

# Our Duty To Government

**Introduction.** Christians are blessed to be citizens of a heavenly kingdom (Philippians 3:20). We have been conveyed into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). As such, we are described as "sojourners and pilgrims" in this world (1 Peter 2:11).

As "pilgrims," we live and work under the governments of men with a variety of political systems: kingdoms, dictatorships, and democracies offering varying degrees of freedom, responsibilities, etc.

The Lord's church began and thrived during the Roman Empire. To Christians in the capital city of Rome, Paul wrote of their responsibility. To Christians dispersed in outlying areas of the empire, Peter did also. The Christian's duty to government is made very clear by the apostles even in the midst, like we experience today, of feeling like the world is crumbling underneath us. Using Paul's comments in Romans 13:1-7 as our starting point, let's review the duties of a Christian.

## I. **Submit**

### A. The rule.

1. It was stressed twice by Paul.
  - a) "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Romans 13:1).
  - b) "Wherefore ye must needs be subject ..." (Romans 13:5).
2. Peter likewise taught this duty (1 Peter 2:13-14).
  - (1) "Submit yourselves ..."
    - (a) It signifies "to place one's self under subjection; to render one's self subordinate."
    - (b) It is a military term referring to arranging troops according to division, under the command of a leader. In a non-military use, it was "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden."
  - (2) We are to submit "to every ordinance of man."
    - (a) The word "ordinance" literally means "a creation".
    - (b) The Greeks and Romans described the appointment of officers as the "creation" of them.
3. Thus the expression "ordinance" actually refers:
  - a) Not to a particular law passed by government.
  - b) But to the civil government or institution itself.
  - c) The NASB and NRSV reads "to every human institution."
4. Note that we are to submit to every human institution (whether it be a monarchy, democracy, totalitarian state, etc.). Our responsibility is clear: "Let every soul be subject" (Romans 13:1).

### B. The reason.

1. Governing authorities that exist have been appointed by God (Romans 13:1).
  - a) This was emphasized in the book of Daniel (2:20-21; 4:17, 25a, 32a).
  - b) Even those that are evil, which God often uses for His divine purposes and then replaces (cp. Exodus 9:16 [Egypt], Isaiah 10:5-12 [Assyria]).

2. Therefore to resist government means to resist God Himself (Romans 13:2-4).
    - a) This resistance means that you will bring judgment on yourself.
    - b) For government is a minister of God, designed to avenge evil.
  3. Peter adds two good reasons (1 Peter 2:15).
    - a) First, this “is the will of God.”
      - (1) It is also “for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13).
      - (2) This is sufficient for all true servants of God.
    - b) Second, that we may “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”
      - (1) Because of their allegiance to a heavenly king, Christians are often falsely accused of sedition or treason (e.g. Acts 17:5-8).
      - (2) By doing good (e.g. by submitting), we can “silence” (lit., muzzle) ignorant charges. To avoid wrath and have a good conscience, “you must be subject” (Romans 13:5).
- C. The exception.
1. It is not when government is oppressive.
    - a) Consider the government and conditions when Paul and Peter wrote.
    - b) The government was totalitarian, under Nero's evil and despotic rule as emperor.
    - c) Under Nero's reign, Christians suffered greatly (cp. 1 Peter 4:12-13; 5:8-9).
    - d) Peter and Paul were eventually martyred (John 21:18; 2 Timothy 4:6).
  2. It is not when you disagree.
    - a) It does not matter if you think the speed limit should be 85, or that a child should drive at 14, or that the age of consent should be 16, or that you can kill 10 deer a season instead of 5.
    - b) The laws of our communities are in force no matter what we think of them, despite the inconvenience they pose. If we disagree, we have the liberty to lobby for their repeal.
    - c) Your submission to government, seen by your children and your fellow man, demonstrates your submission to God (Romans 13:2). Don't let the opportunity pass to show your appreciation for the authority of God.
  3. The only exception: we must obey God rather than man!
    - a) When government tries to force us to disobey God, we must disobey the government, as illustrated by Peter and the apostles (Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29).
    - b) Even then, we may break only the particular law designed to force disobedience to God.
    - c) We have no authority to break other laws in protest to the unjust law. When government seeks to stifle our service to God, we must obey God rather than man!

## **II. Pay**

- A. We are to pay taxes.
  1. As an act of submission we should pay our taxes (Romans 13:6).
  2. Also other fees that are due, such as customs (Romans 13:7).

- a) Jesus would not have agreed with the policies of the Roman government, but He still told us to render to Caesar (Matthew 22:21).
  - b) We are not in agreement with taxpayer-funded abortions, or funding for the NEA, or massive wasteful spending, but I doubt the early Christians approved of how Nero spent the government's money either.
- B. We are to pay respect.
- 1. Fear to whom fear is due (Romans 13:7).
    - a) Such as police officers, judges, etc.
    - b) And if you do evil, be afraid (Romans 13:4).
      - (1) In the context of Romans 13:4, "sword" refers to rulers who have power by means of the death penalty.
      - (2) This must be carried out in a legal way; otherwise, it would be murder. No person can take their own vengeance (Hebrews 10:30).
  - 2. Honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7; cp. 1 Peter 2:17).
    - a) Such as presidents, kings, governors, local leaders, etc.
    - b) Out of respect for the office, if not for the man (or woman), our duty is not limited to those whose political or personal behavior we approve.

### **III. Pray**

- A. For kings and all in authority.
- 1. We are to offer supplications, prayers, and intercessions (1 Timothy 2:1-2).
    - a) Praying for those who lead our country, and those around the world.
    - b) Praying that they rule with wisdom, righteousness, and mercy.
  - 2. We are to offer thanks (1 Timothy 2:1-2).
    - a) Taking time to thank God for those who rule well.
    - b) Thanking God for when we live in peace and prosperity, and for protecting us when we do not.
    - c) An invaluable contribution Christians can give their country is their prayers and petitions that go up before God (Revelation 8:3-4).
- B. That we might lead good lives.
- 1. Good in a material sense, to enjoy quiet and peaceful times (cp. 1 Thessalonians 4:11; Hebrews 12:14a).
  - 2. Good in a spiritual sense, free to be godly and reverent (cp. Hebrews 12:14b). As God works through the governments of men to bestow peace, prayer should be a priority for those who wish to live in peace.

**Conclusion.** If your citizenship is going to be in Heaven, you had better pay attention to how you behave on earth. The duties placed on Christians toward their earthly governments are clear and simple: Be subject to governing authorities, pay what is due in taxes and respect, and pray for all those in authoritative positions.

Beyond this, our involvement in the affairs of government may fall into the realm of judgment. Should we enter politics, serve in law enforcement, enlist in the military? These questions have been debated by Christians for centuries. One fact is clear, we must obey God rather than man, and avoid becoming entangled with the affairs of this life to the neglect of God's service (2 Timothy 2:4). Are you faithfully fulfilling your duty to earthly government, while sojourning as a citizen of a heavenly kingdom?