

## How Should We Think About Government?

### How Then Shall We Live?--part 2

#### Romans 13

How is the Christian to relate to government? How should we respond to immoral laws? Is there a balancing act here? How should we be thinking? It's time to get diggin'!

#### **Day One: The principle of God working through government.**

God has instituted three institutions: the home (Gen. 2:18-25), government (Gen. 9:1-17), and the church (Acts 2). This week we'll look at the role of government.

*Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*

1. An important principle in biblical interpretation is this: consider every verse in the context of all the other verses that relate to the topic at hand. To do the opposite is what's called "proof-texting," taking one verse by itself and drawing conclusions that are not in line with other verses on the topic.

2. Romans 13:1 is an example of the need to think in terms of all the biblical verses and examples related to believers and the government.

3. Romans 13:1 stands as an example of an important truth and **principle** about government, but Paul does not address reasons to violate this principle in this passage. The scriptures have a number of examples where the right thing to do was to stand against the tyranny of government authority. We'll look at this later in the week.

*1 Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,<sup>14</sup> or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*

<sup>15</sup>*For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.*

<sup>16</sup>*Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*

<sup>17</sup>*Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.*

4. From Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2, how would you sum up the basic principle of government's authority?

*Romans 13:2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.*

5. How does Rom. 13:2 add to your understanding of the role and authority of government?

## Day Two: Why we should obey the laws of the state (generally)

\* Paul will outline four reasons why Christians are to be subject to the laws of the State. We'll look at these in the next three days.

### Reason 1. Government puts a restraint on human evil by punishing it. (vv. 1-4)

*Romans 13:3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.*

<sup>4</sup> *For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.*

- a. In the U.S., this duty is left to the criminal justice system. Legislative officials make the law (at least in theory), administrative officials enforce the law (at least in theory). Judicial officials serve as the "watchdogs" to ensure the process works like it's supposed to (at least in theory).
- b. There is this tension with government: though government is given authority by God to operate, it is operated by fallen human beings! And **this** is the reason why knowing how to respond to governmental authority is tricky!

### Reason #2: For conscience' sake (vv. 5-7)

*Romans 13:5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, **not only** because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.*

<sup>6</sup> *This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.*

<sup>7</sup> *Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*

a. What is the rationale for taxes? (vv. 6-7)

b. What four things should we be willing to do? (v. 7)

c. Obeying the state because of conscience is a general principle. It gets tricky when you are called to violate your conscience in order to obey the law.

d. Two examples: Kim Davis, a county clerk in Kentucky has been jailed for refusing to issue marriage licenses. (So as not to discriminate against same sex couples, she decided not to issue any marriage licenses). A few years back, former California governor Gavin Newsome issued same sex marriage licenses even though same sex marriage was illegal in California.

*Acts 24:16 So I always take pains to have a clear conscience before God and man.*

*1 Timothy 1:5 The end purpose of our teaching is love, which issues from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.*

## Day Three: Why we should obey the laws of the state (generally) -part 2

### Reason #3: For love's sake

Romans 13:8 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.*

<sup>9</sup> *The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

<sup>10</sup> *Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

1. Many people think that Rom. 13:8 is mostly about money. Instead, it is a general principle that illustrates a way of thinking and living that makes heavy-handed law and government less needed. He illustrates the principle with four examples in v. 9. He then restates the governing principle of love in v. 10.

2. The more human beings exert self-restraint in their personal lives and dealings with people, the less the government will have to provide forceful restraint. Paul would say, "the more people act in love toward others, the less need for governmental restraint will be needed." That's the principle in these three verses.

3. Our nation's founders recognized this principle and it served as a pivotal point in the formation of our constitution. The founders thought of virtue (what Paul calls "love," here) as the key character quality needed for human restraint, and thus, allowing for democracy to be successful. And what would make virtue more evident and far-reaching was the importance of "religion." Religion served to provide a way for man to restrain himself, not because government forced him, but because of an internal "ought-ness."

"If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary." -- James Madison, Federalist no.

"Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." - George Washington's farewell address

4. Read 13:9 again. How could people living by one of these four examples necessitate a lesser need for governmental restraint?

5. Now let's personalize this. How could a dedication to "love" the people with whom you relate and home, in business, in your neighborhood, etc., necessitate a lesser need for law's restraint?

## Day Four: Why we should obey the laws of the state (generally) -part 3

1. Why should we obey the laws of the state? We've come from fear (punishment), to conscience, to love and now to Jesus Christ!

### **Reason #4: For Jesus' sake (v. 11-14)**

*Romans 13:11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, **because our salvation is nearer now** than when we first believed.*

1. What Paul means is that it won't be that long for any of us before we will be standing before Jesus Christ face-to-face. Remember this!!! Let this guide your behavior!

*Romans 13:12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us **put aside the deeds of darkness** and **put on the armor of light**.*

2. "The night" is this fallen world, rebellious in every way, creating misery everywhere. The drive to "*put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light*" makes governmental restraint less necessary.

*Romans 13:13 Let us **behave decently**, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.*

3. Behaving decently makes government less needed.

*Romans 13:14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

4. This is the highest ethic! Jot down two principles from this verse that would make it less likely that the government would need to restrain you.

5. If Christians understood principles of Romans 13, we should be the best citizens in the nation! The reasons for obeying the law don't rely on governmental intervention!

6. Speaking of restraining our human nature, how has God been nudging in the area of restraining "*the desires of the sinful nature*"? (13:14)?

## Day Five: What about civil disobedience?

1. Romans 13 outlines our general approach to how we think about government, citizenship, and building healthy neighborhoods and societies.

2. However, the scriptures include a number of examples, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament for what we call "civil disobedience."

3. The bible does **not** teach that God endorses every human government official. There is a difference between God-given authority to **government** and the governmental **leader**. God is not responsible for tyrants!

4. King Nebuchadnezzar is a prime example of how God and Daniel dealt with a tyrant. (Daniel 4, especially vv. 17, 25, and 32)

5. What are some examples of acceptable civil disobedience?

a. Peter and John were arrested "*because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.*" (Acts 4:2)

Their rationale for disobeying the civil authorities were these famous words: "*for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.*" (Acts 4:20)

b. Hebrew midwives disobey Pharaoh's edict to throw male newborns into the Nile River. (Ex. 1:15-16).

Their rationale? "*But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.*" (v. 17) God gave favor to these precious ladies (v. 20-21)

c. Moses' mother, Jochebed, disobeyed Pharaoh's edict, hiding the baby Moses in a basket in the reeds along the Nile River. (Ex. 2:3, 7-9)

d. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey the king's command to worship the large, golden statue. They were willing to face the consequences if death, if needed. (Daniel 3:12-13)

e. Peter and the apostles.

*Acts 5:28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."*

*<sup>29</sup> Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"*

6. Sometimes the decision to engage in civil disobedience is easy; other times it is more complex! It is also a personal decision. What one Christian might do, another might not.