

Men to Men Ministry

Men's Bible Study

<http://theinsight.com> – ljmonson@hotmail.com

Romans 13:1-7 Paul with the difference between Church and State

Introduction

We often joke with each other about politics. When Obama was president there were those who stated, "That's not my President". The same words were expressed when Trump was president and again when Biden became president. I vote my conscience for whom ever is running. Most of the time it is a decision between two terrible choices.

We have had impeachments, multiple FBI probes, voter fraud accusations, pregnant chads, birth certificate concerns, a storming of the capital, and more; and I'm only forty years old and that doesn't even include governmental authorities on the state or local levels.

I do not boldly go into my political tendencies, and I hesitate in coming to this portion of the Book of Romans. Paul has moved from theology to personal responsibility. And in this section the responsibility of every Christian in our relationship with Governmental authorities.

Further as I read and prepare, I discover this section is not about being a Democrat or Republican, but God and His will for us. In these seven verses, Paul says very plainly, no less than six times, that the governing authorities are from God. He goes even further that these authorities are servants of God.

It has been said, "Never talk about politics or religion in polite conversation." Nevertheless we come to this section of the Book of Romans which is in the middle of a larger section from Chapter 12 which confronts us from the renewal of our minds, to a change of attitude, and our actions. Here in our relationship with the authorities over us we have a demand based on our new attitude now pointed at the response of Christians to secular authorities.

These seven verses address the controversy between Church and State. It was true of the early Christian state and our current Church.

The issue that is confronted was the perceived difference between what the government was dictating and WWJW (What Would Jesus Want). Attitudes determine our actions.

Scripture as given in the New American Standard Bible.

*1) Every **person** is to be **subject** to the governing authorities. For there is no **authority** except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*

*2) Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the **ordinance** of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.*

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.

4) For it is a **servant** 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 servant of God, an **avenger** who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

5) Therefore, it is necessary to be subjected, not only because of **wrath**, but also for the sake of conscience.

6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, **devoting** themselves to this very thing.

7) Pay to all what is due them: **tax** to whom tax is due; **custom** to whom custom; **respect** to whom respect; **honor** to whom honor.

Key Words and Greek definitions

To best understand the language in Romans 12:1-7 it is best to define specific words.

Verse	Word in NASB	Word in Greek	Definition in Greek
13:1	Person	<i>Psyche</i>	the soul as an essence which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death
13:1	Subject	<i>hypotássō</i>	A Greek military term meaning "to in lines in an orderly fashion under the command of a leader". In non-military use, it was "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming of responsibility, and carrying a burden". A fire line passing one bucket after the other in a united effort to distinguish a fire.
13:1	Authority	<i>exousía</i>	Authority, power, the right to control or govern; dominion, the area or sphere of jurisdiction; a ruler, human or supernatural. The sign of regal authority
13:2	Ordinance	<i>diatagḗ</i>	a disposition, arrangement, ordinance. An understanding of expressed laws, rules, agreements to behavior.
13:4	Servant	<i>diákonos</i>	one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister, the servant of a king, A deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use. A waiter, one who serves food and drink
13:4	Avenger	<i>ékdikos</i>	Someone who lives without law and justice but exacts a penalty from others. An avenger, punisher.
13:5	Wrath	<i>or-gay</i>	Anger exhibited in punishment, hence used for punishment itself. Of punishments inflicted by magistrates
13:6	Devoting	<i>proskarter éō</i>	to be earnest towards a thing that it would persevere, to be constantly diligent, or to attend rigidly all the exercises required. To join, adhere to; to be ready; to give attention, be faithful; to spend much time together.

13:7	Tax	<i>phóros</i>	tribute, esp. the annual tax levied upon houses, lands, and persons
13:7	Custom	<i>télos</i>	The end, result, outcome, finish, goal; revenue, tax, duty
13:7	Respect	<i>phóbos</i>	fear, terror; respect, reverence. The root of the English word for Phobia: fear of something.
13:7	Honor	<i>timé</i>	Honor, value, respect; nobility, specialness; money, cost

Understanding based upon accepted facts:

There are specific facts that we may draw from our scripture:

First, we must acknowledge the Christian has a worldly citizenship. We live here in this world and I am bound by the physical limitations of life. I have a body that feels the restriction of gravity and age. I will have a passport to a new life in the future but right now I have to have an attitude of love. And this love is a benevolent love. I love the tall mountains. I love the broad seas, I love the quiet mornings with a cup of coffee as I write. Nevertheless I am not in a box that the world can never enter. I have to go and pay the price for living here. It was the same for the Roman church and it is the same for me.

Secondly, we must acknowledge the Christian has a heavenly citizenship. I may have an earthly address, but I have a more wonderful, perfectly made for me, address in heaven that will never need fixing.

Third of our facts that are addressed here is that government and authorities are to be tolerated to the place where we can live at peace with all men. It is not easy, but it is expected as far as it is in your power.

The scripture in Matthew 10:16 ***“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.”*** Tells me it is not going to be easy days of sun and green grass. There will be those who will demand the submission to an authority which will not always be easy. We have two passports. We can look forward to the future world with hope and joy, but in the meantime, we must stay here. We are here to save the wolves

Fourth of our facts: Paul does not mean that these rulers are followers of God. Rather, Paul means that are put in place by God. That’s why Paul says in verse 1, “. . . the authorities that exist are instituted by God.” So, when we acknowledge that God is sovereign, all-knowing, and all-powerful; when we acknowledge that every office of authority is under His control; then we understand that not only are positions of authority instituted by God, but also, those in those positions are instituted by God.

Consequently, this dual citizenship of earth and heaven requires I must accept and learn to live responsibly in both.

I was saved way back in 1971. The Vietnam war was winding down to a stalemate where no one could see the end of the police action. Hippies, flower power, and revolution was the pulse that was felt in everything. Woodstock was just over, I wasn’t there I was still in High School. My High School had a social division that was visibility evident by what clothes you wore. The Jocks (the athletes) wore their letterman’s

jackets, the Farmers (Future Farmers of America) wearing their blue jackets with yellow emblems, the Hippies with bell bottom jeans and denim snap up shirts, and the last those who simply were what I would call the nerds. Those nerds that did not fit it. I was a nerd. I did not fit in because I was not much of an athlete but I went in the game when asked off the bench, I was not a farmer, and I was much too conservative to shout down with the war.

The Jesus movement was in its full bloom. A great movement to Height Ashberry in San Francisco was documented in the evening news. They assumed that Jesus was coming very soon. Work was not necessary because it was conforming to the "Man". Responsibility was for the losers. No work, no responsibilities because the world was soon to come to an end. The rapture was going to be any day. No use to conform to this cultures idea of life. Why not just drop a little LSD and drop out. But the Jesus movement at the time was trying to catch the wave of irresponsibility and add a little responsibility back. They encouraged rebellion as long as it was peaceful. What they added was Christianity was a plus added to a lifestyle. Their dogma started with the idea of inhabit or **occupy until Jesus comes**. Christianity still changes people for the good.

The separation of Church and State as seen by Paul

There are Christians who would cry out for change of the politic. One what would honor God and govern as God would. We would like what is called a theocracy. A government based only on God's vision of culture, society, rights, privileges, justice, and peace. The Body of Believers in ancient Rome also wanted this.

Rome was founded as a democracy. Every citizen had a vote. They elected Senators to be their direct representatives and serve the people. But then came Augustus Caesar who was elected for life by the Senate in a dire time when political ends did not equal the military power of a great general. Rome had changed from a Democracy to Autocracy.

Augustus had attained unilateral authority over all the empire in exchange for a promise of peace. But he went beyond peace. He now had the power over life and death of anyone who did not do what Augustus said. With a finger point he could condemn a man to death or to be banished from the entire known world. The Senate was still there but only in an advisory group. They were no longer elected by the people but appointed by Emperor Augustus from the rich and famous. Worship was tolerated if Caesar a title given to the Emperor, was included as a God.

Under this authority Caesar appointed governors of great regions of the empire. Their appointments were not because of intellect or a specific ability to govern, but to be the conduit to the people the will and wishes of Caesar and a reward for submission and exacting conformance men like Pontius Pilot. The people could have whatever king they wanted as long is the King pleased Rome, like Herod. In the name of Herod, children in a specific area of his rule and of a sex and age were slaughtered.

Rome itself was populated by many ethnicities. But most remarkable was the number of slaves. One third to one half of all the population of Rome were slaves.

Out of the need of control the Emperor had four tools: 1) Roman military might 2) Civil authority by the appointed government within each area, 3) Worship of the emperor and 4) taxes. Or in simple terms, fear of the military, fear of the government, forced worship, and oppressive taxes.

Taxes were especially set to make the poor to live on a razor edge of poverty. To live between giving yourself up to slavery to pay your tax debt or work your fingers to the bone just to survive were the choices.

If I pay \$1.19 a gallon in fees and taxes and my truck takes 24 gallons to fill it up \$29 dollars goes to the state. It would be easy to assume some authority is trying to restrict my driving habits. If I disagree with the decriminalization of some drug, I am seen as a conservative rebel and invading trying to restrict someone's happiness. If I disagree with the current implementation of immigration I end up with a label of racist.

Christian Justification of resistance to authority

Christians have different ways of justifying their resistance to authority, depending on their historical context, theological perspective, and moral conscience. Some of the common arguments that Christians have used are:

1. They appeal to the biblical principle of obeying God rather than human authorities, especially when the latter command them to do something contrary to God's will or word. In Acts 5:29 in response to direct refusal to conform to the mandates and judgments of the Sanhedrin, Peter said, "Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" .
2. They invoke the natural law or the law of God written on the human heart, which transcends and judges any human law that violates the basic rights and dignity of human beings. As Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."
3. They distinguish between the legitimate and illegitimate use of authority, and argue that only the former deserves obedience, while the latter can be resisted or reformed. It is a belief that not all the mandates of the State are legitimate. An example that police have the right to stop you for no reason.
4. They acknowledge the role of the lower or inferior magistrates, who have the duty and the right to protect their subjects from the tyranny or oppression of the higher or superior magistrates. This is that local judges have a right to rule as the culture and location determines. The interpretation of a college to have quotas in enrollment for admissions but not to have one on the athletic field.
5. They recognize the limits of human authority, and affirm the sovereignty and judgment of God over all rulers and nations.
6. They anticipate the coming of God's kingdom, and seek to live as faithful witnesses and agents of God's justice and righteousness in the world .

These arguments are not always consistent or coherent, and they have been used to justify different forms of resistance, from passive disobedience to active rebellion. Christians have also used these arguments selectively or hypocritically, depending on their interests or biases. For example, just prior to the civil war, some Republican Christians used biblical arguments to resist slavery and racism, while other Democrats used biblical arguments to defend slavery and racism. Therefore, Christians need to be careful and discerning when they apply these arguments to their own situations, and to be humble and respectful when they disagree with other Christians on these matters.

The Christian response to Government

Romans 13:1,2 - ***Every person is to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.***

Subject to... The thought here is we are to line up and carry the burden given to build something. We are to line up with the authority that is over us. In the military we are to line up in order of rank and responsibility. It is a voluntary attitude of cooperation. We are to carry the burden of government. To be model citizens of this world as long as we are in it.

Again, the early Roman church were meeting in private homes to worship and to be discipled but they did not worship the Emperor. That made them at odds to the accepted, culturally mandated norm.

At the time of the writing of Roman government was in turmoil. It was Ceasar Augustus who commanded all the Roman world to return to their hometowns so they counted and taxed more. And because of this Jesus was born in Bethlehem Joseph's birthplace. Tiberius was the hier to Augustus. Tiberius ruled through his own chosen governor Herod the Great. It was Herod that worked in conjunction with the King of Syria and the local magistrate governed by Pilate with the blessing of the Jewish high priest and the Sanhedrin to have Jesus crucified in 30 AD. Seven years later Caligula (the mad emperor) became supreme commander in 37 AD. After Caligula's death in 41 AD the time of Paul's missionary journeys the new Emperor was Claudius from 41-68 AD, who ultimately kicked all the Jews out of Rome. Next in line and the current Emperor at the writing of Romans was NERO.

Nero first threw out all the laws and regulations made by his predecessor. By mandate Nero removed most of all the writings, statues, and laws of Claudius. The Jews were allowed to return to the city of Rome and re-occupy their own sector of Rome. Nero was reported to set fire to Rome to make room for more room for his new capitol and blamed it on the Christians. It was Nero who loved chariot racing so much he had a track built in the middle of Rome and when it was dark he commanded Christians to be rounded up and covered with pitch, strapped to a pole and burned to provide light for his races.

In this environment Paul writing from Corinth to the Romans to not make waves. To submit to the authority of Rome and by extension Nero.

The Christian response to the rule of government

For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

The reason for submission was simply stated. You will submit because there is no authority that does not come from God. Authority of all is God. Nero was the appointment of God. The king that threw Daniel into the lion's den was appointed by God. The worst of governments from Paul Pot, Stalin, Hitler, Castro, the French revolution, witch burners by the Puritans, Presidents that were inept and elitists, the governments of Afghanistan, Chad, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Venezuela, and the Sudan are all there by God's allowable will.

Whether you like it or not the authorities to which we are governed receive their authority from God. Jesus had no trouble with authority unless it restricted access to worship when he overturned the buyer and sellers in the temple. When asked by Pilate, "don't you know I have the power to kill you." Jesus responded. "You have no power unless given to you from above."

But what about concerted, willful disobedience to the government? How should we respond to authority that is simply wrong? One example of reaction to authority was Martin Luther.

Martin Luther, the German monk and theologian who initiated the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Luther resisted the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, which he believed was corrupt and teaching false doctrines. He challenged the pope's supremacy, the practice of indulgences, and the authority of church traditions over the Scriptures. He also translated the Bible into German, making it accessible to the common people.

Luther's resistance to the church authority was met with fierce opposition and persecution. He was excommunicated by the pope, declared a heretic by the emperor, and banned from the Holy Roman Empire. He had to hide in a castle for his safety, where he continued to write and preach. He also faced criticism and conflict from other reformers, who disagreed with him on some theological issues.

Despite the dangers and difficulties, Luther remained faithful to his convictions and his conscience. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Christian history, whose resistance to authority sparked a movement that changed the course of Christianity and Western civilization.

The Christian response to the rule of government is a complex and nuanced question that has been discussed by many Christians throughout history. There is no single or definitive answer, but rather a range of perspectives and principles that can guide Christians in their relationship to government and authority. Here are some of the main points that I found from my studies:

1. As Christians we believe that God is the ultimate source and ruler of all authority, and that he institutes and ordains human governments for the purpose of restraining evil, maintaining order, and promoting justice and righteousness. This is stated plainly here in Romans 13:1-7 and specifically in Verse 13:1. Our reaction to authority is to realized all authority comes from a single source, GOD.

2. Christians are called to respect, obey, and pray for the governing authorities, as long as they do not contradict or violate the laws of God or the teachings of Christ. Christians are also called to be good citizens and to seek the welfare of the society they live in. We must seek and support with our time, talent and treasure those who are less fortunate.
 3. Christians may also participate in government or other institutions of society, as long as they do not compromise their loyalty to Christ or their love and holiness. Christians may use their gifts and talents to serve the common good and to influence the culture for God's glory. We need more Christians in places of authority. I may not vote for a corrupted Christian who has given in and given out to the special interests. Nevertheless a person who exhibits Christian morals, adheres to Christian teachings, who loves God more than the accolades of men, has my vote and support.
 4. Christians may also resist or disobey the governing authorities, if they require them to do what God forbids or forbid them to do what God commands. Christians may also challenge or critique the government, if it fails to uphold its God-given function or acts unjustly or oppressively. Christians may use various lawful and peaceful means of resistance, such as appealing to higher authorities, waiting for God's providence, refusing to comply with evil commands, or proclaiming God's judgment.
 5. Christians recognize that human governments are imperfect and corrupted by sin, and that they are ultimately accountable to God for their actions. Christians also acknowledge that God is sovereign over all nations and history, and that he can use them for his purposes or judge them for their wickedness.
 6. Christians hope for and anticipate the coming of God's kingdom, where Christ will reign as the true and righteous King over all creation. Christians also seek to live as citizens of heaven, who reflect the values and virtues of God's kingdom on earth.
-

What if we don't agree with authority?

Verse 13:2 ***Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.***

This verse refers not to criticism of injustice but toward those who take action to tear down the authority which God has full knowledge and has allowed. Remember this section was written during the aftermath of the Jewish revolt in Jerusalem. They had risen and killed Roman soldiers and civilians in Jerusalem. Nero would send Vespasian and his son Titus to quell the rebellion that ultimately end in the elimination of Jewish resistance in 67. For a Christian there is no place for active insurrection, no matter the cause.

Our attitude determines reaction.

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.

4) For it is a servant 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 servant of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

5) Therefore, it is necessary to be subjected, not only because of wrath, but also for the sake of conscience.

Good behavior of good is not out of fear. Fear is associated with our willful reaction of the inner attitude of good and evil. To become a part of an active insurrection, for Paul is a path to destruction. Here in the USA we have a freedom of speech. But our speech is to be metered by the resulting actions. If I don't like a lawn sign on the corner because it proclaims a person from a different point of view. I can be angry and not sin. If I go out in the middle of the night and tear down that sign and burn it in the middle of the street, I think I am violating the spirit of good behavior. If you do the good thing, engage with your neighbor to understand the other point of view is the best response and maybe heap great heaps of fire on their head. I have to acknowledge in my own divinely changed attitude there is good and evil but it is not my place to be the judge and executioner.

Two reasons for our reaction to authority: Not because of wrath, but for the sake of conscience. If we do good toward authority there is no fear of retribution. And if we in our own attitude react for God for the personal serenity of our conscience.

Our responsibility to authority

6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

7) Pay to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; respect to whom respect; honor to whom honor.

So we have to pay taxes as required. I may not like them, I cringe when I fill my truck up with gas, I may get frustrated when I hit a pot hole in the road and blow out a tire, but I still have to do it. And I do it for God. I am very careful with the amount I pay. I don't pay a penny more than is required, but I pay them.

Interesting here about four concepts in Verse 7. Each of these things taxes, customs, respect, and honor are part of our decision making attitude of Love.

1. **TAXES:** a tribute homage we pay as we are assessed. It is saying I agree with God that I must have this attitude of a showing or demonstration of respect or dedication to someone or something, sometimes by simple declaration but often by some more oblique reference, artistic or poetic.

Is the attitudinal action that I give to another as a sign of submission, allegiance or respect. Various ancient states exacted tribute from the rulers of lands which the state conquered. In the case of alliances, lesser parties may pay tribute to more powerful parties as a sign of allegiance. It is an obligation given in respect of God's plan for our government.

2. **Custom:** a traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place, or time: A Christian custom would be wearing a cross around your neck. An American custom would be interest and support of those who have been elected and those you would like to take their place.
3. **Respect:** a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements. They got there and even if I don't agree with them I

am mandated by God to give them respect and recognition. I will have due regard for the feelings and rights of those God has put in place. I don't have to like their point of view but I have to respect the office. Like a soldier saluting an officer; They do it in respect of the rank not of the person.

4. **Honor:** To value, to give nobility and specialness to those who govern. Had there been any doubt, up to here, that the total establishment of human government is to be honored, respected, and obeyed by Christians, upon pain of God's displeasure if they fail, it would have been effectively removed by this blanket inclusion of "all."

Conclusion

Before leaving this section of Romans which details the relationship of the Christian to his government, one other consideration needs emphasis. It is too easy to let passion to sway even the best of us. To some the idea of overthrowing governments which are considered unjust or oppressive is prohibited. I have heard some Christian ministers making a distinction between obeying "good" governments and "bad" governments and actually suggesting in their logic that it is all right for conscientious and well-intentioned activists to go forth and pull down the government if they think it is bad. On the contrary no Christian is to take on such a role, nor may he even "resist" (13:2). Not only based upon these words of Paul but also a quick look at history and discover there is no place in the apostolic age where there was ever any Christian action to pull down the government.

The great apostle Paul was proud of his Roman citizenship, invoked its protection, and refused to pay a bribe to Felix, despite the fact that a bribe was solicited and would have procured his release from prison. As just noted, Paul commanded Christians to obey civil laws, honor authorities over us as ministers of God. We should pray for the establishment, and insisted that the total arm of human government be respected, honored, and obeyed.

Thus, the conclusion must be made that if I consider the vice, wickedness, and terror of that age, the consummate wickedness of human government under the control of men like Nero, Caligula, etc., coupled with the government's support of such institutions as human slavery, witchcraft, and prostitution — that if one considers all this, along with the Christian community's total refusal to engage in any actions of opposition or subversion against such a government, and if it be further understood that the Christian's refusal to obstruct or oppose such a regime was due to reasons of doctrine and conscience, honoring the commandments of Jesus and the apostles — then the conclusion is inevitable and must be received as binding that it is a sin for a Christian to engage in the projected overthrow of an earthly government, despite any faults or injustices that might either correctly or falsely be ascribed to the state they would purposely try to overthrow.