

“Let Every Soul Be In Subjection ...”

“... to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God and the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). In Romans 13:1-7, Paul instructed Christians concerning their duty to civil government and the purpose God intended government to be for man. One of the false charges against Christians in the first century was that they were not loyal to the existing civil powers of Rome; they were intent on its overthrow. These were false for the apostles uniformly commanded Christians to submit themselves to the “*powers that be.*” Here and in other places Paul’s attitude toward government may be seen and Peter taught also the same (1 Tim. 2:1; Ti. 3:1f; 1 Pet. 2:13f). Such was the teaching of Jesus. When questioned about the lawfulness of giving “*tribute to Caesar,*” he responded, “*Render to Caesar the things which be Caesar’s and unto God, the things which be God’s*” (Mt. 22:21).

Paul’s instructions in verse one, coupled with those in verse two, must not be understood to be without exception. Verse two reads, “*Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinances of God; and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment.*” When Sadducees commanded Peter and John not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, the apostles responded, “*Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard*” (Acts 4:19f). They later told the same men, “*We must obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29). This is ever true. Government was ordained of God but government’s role was NEVER designed by God to have greater authority than the voice of God. When the demands of government run counter to the commands of God, Christians have but one choice: we must obey God rather than man.

In the connection that government “*is ordained of God,*” three times Paul tells us that government is the “*minister of God*” (verses 4 twice, 6). The scriptures not only show that God used government as His instrument in dealing with nations (Assyria was God’s “*rod*” in dealing both with Israel and Judah; Babylon was God’s agent in punishing Judah for her sins): the scriptures also picture government as being created by God to be a benefit to those who are its subjects. As a “*minister of God,*” government acts for God. “*For he is a minister of God to thee for good*” (13:4). Those who obey civil laws should have no fear from government, for it is not a “*terror to the good work, but to the evil*” (13:3). In essence, Paul’s reasoning goes like this: government is the minister of God to protect and secure the rights of those who do right; it is an avenger of wrath to those who do evil. Because it is government’s role to keep the peace: rewarding those who do well and pun-

ishing those who do evil, we have an obligation to pay taxes to aid government in its work they are charged by God to do for their citizens.

From these instructions we see that God holds each person accountable who *"resisteth the powers that be:"* such shall receive to themselves judgment (13:2). Government has right to execute the criminal *"... for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil"* (13:4). Government has right to assign appropriate punishment to lawbreakers, whether probation to one on whom government feels leniency is appropriate; or death to the hardened or heartless criminal whom government deems "unfit to live." We learn that we must subject ourselves to government not only because of the fear of punishment from government should one do evil but for "conscience sake" -- I cannot truly obey God if I ignore His command to obey the laws of the land.

Thus, *"Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor"* (Rom. 13:7). We must be careful to pay taxes; obey the laws of our land, speak respectfully of our rulers and live quiet and peaceful lives among men that God's name not be blasphemed. In Peter's words, *"Let none of your suffer as a murderer, as a thief, or as a evil doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters"* (1 Pet. 4:15).

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