

Romans 13 • Christianity & Politics

Introduction

We certainly have biblical examples of Believers who were able to exercise spiritual influence upon pagan governments in the likes of Joseph, Daniel, and Esther. But we also have to keep in mind that none of these were “elected” by the people but rather, through God’s providence, were placed in those positions according to God’s calling and purposes. Christians have been called **OUT** of this world...

*“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.
John 17:14*

...and Jesus specifically stated, “My kingdom is not of this world”.(John 18:36)

Where Christians have been given the opportunity to participate in government, it’s logical they should use their God-given privileges to support the best leaders and that the best laws are enforced justly, but the overall teaching of the Bible is not to seek control of earthly governments but to be a witness to them. Paul here provides four motives for obeying human government.

¹Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ²Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ³For 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; ⁴for it is a minister 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 minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: Is “the governing authorities” referring to only Christians?

A: No, they are the rulers of government even though they may not be Christians. There are examples of such who received the Gospel such as Erastus, the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23) and some of Caesar’s officials (Phil. 4:22), but we must recognize the fact that even an unsaved government official is a minister of God.

Point: *Even if we cannot respect the person, we must respect the God-ordained office.*

Q: In general, Christians who live consistent Spirit-filled lives need not fear governments. But what if the government is openly opposed to Christ?

A; Then the principle established by the apostles in Acts 5:29 must be followed.

But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:29

Observation: *God established three earthly institutions: the home (Gen. 2), the church (Acts 2), and human government (Gen. 9). Their functions are not supposed to overlap; when they do, there is always confusion and trouble.*

Q: What is the first motive Paul gives for being obedient to government?

A: For wrath’s sake (v.4), to avoid being punished for doing wrong, punishment that is deserved for earthly disobedience.

⁵Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. ⁷Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor

[Read v.5-7]

Q: What is the second motive?

A: “...for conscience’ sake.” (v.5) Fear is perhaps the lowest motive for Christian obedience because a Spirit-directed conscience lifts us to a higher level.

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to whom honor.

Q: According to 1 Timothy 1:5, an obedient Christian should have a “good conscience”. What happens to the Christian who constantly disobeys and refuses the Spirit’s witness to their conscience?

1. It leads to a defiled conscience. “To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.” (Titus 1:15)
2. The conscience eventually becomes seared (or calloused). “by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,” (1 Tim 4:2)
3. And finally it becomes a rejected conscience. “keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.” (1 Tim. 1:19)

Point: Consistently yielding to God’s Word and ways in all things is extremely important not just to our personal witness to others, but the quality of our own spiritual health.

Q: Why did Paul use the example of paying taxes as the primary Christian example of one’s obedience?

A: Money issues are generally **THE** most important concern with which governments and their officials are consumed. It’s a kind of witness to them in the area which matters most to them creating the possibility of a door being opened for further opportunities for the Gospel.

⁸Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. ⁹For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”
¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

[Read v.8-10]

Q: How would you characterize the 3rd motive Paul presents?

A: For the sake of love.

Q: Until now Paul has been speaking about our relationship to human laws. To what is he now referring?

A: Christians may live under the law of the land, but they also live under a much higher Law as citizens of heaven: the law of love.

Q: What is the irony about true, biblical love where law is concerned?

A: Love is actually the fulfillment of the law because love from the heart enables us to obey what the law demands.

Q: What parallel can be drawn between human laws governing us and the ones Paul singles out for us from God’s Law?

A: They both have to do with the treatment of others. Built into God’s Law is not just the call to treat people right solely because it’s the right thing to do anyway, but because in God’s estimation it’s the **LOVING** thing to do.

Point: More people are won over by love than through arguments. The Christian who is walking in love is the best citizen **AND** the best witness.

¹¹Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. ¹²The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

[Read v.11-14]

Q: How would you characterize the final motive presented by Paul?

A: For the Savior's sake.

Point: Paul takes us to the pinnacle of motives, from fear to conscience to love to devotion to Christ.

Q: What should be pictured when Paul states "salvation is nearer to us than when we believed"?

A: It's the picture of Christ's Second Coming and all that it entails for the Believer who will receive new bodies and a new home. It speaks of not belonging to this earth in order to gain what is coming in heaven.

Point: Christians belong to the light, not the dark. They should be awake and alert, behaving as those who have seen the Light of the Gospel.

Q; This is not a comprehensive list of all sins. Why do you suppose Paul identified these particular ones?

A: These are sins which should never be named among God's people. It's the contrast of the flesh versus the spirit in that we're to "make no provision for the flesh" and likewise "put on the Lord Jesus Christ".

Point: We're to behave according to a standard much higher than the world's, to deliberately avoid those things tempting us to sin. It's our spiritual responsibility to live – according to God's standards – sober, spiritual, clean lives. Even the most lawless non-believer understands whether we're truly living by the Spirit of God or controlled by the lusts of this world.

Overall Application

The Last Days are characterized in Scripture as being days of lawlessness. (See 2 Tim. 3 and 2 Th. 2.) It will be increasingly difficult for dedicated Christians to maintain their testimony as governments become more opposed to the Bible and Christ. Finally, the Man of Sin – who himself is described as "lawlessness", establishes the one-world, Satanic system opposed to the truth. To be sure it will be a test of each Believer's faith more than their knowledge, but it will also be the ultimate test of their love and service to Christ in how they choose to conduct their life.