



“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” (Romans 13:1).

The Secular Life of the Christian

Central Truth: God has ordained that society should be regulated and directed by governmental authority.

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Topic: Authority: Of Government; Government.

D. L. Moody was rebuked because he took a stand on some moral issue facing his city.

“You must remember that you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven,” the complainer reminded him.

“Yes, I am,” Mr. Moody replied, “but now I vote in Cook County, Illinois.”

That little incident reminds us that the Christian must not divide life into “sacred” and “secular” compartments which never meet. There is no area of life where God is not involved. Every part of life takes on a sacred element because He shares it with us.

Even your rights and duties as a citizen of a nation here on earth are of concern to God. He instituted human government and placed us under its authority as citizens. We will account to human authority and divine authority if we rebel against the government under which we live. God has ordained that society should be regulated and directed by governmental authority.

I. THE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:1, 2)

A. Human government extends over all people. *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers”* (Romans 13:1). *“Every soul”* means each person. *“Higher powers”* refer to governing authorities, officers of

government. Christians are *“to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work”* (Titus 3:1). God never approves of anarchy where everyone does what is right in his own eyes. A human being can govern all things except himself. So God has set over him the authority of human government to control him.

B. Human government is of divine origin. *“There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”* (Romans 13:1). No authority can exist without the permission of God. Therefore the governments in the world have been appointed of God according to His purposes in human history.

God did not establish one kind of government as a democracy, republic, or monarchy. He instituted human government, which takes various forms in different countries and ages. Even godless governments, such as communism today, exist by the permission and according to the purposes of God. He is in control of human governments. We submit to them in obedience to Him.

C. Human government has power to punish resisters (Romans 13:2). He who sets himself against the government under which he lives has set himself against what God has ordained. That will bring punishment from human and divine authorities.

Read the book of the prophet Habakkuk to see how God raises up a government (even a godless one) to use according to His purposes. Submit to the government over you. Obey its laws, as long as they do not contradict the law of God. Obey its officials, whether they are committed to God or not. Submit or suffer the consequences.

II. THE AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:2-5)

A. Governmental authority is personified in its officials (Romans 13:3). Civil rulers do not oppose good people, but wicked people. They are feared by the criminal. If you do what is right, you have nothing to fear. They will respect you as a good citizen.

Guard your attitude toward the peace officer. Be careful how you speak of the mayor, or governor, or president (even if they are of a different political party from your own). God and men hold you responsible for the quality of your citizenship.

B. Governmental authority is the representative of divine authority (Romans 13:4). The civil officer is a servant (*diakonos, deacon*; “one who serves”) to God. Twice in verse 4 it is said, *“he is the minister of God.”* He serves God in doing good to the obedient and executing wrath on the

disobedient. The officer of the law may not be a Christian, but he is serving God as he performs the duties of his office. For that reason, to rebel against duly constituted government is to rebel against God himself. That is a message we need to hear and heed in this time of protests and civil disobedience. The faithful citizen must not break the laws.

C. Governmental authority includes the powers of life and death.

Romans 13:4 speaks of the peace officer as bearing "*the sword.*" The purpose of the sword is "*to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.*" The "*sword*" mentioned is the executioner's sword. Reference is to capital punishment. God decreed that the man who willfully took the life of another man forfeited his own right to live (Genesis 9:6). The sentence was not executed privately but under duly constituted authority after evidence was presented (Deuteronomy 17:8-13). A nation that turns from Bible standards rejects that authority also. Capital punishment is not designed to deter crime so much as to defend the honor of God upon the murder of a person made in the image of God.

D. Governmental authority requires the submission of its citizens.

Romans 13:5 gives two reasons for such submission: "*not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.*" (1) Obey the laws because you will face the wrath of men and God if you do not. (2) Obey the laws because you will suffer a violation of your conscience if you do not. It is the right thing to obey the laws of the country where you live or where you visit. Do it, therefore, as a matter of principle.

III. THE OBEDIENCE TO GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:5-8)

A. Obey for peace of conscience (Romans 13:5). Have you ever driven above the speed limit, then felt a tinge of guilt or fear when you saw a police car? Have you claimed a questionable item on your income tax report only to experience fear when an envelope arrived with the Internal Revenue Service imprint? If so, you know what Paul meant when he wrote to obey not only because of the punishment if you are caught doing wrong, but also because of the peace of conscience you will have. "*I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men*" (Acts 24:16). Thank God for a clear conscience based on faithful obedience.

B. Obey in the payment of taxes (Romans 13:6, 7). "*Tribute*" means taxes. Taxes pay the salaries of civil servants and meet the needs in the community. Since the civil officers are servants of God, pay taxes as an act of obedience to Him.

The payment of taxes relates to all financial obligations owed the

government. It includes sales tax, import tax, property tax, etc. Both the act and the attitude of payment are important to God. Obligations are paid with all due respect to the governmental official who receives them. Remember that he is the servant of God in that place. Without taxes the government could not operate, and what God has instituted would fail. Payment of taxes to your government is an act of obedience to God. Be honest.

C. Obey with full respect toward officers of government. Follow the principle, *“fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour”* (Romans 13:7). All are to receive respect. Some are to receive greater honor. Each is to receive what is due him.

Parents should guard their speech concerning officers of the law. Their words will be reflected in their children. Respect for the authority vested in an officer of the law is essential to a stable society.

What if the officer is not a good man? Respect him anyway. When the high priest commanded Paul to be slapped as he stood before the council, Paul spoke harshly to him. But when reminded that it was the high priest whom he addressed, Paul apologized to the wicked man, saying, *“It is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people”* (Acts 23:5). That is a lesson for Christians to learn.

D. Obey in the fulfillment of every duty. Romans 13:8 has been paraphrased, “Pay every debt you owe but the debt to love one another never consider that debt fully paid.” Paul’s admonition to *“owe no man anything”* suggests that we are to meet every obligation. *“To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice”* (Proverbs 21:3).

Here is a summary of the Christian’s civic duties: *“Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king”* (I Peter 2:17). Blessed is the nation whose citizens live according to that principle. Such a lifestyle will bring the respect of men and the favor of God. Will you be that kind of a citizen as an act of obedience to God?

Questions

1. How does being a Christian make one a better citizen?
2. Why did God institute human government?
3. How does resisting government result in resisting God?
4. Why should civic officials be respected?
5. What is the authority of the “sword” which is entrusted to government?
6. How is payment of taxes an act of obedience to God?
7. What part does conscience have in your duties as a citizen?
8. What does Acts 23:5 say about respect for those in authority?

9. How does I Peter 2:17 summarize the Christian's civic duties?
10. How would praying for our rulers be a part of this study?