



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).

Civil Government

Truth: Christianity promotes good citizenship.

Cobb’s “Confession of Faith”: Article XV

Text: Matthew 22:15-21; Romans 13:1-7

“We believe that civil government is of divine appointment and arrangement for the best interests and good order of human society. Magistrates are to be prayed for and conscientiously honored and obeyed in matters not opposed to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Lord of men's consciences and the prince of the kings of the earth” (Cobb's Baptist Church Manual, page 83).

We believe in the separation of church and state, but we do not believe in the separation of God and state. God instituted human government and governments are accountable to God for the way they exercise their authority.

Separation of church and state does not mean the church does not influence the state or that the state does not recognize the church. It rather means the state will pass no law which favors one branch of religion above another so as to “establish” a particular religion.

That belief is abused today. Separation of church and state does not mean we cannot pray in a public school. It does not prohibit “In God We Trust” on our money or “under God” in our pledge of allegiance.

There is a mutual dependence between church and state. The church supports the state by prayer for leaders and obedience to laws. The state exempts the church from taxes and allows freedom for worship and propagation of beliefs.

I. GOD AND GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:1)

Romans 13:1 teaches that every Christian should submit to the governing authorities that are over him. That indicates three great truths.

A. God approves human government. That is why He commands us to be subject to it. He instituted the system by which citizens are to rule the community. He gave authority to officers of government to exercise their duties. He did not approve only one type of government (monarchy, democracy, etc.), but He approved the principle of government because of the destructive effects of anarchy.

B. God sustains human government. He raises up rulers and puts down rulers. When one ruler falls, God raises up another to take his place. That principle is true even of nations who do not recognize the true God. He said to an Egyptian pharaoh, who considered himself to be a god, *“For this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth”* (Exodus 9: 16). He called Cyrus, ruler of the ancient Persian Empire, *“his anointed. . . whose right hand I have holden”* (Isaiah 45:1). He keeps human government in operation.

C. God holds human government responsible. He will turn into hell *“all the nations that forget God”* (Psalm 9:17). The government under which you live is under the hand of God. Be a good citizen.

II. AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:1, 2)

A. The Christian must submit to governmental authority. *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers”* (verse 1). The Christian is *“to be subject to principalities and powers”* and he is *“to obey magistrates”* (Titus 3:1).

“To be subject” is used in the Bible to refer to our submission to God (James 4:7), the slave's submission to his master (I Peter 2:18), the younger person's submission to his elder (I Peter 5:5), and the church's submission to Christ (Ephesians 5:24). It means to yield in obedience to authority.

There is no basis for “civil disobedience” among Christians. God commands, *“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him. . . . For so is the will of God. . . . Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king”* (I Peter 2:13-17).

B. The Christian must recognize the divine source of governmental authority. *“The powers that be are ordained of God”* (verse 1). We are advised *“to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of*

God” (Ecclesiastes 8:2). *“Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings”* (Daniel 2:20, 21).

C. The Christian must recognize the consequences of rebellion against governmental authority. To resist one's government is to resist what God has ordained (verse 2). Such resistance will surely bring the penalty for lawbreaking. *“Whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment”* (Ezra 7:26). The penalty is severe because the offense is great, being rebellion against God and man.

III. OFFICERS OF GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:3-5)

A. Respect the officer of government. He has a job to do in the affairs of the nation, and he deserves respect because of his position even if he does not deserve respect personally. *“Thou shalt not . . . curse the ruler of thy people”* (Exodus 22:28). Paul showed that respect must be given one in authority even when his conduct does not merit it (Acts 23:1-5). Obedience to him is an act of obedience to God who instituted and authorized human government.

B. Recognize the officer of government as the servant of God. He is called *“the minister of God to thee”* in verse 4. That term *“minister”* is the Greek term for “deacon” used in the New Testament. It refers to one who serves. The officer of government serves the purpose of God as he rewards good and punishes evil. God said to judges in Israel, *“Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD”* (II Chronicles 19:6). The policeman is serving God when he arrests the criminal. The *“sword”* which the government is said to bear is the executioner's sword, indicating that the power of government extends to life and death. Be a good citizen as a servant of God.

IV. TAXES FOR GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:6, 7; Matthew 22:15-21)

A. The Christian citizen should pay all his taxes. God specifically commands it in Romans 13:6. Jesus approved the principle in saying, *“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's”* (Matthew 22:21).

All types of required taxes are to be paid. *“Tribute”* refers to taxes on lands and estates. *“Custom”* refers to taxes on goods and merchandise. Both

are to be paid fully. Disagreement with governmental policies is no excuse for withholding taxes. All taxes must be paid according to law.

B. The Christian citizen should pay his taxes with the right spirit, the spirit of fear and honor (verse 7). That indicates respect for the government and the officers of the government which receives the taxes we pay. It will be a bad testimony for Christ if the Christian is unchristian at tax time.

V. CONSCIENCE AND GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:5)

God says, “*Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth*” (Romans 14:22). It means that we must not allow things in our lives which cause misgivings and qualms of conscience afterwards. In view of that principle, ask yourself this question, “Do I have a clear conscience about my citizenship regarding laws and taxes?”

Here are some principles which apply to this study. (1) Obedience to government is obedience to God since He instituted and preserves it. (2) Civil rulers are under the control of God who raises them up and removes them. (3) The work of the civil officer is done in behalf of God, even if he is not a Christian. (4) Civil authorities have no power over the consciences of the citizens. (5) No one can be a bad citizen and a good Christian at the same time. (6) It is the Christian's duty to obey the laws, respect the officials, pay his taxes, and pray for his nation.

Romans 13 was addressed to Christian citizens living under the reign of a king who thought himself to be a god. He was a pagan. The Jewish Christians who read this passage must have chafed under its limitations. They felt that no pagan should rule them (Deuteronomy 17:15), and they longed to see dominion restored to Israel (Acts 1:6). They teach us that we must not allow our desires to interfere with our duty to God and country.

“God bless America!” whatever administration is in power.

1. What is the difference between “church” and “state”?
2. In what sense is there separation between them?
3. Why did God ordain human government?
4. How does Exodus 9:16 show God's sovereignty over nations?
5. How does Psalm 9:17 show God's government of nations?
6. What principles of citizenship are in I Peter 2:13-17?
7. Why should Christians be good citizens?
8. How does Exodus 22:28 apply to us?

9. How is the officer of government the “minister of God”?
10. How does Romans 14:22 relate to Christian citizenship?