

## Introduction

- The foundational command to worship God with our whole lives (12:1) extends even to how a believer relates to governing civil authorities: “Believers express their commitment to God in how they relate to rulers and the law of the state.”<sup>1</sup>
- In 12:17-21, believers are commanded not to exercise vengeance, but to do good even to enemies. While God’s wrath is ultimately promised to the unrepentant evil, now we see that God intends to punish evil even in this life through civil government.

## Christian Citizenship (13:1,2)

### The Command (13:1a)

13:1a *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.*

- Though we are not to “*be conformed to this world*” (12:2), that does not mean that Christians are free from earthly authority.
- God created us to be obedient out of our faith (Romans 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; Hebrews 5:9) and our love (Exodus 20:6//Deuteronomy 5:10; John 14:15,21,23,24; 15:10; 1 John 2:5; 5:3) for Him. We were originally created to show forth God’s authority in the world (Genesis 1:26,28). He places authorities over us throughout our life which are earthly expressions of His authority: parents (Exodus 20:12//Deuteronomy 5:16; Proverbs 1:8; Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20), the church (Hebrews 13:7,17), and civil government.

### The Source of All Earthly Authority (13:1b,2)

13:1b *For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.* 13:2 *Therefore whoever resists*

<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pg. 677.

*authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.*

### Jesus Christ Is the Highest Authority

- The risen and ascended Jesus is the highest authority and is worthy of highest allegiance: READ Ephesians 1:20,21.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Holy Spirit moves us to confess Jesus as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3), the confession by which we are saved (Romans 10:9,13). “*Lord*” is a title of authority.<sup>3</sup>

### He Removes Kings and Establishes Kings

- Daniel praises God with the words “*it is He Who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings*” (Daniel 2:21).<sup>4</sup>
- Sometimes God allows civil governments to persecute His people for a season as a setup to the judgment of those governments (Daniel 7:19-27; 8:21-25; Revelation 13:7). Sometimes God allows civil governments to persecute His people to cause the Gospel to spread (Matthew 10:23; Acts 8:1-4).

### The First Priority Is the Gospel

- READ Matthew 10:16-20//Mark 10:9-11// Luke 21:12-13.
- 1 Timothy 2:1-8 (which is an echo of Jeremiah 29:7) teaches us to pray for governmental leaders so

<sup>2</sup> Also READ Matthew 28:17; John 17:2; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Philippians 5-11; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 1:4,5; 17:14; 19:16.

<sup>3</sup> The saving confession “*Jesus is Lord*” is not politically neutral. For those who stood before Pilate, it was a choice of either Jesus as “*King*” (which He was, John 18:36,37) or “*we have no king but Caesar*” (John 19:15). In Thessalonica, one of the charges against Paul and the other Christians in that town was that they were “*saying there is another king, Jesus*” (Acts 17:7).

<sup>4</sup> Compare with Paul’s words in Acts 17:26.

that we will be free to live as Christ commanded and to spread His Gospel.

- Titus 3:1-8 advises submission to government for Gospel reasons, as well.

### Hope in the Judge and His Justice

- READ 1 Peter 2:12-23.

## Government: the Servant of God (13:3,4)

*13:3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 13:4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.*

### The Key: Godly Government Is a Sword Against Evil

- What is the role of civil government, according to Paul? God's purpose for civil government is that it “brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”
- The apostle commands the Roman Christians (and us) to submit to all authority that punishes evil and is not threat to “good behavior.” He does not command the Church to submit to governments that are a threat to “good.”<sup>5</sup> Verse 4 is God's limit to civil authority.

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<sup>5</sup> “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right

- In other words, if a so-called “ruler” is “a cause of fear for good behavior,” it is not the authority to which Paul commands submission.
- These categories, “good” and “evil,” are defined by God's righteous standard as revealed in His Word. Humans do not get to define these terms – not our feelings, our society's acceptance, our culture's norms, nor our political party's platforms. Only the Word of God defines these categories. How can civil governments that have lost, abandoned, or are in rebellion against God's standard of “good” and “evil” rightly wield “the sword” entrusted to them by God? Can an authority truly representing God enforce the opposite of His righteous character? No, for God cannot contradict Himself: READ Psalm 94, especially vs. 20.
- Paul is speaking of civil government that is maintaining God's righteous standard of “good” and “evil.”
  - True Christians know that the Bible calls homosexual acts an “abomination” (Leviticus 18:22).<sup>6</sup> Do you also know that the same word is used to describe civil government that what is wicked in the sight of God? READ Proverbs 16:12; 17:15.<sup>7</sup>
  - Does a government that permits and promotes in its legislative, judiciary, and executive actions

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to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power” (*Baptist Faith & Message* [2000], XVII).

<sup>6</sup> Cross-dressing is similarly an “abomination” (Deuteronomy 22:5).

<sup>7</sup> It's also an “abomination” to God to spread “strife among brothers” (Proverbs 6:16-19), but that's another sermon...

that which is forbidden in the Bible merit the title “*minister of God*”? Would you tolerate your pastor, also a “*minister of God*,” to permit and promote that which is forbidden in the Bible?

### Biblical Resistance

- We know that 13:1 is not absolute, not only from the limiter to authority in 13:4, but also in the numerous biblical examples of resistance to ungodly authority.<sup>8</sup>
- God raises up Pharaoh for His glory (Exodus 9:16//Romans 9:17) – the same Pharaoh who enslaved God’s people (Exodus 1:11-14) and commanded genocide against them (Exodus 1:15,16,22). Those who resisted Pharaoh’s orders were first heroes of the Exodus (Exodus 1:17; Hebrews 11:23).
- The king of Jericho ordered Rahab to give up the spies from Israel; instead she lied, hid the spies, and helped them escape because of the fear of the LORD (Joshua 2:1-24). As a result, her family was saved from God’s wrath against Jericho (Joshua 6:17,22,23), she is honored in history (Matthew 1:5), and by the N.T. (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25)!
- Elijah the prophet opposed Ahab, king of Israel – Ahab even calls Elijah “*my enemy*” (1 Kings 21:20).
- King Uzziah, descendant of David (and forefather of Christ, Matthew 1:8,9!), attempted to step past his authority as king and enter “*the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.*” Azariah the priest and “*with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men...opposed Uzziah the king.*” The king was angry at the priests, but was struck by God with leprosy for the rest of his life (2 Chronicles 26:16-23).

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<sup>8</sup> If we read 13:1 by itself, we would make a false conclusion. We must let all of Scripture interpret Scripture.

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego disobeyed the command of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar to bow down before a statue (Daniel 3:1-30), and Daniel disobeyed the law of Darius the Mede (a Persian king) by praying to God (Daniel 6:1-28).
- Most famously is Peter’s statement to the Sanhedrin, which had given him “*strict orders*” not to teach in the name of Jesus: “***We must obey God rather than men***” (Acts 5:27-29; see also 4:18-20).
- There was a warrant out for Paul’s arrest in Damascus, but he evaded capture (2 Corinthians 11:32,33).
- In Revelation 13, we meet “*a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names*” (13:1). The inhabitants of the earth worship the dragon and the beast, while the beast blasphemes God and His people (13:4-6). He makes war against the people of God (13:7). There is a beast out of the earth, who kills those who refuse to worship the image of the first beast (13:15), and those who don’t have his mark cannot participate in the economy (13:16,17). This is a civil government (“*the ten horns...are ten kings,*” 17:12), yet those who obey it will endure the eternal wrath of God (14:9-11; 19:20). Those who rebel against this civil government are resurrected to reign with Christ in heaven (20:4).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, just as we read; but how much more so for the Lord God! As long as he does the Lord’s will, and lives in peace, Caesar’s office we must honor; should he transgress, he is no more emperor or lord, but an outlaw and a bear-wolf against which we must guard” (a soldiers’ song recorded in Magdeburg in 1548). Magdeburg successfully resisted Holy Roman Emperor Charles V’s command that the city cease to be Protestant and return to Roman Catholicism (1551).

- To obey civil government when it is in opposition to God’s clear commandments and definitions of “good” and “evil” is to make it a god above the One true God – a violation of the First Commandment (Exodus 20:3//Deuteronomy 5:7).

### The Servant of God

- When Paul calls civil government “a minister of God,” he uses the word δίακονος, or “servant” (we get the title “deacon” from this word). If government is “God’s servant” (E.S.V., N.I.V., N.L.T.), Whom must government serve (this isn’t a trick question)?
- Just as civil government’s power and authority is derivative, or received from God, its right function is as servant to God.

### Godly Government: A Reminder to Christian Conscience

13:5 *Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.*

- We submit to civil government (if it is not contradictory to God’s revealed will) because in our consciences we know it is ordained of God and is His servant on the earth.

### What We Learn by Submission (13:6,7)

13:6 *For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.* 13:7 *Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.*

- READ Matthew 22:15-22//Mark 12:13-17//Luke 20:19-26.
- Since rightly-functioning civil government is serving God’s will, it has a right to be financially supported in that service.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This is comparable to the principle found in 1 Corinthians 9:14; 1 Timothy 5:17,18. The civil government, as servant of God, and the

- What about paying taxes to civil government that is not doing its God-given role of punishing God-defined evil? READ Matthew 17:24-27. Jesus regarded Himself as exempt from the temple tax, but ordered Peter to pay it to avoid being an unnecessary stumbling-block. He didn’t come to argue taxes; He came to “preach the kingdom of God” (Luke 4:43).<sup>11</sup> Make sure your priorities are heaven’s priorities, and not earthly.

### Law: the Goal is the Gospel

- We desire just, godly laws. We must, as believers, obey laws as long as they do not contradict God’s commandments for us in Christ. We desire a lawful society (for ungodly laws are no law at all), not because ordered, ethical societies save souls, but because being bound by the Law leads us to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone saves (Galatians 3:22,24).
- “The point is that good law which affirms or mirrors the law and justice of God helps men to see their need for Christ. Bad law that contravenes and spurns the law and justice of God assists men in ignoring and/or justifying their sin. Hence, the laws of a nation go to the very salvation of men’s souls.”<sup>12</sup>

**Jesus Christ is the highest authority.  
God ordains earthly authority to maintain order in this age so that His people will be encouraged to live His standard of “good” and “evil,” and so that they will be free to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and live out their obedience to Him in all things.**

teaching elders of the church, as servants of God, should be financially supported in those service roles.

<sup>11</sup> See also Hebrews 10:34, where believers “accepted joyfully” confiscation of property in the midst of persecution. How? They had their eyes on heaven.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew J. Trehwella, *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates* (2013), pg. 85.