

RENDER UNTO CAESAR **Romans 13:5-7**

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One of the hottest issues any Christian in any generation faces is his relationship to his government. This subject is relevant to us today. As Christians, we want to reach the world for Jesus Christ, and in order to make an impact on the world, we must know our responsibility to our government. A Christian who is in constant conflict with his government will not have much time to be an effective witness to the world for Christ.

In our study of Romans 13, we have already laid down some basic principles to follow in our relationship to government. Outside these guidelines, Christians may disagree on particulars of the Christian's responsibility to the state.

- Principle one:* All government is ordained of God. Even bad government is somehow under the control of God and is being used to bring about his hidden plans and purposes for this world.
- Principle two:* All Christians are to be in submission to the government which God has sovereignly put over them, even though they may not like that government.
- Principle three:* Christians are not to be known as political reactionaries, but as ambassadors for Christ. If a Christian feels bound by conscience to react politically, then he must be willing to suffer the consequences of that action from the state.
- Principle four:* The state is God's minister to maintain social order, and to resist this power is to resist God.
- Principle five:* Christians can rebel against their government if the government takes away their right to propagate the gospel or forces them to do some immoral act for the state. Christians most likely would go underground rather than use violence, but there may be a few exceptions where violence would be necessary.

Principle six: A Christian should have political convictions and use all lawful means to change the government for greater justice. The Bible does not forbid the teaching and agitating for better government in legal ways if the steps taken do not lead to force and violence.

Principle seven: A Christian may have a very difficult time discerning between religious and political issues because religious freedom is so very closely tied up with political freedom. It is possible for two Christians to take different sides on some political issue, but this should never strain their oneness in Christ.

GOVERNMENT IS TO BE OBEYED — Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17

Submission to existing government was taught by the Apostle Peter and is also mentioned in other places in Scripture. “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1). Paul had to remind Titus, a preacher, to have the Christians remember they were to be in subjection to their government. When things are rough or not going our way, we have a natural tendency to want to rebel against the existing government or environment. The Bible says we are to obey.

Christians are not to be known as political reactionaries. During the election between President Johnson and Senator Goldwater, there was a young man in my church who was a zealot for conservative politics and sold out to Barry Goldwater. During the campaign he passed out Goldwater literature, talked with everyone about voting for Goldwater, and he even had four Goldwater stickers on his auto. This young man was also a zealous Christian. A number of people who lived in his neighborhood felt as strongly for President Johnson as he did for Mr. Goldwater. During this time I preached that Christians may have political convictions but cannot be known as political reactionaries, for they are left on earth to tell the good news of Jesus Christ. Soon afterward the young man drove up to the church and the Goldwater stickers were gone from his car. He came booming into my office and said, “Pastor, I have not changed any of my convictions, but I want all the people in my neighborhood to know me as a spiritual reactionary for Christ and not as a political reactionary for Goldwater. My first allegiance is to Christ.” He had learned the lesson well.

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put

to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king” (1 Pet. 2:13-17).

Notice that Peter calls these Christians “free.” All were under the political yoke of Rome; some were slaves, and many were of the poorer class. In what sense were they free? They were free from the bondage of sin through faith in Christ Jesus. This verse indicates that Christianity was never designed to be a movement to improve government or to clean up society. Christianity is the preaching of the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation for the individual soul. However, when the individual is transformed by the gospel, this will have its effect upon society.

GOVERNMENT IS TO BE PRAYED FOR — 1 Timothy 2:1-2

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Christians are to pray for all who are in places of authority in the government — for their conversion to Christ, and also that God would grant them wisdom in running the affairs of the state. Why? So that Christians may lead quiet and peaceable lives without constant fear of political agitation so they can give themselves unreservedly to preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of the reasons the early church was not persecuted more by the Roman government was that they assured the government that they were constantly praying for it, not rebelling against it. Thus, the Christians slowly gained the confidence of the government rulers.

Senator Mark Hatfield, when he was governor of Oregon, said,

“How long has it been since you as a Christian have had an opportunity to pray with a fellow Christian, just two or three of you, praying for the needs of your lives, and certainly praying for the needs of our country, as the Scriptures exhort us to do? Pray for those in positions of political authority. I often have said that it means much more to me personally to have someone come up and tell me, “I pray for you,” than to have one say to me, “I voted for you.” The prayers of many people sustain us in public office. I urge that you pray for the Governor of this commonwealth, for the President, and for those in other important places. So to do is scriptural.

The prayers of many Christians for the welfare of this nation will avail us much, and will likewise strengthen our spiritual defenses.”

GOVERNMENT IS TO BE OBEYED FOR CONSCIENCE SAKE — Romans 13:5

“Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.” It is necessary for the Christian to submit to government, not only for fear of punishment but also for the sake of his conscience. Subjection is not only a civil duty, but also a religious duty; it is a part of the Christian’s worship and obedience to God.

When we keep the traffic laws of our city, county, state or nation, we are worshiping God. Our conscience is doing it for God, not just for fear of being caught. If we exceed the speed limit, we should expect to be given a ticket and thank the polite officer for his faithful duty.

GOVERNMENT HAS THE RIGHT TO COLLECT TAXES — Romans 13:6

“For this cause pay ye tribute [tax] also.” Because of the service of protection and social help the state gives to the Christian, he is to pay taxes. The power of the government to collect taxes is a God-given authority, and when a Christian pays his taxes he is actually worshiping God. This does not mean that all taxes are just, but that the principle of taxation by the state is biblical. If taxation is unjust, as Christians we should use all the legal means at our disposal to change the situation, but we must remember that the collection of taxes is the right of the government.

If a Christian cheats on his income tax, he has failed in his worship of God and has grieved the Holy Spirit. Chief Justice William Howard Taft said that it was the duty of every citizen to avoid payment of all taxes and to evade payment of none. A Christian may avoid paying unnecessary taxes by taking every lawful deduction, but he may not evade paying anything that is due.

“For they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.” The state is God’s minister, performing the function of collecting taxes. I think this makes it clear that ultimately Christians pay taxes to God, not to the government.

GOVERNMENT IS TO BE RESPECTED — Romans 13:7

“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom.” A government may be filled with scoundrels, but it is to be obeyed because it is carrying out its function. We are to pay the taxes that are levied.

“Fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.” All men, especially government officials, are to be respected because men have been given their secular positions by God’s common grace. Difference of rank in society is by God’s appointment and all Christians should respect people of other ranks. This is not to say that we should respect ungodly systems of social class, such as the Indian caste system which fails miserably at the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. Every Christian should realize that God has sovereignly given him his station in life and that he has been put where he is to be a witness to those about him. Whether educated or uneducated, rich or poor, black or white, if born again we are where we are to reach those about us for Jesus Christ. This does not mean that God cannot also choose to elevate us to a higher position, or even to lower our position. It simply means that we are to live appropriately to our present calling.

This exhortation to Christians to respect all who are due respect includes not only government officials, but also those men to whom God has committed wealth or outstanding ability, and those who have risen honorably among their fellows. We may disagree with such people, but we should not make disparaging remarks about them.

Children of Christian families must be taught respect for the policeman, the fireman, and certainly for the school teacher. The Bible tells parents to discipline their children and it seems to me that disrespect for a teacher should receive punishment equal to that inflicted for lying or obscenity. The school systems of our cities would have no blackboard jungles if proper respect for authority and law were inculcated.

CONCLUSION

Many great men in history have given their lives for political and social causes, some good and some bad, and their goal has been to make their lives count for something worthwhile. Yet, most of these men never had any assurance that when they died they would go to heaven. All the good or bad they did on earth never prepared them for heaven, for only Jesus Christ can do that. He is the only way to the Father, the only one who can forgive sin and give eternal life. Our Lord said, “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”