deals with five basic relationships.

1. Our new relationship to the Lord. v.1
2. Our relationship to ourselves. v.3
3. Our relationship to one another. v.4-5
4. Our relationship to our enemies. v.17-21
5. Paul addresses how Christians should relate to the government. 13:1-7

Some reasonable questions.

- Do you reject the government because you now serve a new king?
- Do you insult, slander, or mock earthly rulers when you disagree with them or dislike them?
- How does our relationship with God shape our relationship to government?

We have church members serving inside of 7 different governments.

1. Constitutional democracy: South Africa
2. Presidential republic: Turkey, Indonesia, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Benin
3. Federal republic: Nigeria, Mexico
4. One-party socialist republic: China
5. Democratic republic: Taiwan
6. Constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government: Japan
7. Parliamentary constitutional monarchy: Spain

Historical ethical issues not in our text.

1. Is submission to government absolute or are there limitations?
2. Is armed opposition to government ever permissible?
3. Does government have the right to take human life?
4. How much and in what manner may a Christian participate in government?
5. What should Christians do about governments who persecute Christians?
6. Should a Christian fight for secular governments?

[Romans 13:1-7](#) (KJV)

¹ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

² Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

⁴ For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

⁵ Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

⁶ For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

⁷ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

If we understand our submission to God as expressed through our obedience to government, then civil disobedience becomes justified only when it is a response to a higher call to obey God's will.

Question: How is a Christian supposed to live related to human governments while on the earth?

1. They are ordained God
2. They are God's servants for maintaining order
3. We must submit by supporting them in their work.

1. They are ordained of God

[Romans 13:1](#) “1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

- Power in the way that Paul is using it refers to the government's authority to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.
- Submission: Means willingly and gladly to accept a subordinate position because it is pleasing to God
- To whom is this command given? To every soul... especially to Christians
- Our authority is not your own. And you will give an account for how you use it.
- Are we saying that the government in North Korea exists because God established it? Or the violent government of Communist Russia under Stalin? Or the oppressive regime under the Egyptian government of Pharaoh? Yes, I am saying that.

Listen to what these passages say.

- [Romans 9:17](#) “17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.”
- [Proverbs 8:15–16](#) “15 By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. 16 By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.”
- [John 19:11](#) “11 Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”

Paul was writing to the Romans, who were not ignorant of evil government.

The context of [Romans 13](#) is the persecution of Christians

- [Romans 12:14](#) “14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.”
- [Romans 12:17](#) “17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”
- [Romans 12:21](#) “21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”
- Paul was executed at the hands of this particular government under Emperor Nero, a decade later.
- This letter should be interpreted in light of an evil government—not a peaceful one.

2. You must submit to the governing authorities because they are God's servants for maintaining order.

[Romans 13:2](#) “2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”

Paul explains the way in which the judgment will be carried out.

[Romans 13:3-5](#) “3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. 5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.”

Shocking statements.

- Rulers are described as the “servant of God.” v.4

Without naming names, are there any politicians you think they cannot be a servant of God, they are not servants nor do they have any fear of God in their lives.

- The governing authorities maintain order by commending those who do good and by punishing those who do wrong.
- And while Paul mentions both aspects here, his emphasis in this section is on their role as agents of justice.
- The sword represents their God ordained authority to execute justice and to carry it out.
- You are in danger of eternal judgment. Trouble with the law may be God's way of getting your attention. That you are in danger of a greater judgment.
- Rulers cause no fear for good conduct.
- Obey the law for the sake of a clear conscience before God, verses 1 and 2. Because he's behind all authority.
- One thing is clear from this passage is that there is one who is greater than the government, and he sees all things. His justice will be perfect.

Plead with the Lord to raise up public servants in this country and other countries who will be concerned with righteousness and justice.

Being good citizens of two different countries presents some very complex problems for all Christians

1. We have a citizenship in Heaven. [Philippians 3:20](#) “20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:”
2. The Apostle Paul repeatedly claimed the privileges of status as a citizen of Rome. Paul says in [Acts 22](#) to a Roman about to beat him for a crime he didn’t commit that it is not lawful for him to be flogged without a trial.

3. We submit by supporting them in their work.

A. Pay Taxes

- i. Jesus argued concerning the Temple Tax in Matthew 17 that children of God should not have to pay a tax to worship in His house. [Matthew 17:24-27](#) “24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? 25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? 26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. 27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.”
- ii. Once about taxes to the Romans: Matthew 22
 1. Giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s
 2. Jesus’ enemies sought to trap him
 3. The Pharisees and the Herodians wanted to trap him in his words. [Matthew 22:15-17](#) “15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. 16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. 17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?”
 4. Jesus’ answer is classic, and it is the foundation of what Paul teaches here. [Matthew 22:18-22](#) “18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? 19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. 20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? 21 They say unto him, Caesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s. 22 When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.”

- iii. Why? [Romans 13:6](#) “6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.”

B. Show Appropriate Respect and Honor

[Romans 13:7](#) “7 Render therefore to **all their dues**: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”

- i. A sense of obligation: give everyone what you owe him
- ii. It goes beyond merely paying taxes.
 - 1. Taxes = tribute, usually collected from all individual citizens as a tribute to their Roman overlords
 - 2. Custom = fees and taxes collected from specific people at specific moments, like levies at ports of entry, use of bridges, places of commerce, crossroads, and sale of goods

| Kanon Bloom and Jon Canavan spend \$14 in tolls to see each other in NYC.

- iii. ALSO: fear and honor
 - 1. In a courtroom: “Yes your honor” “No your honor”
 - | Greg called the judge at our adoption, “Your Majesty”
 - 2. We should use these terms in our prayers, social media, and when we teach our children.

Transition: Paul’s message is actually subversive, considering the time period. Paul wrote that God is actually the ultimate authority (v.1), and Caesar is simply God’s “minister” whom God permits to rule (v.4). What a subversive message! As Christians, we are to voluntarily submit ourselves to human government, while we know that Jesus is the ultimate King.

Do we take Romans 13 as a requirement for unquestioning submission to human government?

This question of the limits of Christian submission to government is really an old one, and the Bible has much to say about it.

Bible examples of being innocent before God and before the king.

1. Peter and John
 - a. A limit to Christian submission to government. [Acts 4:18–19](#) “18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.”
 - b. Follow up visit to court. We noticed you’re not obeying the command we gave you earlier. Well, they could say we already told you. And they did tell them again. [Acts 5:27–29](#) “27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. 29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”
2. The Hebrew midwives were blessed by God by disobeying; after disobeying Pharaoh’s command to kill all the boy babies, they were blessed by God for that.
3. The Book of Daniel gives us actually repeated examples of godly people who refuse to obey an ungodly command and yet maintained a stance of submission to the government.
 - a. Daniel and his friends would not eat the defiled food in chapter one, but they *asked permission* not to eat the defiled food.
 - b. In [Daniel 3](#), Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will not bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s gold statue.
 - i. They’re thrown in a fiery furnace, but God rescues them. And then Nebuchadnezzar comes and gives them a lawful command [Daniel 3:26](#) “26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire.”

- ii. They said, “Yes, King.” And they came out. They did what they were told, as that was a lawful command, Come out. That doesn’t violate my conscience, but bowing down definitely does. There’s a difference.
- c. Daniel refused to obey the unjust command of prohibition against prayer. He was prohibited from praying to God. He could pray to King Darius, but he was not allowed to pray to the true God. He went ahead and bowed down and was thrown in the lion’s den. And he says, when he’s brought out, he says, [Daniel 6:22](#) “22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.”
 - i. He was submissive to the king’s authority up to that point but then he refused to obey.
 - ii. Innocent before God (in me) and before king.

Modern examples of being innocent before God and before the king.

- It may surprise you to know that only one story of the martyrdom of an apostle is narrated in the Bible, that of **James, son of Zebedee**.
- Anabaptist stories. Avoided the idolatries practice of the “Eucharist Adoration.”

After 316, the emperor Licinius decreed a persecution of Christians in the East. He threatened death if they failed to renounce their faith. In 320, forty young Christian Roman soldiers refused to sacrifice to idols and were tried before the tribunal at Sebaste, Cappadocia. The governor tried threats, bribery, and torture to persuade the young men, but they stood firm. He put the forty in prison, where it is said that Christ appeared and encouraged them to persevere.

Incensed by the soldiers’ obstinacy, the governor ordered that they be stripped and left to die standing on a frozen lake. He arranged a fire and warm bath on the shore to tempt them to apostatize. All forty signed a will, drafted by St. Meletius, the youngest, that expressed their faith, unity, and courage:

The young men did not wait to be stripped, but removed their clothes themselves. And together they prayed, “Lord, we are forty engaged in this contest. Grant that forty may receive crowns and that we may not fall short of that sacred number.” After one night’s ordeal, however, one soldier caved, but died of extreme heat in the bath, losing his martyr’s crown. But an off-duty guard, prompted by the martyrs’ courage and a dream, professed himself a Christian and took his place, thus preserving their number.

Questions we will have to ask ourselves.

- You have to discern, are you forced to disobey God by this government injunction?
- Are you being forced to do something that violates your conscience?
- Are you being forbidden to do something that God's commanded you to do?

Summary Statement

If we understand our submission to God as expressed through our obedience to government, then civil disobedience becomes justified only when it is a response to a higher call to obey God's will.