

**Romans 13:1-7**  
**“Lessons in Civics”**

- I. Intro**
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**I. Intro**

In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter Paul dealt with *the obligations of love*; those within the body of Christ and those outside the body of Christ. Now Paul points out that we have obligations to love outside these personal relationships to general relationships such as being a good citizen in the country the Lord has placed them. I’ve heard it said that there are three things you should never discuss in public “*Religion, politics and taxes*” and in this passage Paul is going to do all three. Paul can’t be talking about us being subject to the “*governing authorities*” with the mess we are in right now? But the truth is that the times in which Paul wrote these words were far more evil then now. When one considers that he was writing to the church in Rome where 2/3 of the people were slaves and many within the church were Jewish and they were notorious for their up risings. Yet it is to this very group that Paul tells Christians that they are to be subject to the governing authorities. Paul defines for us **three ways that we are to maintain a relationship with the state:**

- 1. Vs. 1-7 The Christian’s obligation to the state**
- 2. Vs. 8-10 The Christian’s obligation to the citizens of the state**
- 3. Vs. 11-14 The Christian’s practice of their civil obligations**

**II. Vs. 1-2 Obey the powers that be**

Vs. 1 The first things we learn about both the forms of Government as well as those that occupy the positions of power within the government is its source as Paul says that “the powers that be” are from God. Paul tells his readers of their obligation for civil obedience and that there is not one Christian that is exempt from obedience to the state! The reason for this has nothing to do with the righteousness or lack thereof of the “powers that be” but rather because of the “righteousness” of the God who is the source of their authority and the One who has sanctioned it. God is not removed or uninterested in governments and political affairs, He is orchestrating them.

God hasn't sanctioned any one form of government so it can take on many different forms and still be from Him. All of society needs government as God intended man to live under authority. I'm reminded of a quote from a letter written by the French diplomat Joseph de Maistre in August 1811 about Napoleon Bonaparte in post-revolutionary France when he said, “Every nation gets the government it deserves”. We Americans love to think that only democracy is ordained by God but the time that Paul wrote this Rome had been a monarchy, republic, principality and now an empire under their 5<sup>th</sup> emperor and perhaps the most ruthless Nero. The best form of government for a nation is whatever form God has brought into being for that time and place. Sometimes God uses a government or the powers that be to bless a people and sometimes He uses them to judge them and to get them to repent! America has tried to set up democracies in parts of the world where the people of that country just can't seem to make it work. In Daniel 2:20-21, Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar “God changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.” God is interested in not only the form of government but also the persons who occupy the offices of authority. And by His grace and wisdom He not only

sends us good leaders but allows us to have bad ones at times as well. In Daniel 4:17 King Nebuchadnezzar came to this decision when he wrote a decree saying, *“That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.”*

Vs. 2 In light of the corruptive form of government that Paul and believers were living under at the time of this letter **he still condemns the resistance to the governing authorities saying that it was equivalent to resisting God.** Since God has allowed the “*power that be*” to govern over us the flip side of that is also true: **governments are in power “under God”.** In February of 1948 Louis Bowman inserted those very words “*Under God*” in the pledge of allegiance quoting from Lincoln’s Gettysburg address. Under President Eisenhower’s administration it was signed into law as part of the pledge of allegiance. This in no way suggests that everything that a government does to its citizens is justified or ordained by Him.

This concept isn’t new as you will recall Jesus words in Matthew 22:21 as they handed him a coin with Caesar’s image on it and He said, *“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* **God has put His image on man, we belong to Him. We can give certain things to Caesar, but people belong to God, they may have right to our property and possessions, they may regulate how we treat one another but they have no right to the spirit of man.** They have no right to tell us how worship or forbid our obedience to the Word of God. Whenever a government commands that we do what ought not to be done we don’t have to listen. We must not enslave people, oppress them because they are God’s not the governments. Such is the case in Acts 5:29 after being commanded to never speak about Jesus *“Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”* To oppose overtly the government that is in power such as was the case at the founding of this country; **two things not mentioned here must be considered:**

- a. What is our responsibility should the government persecute Christians?
- b. What is our responsibility should the government fail to do its duty to its citizens?

Paul wrote this during the reign of the Roman Empire which was no democracy, and no special friend to Christians - yet he still saw their legitimate authority. **Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, one of the worst Roman governors Judea ever had, and Paul under Nero, the worst Roman Emperor. And neither our Lord nor His Apostle denied or reviled the 'authority! We are bound to obey the governing authority unless they order us to do something in contradiction to God's law.**

### III. Vs. 3-5 Reasons to obey

Vs. 3-4 Paul adds additional reason for submission to the “*powers that be*” saying they are “*servants of God*” and ought not to cause any fear or trouble to those who are good citizens only to those who are evil doers. Three times in this section Paul refers to them as “*ministers*” and that is the same word we use for deacon and was used of those who served in the Jewish temple.

**Governments are to protect its citizens from evil:** This evil may be in the form an outside attack. Or it may be from the inside attack like crime from within. This is why governments have armies, police forces and courts. Rulers that bear the sword simply means that they have the authority to act on behalf of society to afflict punishment upon those who have injured the citizens. They have the right on behalf of its citizens to execute force if necessary even to taking a life. There is no doubt that these powers have been abused and miss applied but the answer is to correct the problem and not to eliminate governments right to act on behalf of its people. So the next time you get pulled over realize that the person who did so was acting like a deacon.

Vs. 5 He further tells his readers that such obedience to the “*powers that be*” are not only to be made by the believer because it will keep is out of trouble but because it is the “*right thing to*

*do”! This conscience’s sake not only gives us the right moral compass it also serves as the government’s limitation.* The powers that be that govern in God’s name must not do anything contrary to that Name and if they do we are not obligated to participate in their practice. Now I’m certain that all of us can come up with examples from both parties of those who have abused their God given authority, but we aren’t called to always respect the person in office, we are called to respect the office because the powers that be are from God.

#### IV. Vs. 6-7 Benefits of obedience

Vs. 6-7 *The second function governments have is to tax its citizens: Governments not only serve their citizens by protecting them from without and from within they also provide common services that minister to the needs of the people. Utilities, education, and relief agencies are common things that taxes are to go for.* Governments have two things at their disposal to ensure that their citizenry complies with these things physical force and economic force.

*Taxes to whom taxes are due:* To get people to do the right thing in caring for each other the government has the right to tax’s its people to ensure that folks get the care they need. We may not like the amount the government takes and the way they spend it, but the answer is not to be found in not paying but rather in changing the laws or the people making the laws. It is our responsibility to do the right thing even when we are trying to change it. Paul gives an example of civil obedience in the paying of taxes to which he says, “*render therefore to all their due*” and then he mentions four aspects of civil authority:

- a. *Personal property taxes:* Taxes, refers to an annual collection such as property or income tax. I’m certain that most folks don’t think of their IRS agent as a minister of God. Some say that they don’t want to pay their taxes because the money the

- government is collecting is going against the things of the Bible but so to in Paul's time.
- b. **Export, or import taxes**: Sales tax is paid upon purchase, something that we don't have in Montana.
  - c. **Fear, or respect of the government**: Fear does not mean terror but rather that which removes terror and as such we are to have high regard for those in authority over us who have removed our terror.
  - d. **Honor and respect for those under the government as well**: But beyond that we are to pay what we owe; honor.

This is not the only passage that deals with the Christians civil duty:

- 1 Tim. 2:1-2 where Paul exhorts *“first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”*
- Titus 3:1 we read that they were to be reminded *“to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.”*
- 1 Peter 2:13-17 Peter writes, *“submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”*

Justin Martyr (103 to 165 AD) wrote during the height of Christian persecution, “*We worship only God, but in other things we will gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that, with your kingly power, you may be found to possess also sound judgment.*”