



The Christian And Civil Authority – Part 2 (Practical Applications)

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“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. 5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. 6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Romans 13:1-7).

INTRODUCTION

Romans 13:1–7 is one of the clearest passages in Scripture concerning the relationship between the Christian and civil government. The Apostle Paul wrote these words to believers living under the Roman Empire. The Roman authorities were not a Christian government. Indeed, the Roman system would eventually become responsible for the persecution and execution of many Christians.

Yet Paul did not tell Christians to live as rebels, agitators or anarchists. Instead, he instructed them to recognise legitimate authority, obey the law, pay what is due, and show proper honour to those in positions of governmental responsibility. This does **not** mean that everything a government does is automatically approved by God, nor does it mean that Christians must obey a government when it commands them to disobey God.

The Bible teaches both **submission to legitimate authority** and **obedience to God above every earthly authority**. We therefore need to understand Romans 13 carefully and in the context of the whole counsel of Scripture.

The Key Theme Is: The Christian's responsibility towards civil authority

The Key Thought Is: God is a God of order and authority. Christians are called to respect and obey legitimate civil authority, not because every ruler is righteous, but because God has established the principle of government for the restraint of evil and the preservation of order. At the same time, our ultimate allegiance remains to God.

This study is divided into two parts:

- **PART 1** – Divine Principles (This was completed in the preceding study)
- **PART 2** – Practical Applications (This is the focus for this study. **Go to Page 6**)

1. GOD IS THE SOURCE AND AUTHOR OF ORDERLY AUTHORITY

Romans 13:1: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Paul begins with a fundamental principle: **"There is no power but of God."** God is sovereign over human history. Government and civil authority do not exist outside His knowledge or sovereignty. This principle is established throughout Scripture, For example:

- **Daniel 2:21** "And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings..."
- **Daniel 4:17** "...the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will..."
- **Proverbs 8:15–16** "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth."

The Bible therefore does not present government as inherently evil. God created human beings with a need for order, responsibility and accountability. Where there is no authority whatsoever, society quickly degenerates into disorder.

Imagine a busy road junction where every driver decides that nobody has authority to tell him when to stop.

- One driver says, "I have my freedom."
- Another says, "Nobody can tell me what to do."
- Another says, "I will go whenever I want."

What happens? Freedom without order quickly becomes danger. Traffic lights restrict certain actions, but that restriction serves a greater purpose: **the protection and orderly movement of everyone.** Likewise, legitimate civil authority imposes restrictions upon individual behaviour for the sake of public order.

2. RESISTING LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY IS A SERIOUS MATTER

Romans 13:2 "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Paul makes the matter very serious. To resist legitimate authority merely because we dislike authority is contrary to God's principle of order. This does not mean that every government action is righteous. Scripture contains numerous examples of rulers who were wicked. But the existence of imperfect rulers does not abolish the biblical principle of legitimate authority.

- **Titus 3:1** "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work."
- In **1 Peter 2:13–14**, Peter gives the same principle: "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."

Notice the reason Peter gives: **"for the Lord's sake."** Our submission to legitimate authority is ultimately an expression of our submission to God. We do not obey merely because we fear punishment. We obey because we recognise God's principle of order.

3. THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT IS TO RESTRAIN EVIL AND PROTECT GOOD

Romans 13:3–4 "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain..." Paul describes civil authority as having a legitimate function. Government is intended to:

1. Restrain evil.
2. Punish wrongdoing.
3. Protect society.
4. Promote public order.
5. Recognise and encourage what is good.

Paul calls the governing authority: **"the minister of God to thee for good."** This does not necessarily mean that the individual ruler is personally a servant of God in the spiritual sense. Rather, God can use civil institutions—even imperfect ones—to accomplish His purposes of restraining evil and maintaining order.

GOVERNMENT HAS A GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY TO DEAL WITH EVIL

The Bible does not teach that society should simply tolerate lawlessness.

- **Ecclesiastes 8:11** "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." When wrongdoing has no consequences, people become emboldened to do more wrong. That is why the rule of law matters.
- **Proverbs 29:4** "The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it." Good government promotes justice. Bad government promotes corruption.
- **Isaiah 1:17** "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Government therefore has a moral responsibility to administer justice.

4. CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT LIVE IN FEAR OF AUTHORITY WHEN THEY ARE DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

Romans 13:3 "Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." Paul's principle is simple: **Live righteously, obey the law, and you should have no reason to fear legitimate authority.** The Christian should be known as a person of integrity.

- **1 Peter 2:12** "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." Our conduct should give unbelievers no legitimate reason to accuse us of wrongdoing.
- **Philippians 2:15** "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."

The Christian should be a good citizen. We should not be known for: dishonesty; tax evasion; lawlessness; violence; fraud; corruption; disorder; deliberate disregard for legitimate laws. Instead, we should demonstrate righteousness in our daily lives.

5. SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY IS NOT THE SAME AS BLIND OBEDIENCE

This is an important qualification. Romans 13 cannot legitimately be interpreted to mean: **"Whatever the government commands, Christians must obey."** The Bible

itself gives us examples where God's people respectfully refused commands that contradicted God's Word.

- **The Hebrew midwives.** Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill the male children. **Exodus 1:17** "But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive." Their ultimate allegiance was to God.
- **Daniel's three friends.** Nebuchadnezzar commanded Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to worship the golden image. They refused. **Daniel 3:16–18** "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace... But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." They respected the king's authority, but they would not worship the king's idol.
- **The Apostles.** The Jewish authorities commanded Peter and John not to preach in the name of Jesus. Their response was: **Acts 4:19–20** "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Later, Peter and the other apostles were commanded again to stop preaching. **Acts 5:29** "We ought to obey God rather than men."

This is the governing principle: **When human authority commands what God forbids, we obey God. When human authority forbids what God commands, we obey God.** However, we should never use this principle as an excuse for ordinary rebelliousness. There is a vast difference between **biblical conscientious obedience to God** and **personal resistance to authority because we dislike being governed**.

6. THE CHRISTIAN'S SUBMISSION SHOULD BE MOTIVATED BY CONSCIENCE, NOT MERELY FEAR

Romans 13:5 "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." This is one of the most important verses in the passage. Paul gives two motivations:

- **"for wrath"** — because wrongdoing brings punishment; and
- **"for conscience sake"** — because we recognise that obedience to legitimate authority is morally right.

A Christian should not obey the law only because there is a police officer nearby. Our character must be stronger than our fear of being caught.

Suppose you arrive at a red traffic light late at night. There are no pedestrians, no other cars and no police officers anywhere nearby. Why should you stop?

- A person whose only concern is punishment may say: "There is nobody here. I can go through."
- But a person governed by conscience says: "The law is there, and I will obey it whether or not somebody is watching."

That illustrates Paul's teaching. **Christian character does what is right even when there is no immediate consequence for doing wrong. Proverbs 15:3** says that "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." God is always watching.

7. CHRISTIANS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO PAY WHAT THEY OWE

Romans 13:6–7 "For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." Paul specifically addresses financial obligations. Christians are not to evade legitimate taxes and financial obligations simply because they dislike the government. Jesus taught the same principle. **Matthew 22:17–21** The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar. Jesus replied: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." There is an important distinction here. We have obligations towards human government. But we also have obligations towards God. **Caesar must receive what belongs to Caesar, but God must receive what belongs to God.** This means that paying taxes does not replace our responsibility to serve God.

8. CHRISTIANS SHOULD GIVE HONOUR WHERE HONOUR IS DUE

Romans 13:7 "Render therefore to all their dues... fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." Christianity does not teach contempt for authority. We can disagree with a government policy without becoming personally abusive towards those in authority. **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..." Notice Paul's response to government:

- Pray for them.
- Not merely complain about them.
- Not merely criticise them.
- Not merely curse them.
- **Pray for them.**

Why? "That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

PART 2 – Practical Applications

9. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN RESPECTING A PERSON AND APPROVING EVERYTHING THAT PERSON DOES

This is an important biblical balance. The Bible does not require us to call evil good.

- A ruler may be wrong.
- A government may make unjust decisions.
- A law may be unjust.
- A public official may act corruptly.

Respect for authority does not require Christians to approve unrighteousness. John the Baptist provides a powerful example in **Luke 3:19** "But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done..." John did not become a rebel against government. But neither did he remain silent about sin simply because Herod was the ruler. He courageously confronted wrongdoing. **Ephesians 5:11** admonishes: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Therefore, Christians can respect governmental authority while also speaking truth concerning injustice, corruption and unrighteousness.

10. NEVER MAKE POLITICAL POWER YOUR ULTIMATE HOPE

Romans 13 teaches us to respect government, but the Bible never teaches us to put our ultimate trust in government. Rather, we are told in:

- **Psalms 118:9** "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."
- **Psalms 146:3** "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." Why? Because political leaders are human. They change. Governments change. Policies change. Political parties change. But God does not change.

- **Hebrews 13:8** "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

Government may provide earthly security, but **God is our ultimate security**.

Government may provide earthly justice, but **God is the ultimate Judge**.

Government may provide earthly provision, but **God is our Provider**.

Government may protect our earthly lives, but **God holds our eternal destiny**.

11. RECOGNISE THAT THE CHRISTIAN'S HIGHEST CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN

We should be responsible citizens of the country in which God has placed us. But our deepest identity is not political.

- **Philippians 3:20** "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." The word "conversation" here carries the idea of citizenship or manner of life. We have an earthly citizenship, but we belong ultimately to the Kingdom of God.
- **Colossians 3:1–2** "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Therefore:
 1. Be a good citizen, but remember that you are a citizen of heaven.
 2. Respect earthly authority, but remember that Jesus is your Lord.
 3. Pay earthly taxes, but remember that your life belongs to God.
 4. Obey legitimate laws, but never compromise the Word of God.

12. ACCEPT THAT GOD EXPECTS CHRISTIANS TO BE EXEMPLARY CITIZENS

The Christian should make society better, not worse. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:13–14** "Ye are the salt of the earth... Ye are the light of the world." Salt preserves. Light exposes darkness. The Christian should therefore influence society through righteous living. In **Matthew 5:16** Jesus admonished "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Imagine what would happen if every Christian:

1. paid his legitimate taxes honestly;
2. obeyed the law;
3. treated public officials respectfully;
4. refused corruption;
5. rejected violence;
6. helped the poor;
7. defended the oppressed;
8. spoke truth;
9. prayed for those in authority;
10. raised godly children;
11. conducted business honestly;
12. kept his promises;
13. and lived according to God's Word.

The Church would become a powerful testimony to the transforming grace of God.

13. UNDERSTAND THAT AUTHORITY BEGINS WITH GOD AND MUST ULTIMATELY ANSWER TO GOD

Romans 13 tells us that rulers possess authority. But Scripture also teaches that rulers themselves are accountable to God. For example, we are told in:

- **Psalms 2:10–11** "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." Earthly rulers are not the ultimate authority. They are themselves under God's authority.
- **Proverbs 21:1** "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."

This should give Christians confidence.

1. We do not need to live in political panic.
2. We can pray.
3. We can vote where appropriate.
4. We can speak truth.
5. We can participate responsibly in society (including in Politics).
6. We can challenge injustice lawfully.
7. We can obey legitimate authority.
8. And above all, we can trust God.

14. EMULATE JESUS, THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF SUBMISSION WITHOUT COMPROMISE

Jesus Himself demonstrated the proper balance between submission to earthly authority and absolute obedience to God. He paid tribute. In:

- **Matthew 17:27** Jesus instructed Peter to pay the tribute money. He acknowledged earthly governmental authority.
- **Matthew 22:21** He commanded "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Yet Jesus never compromised the Father's will.

- **John 6:38 He said** "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Jesus was submissive without being sinful. He was respectful without being compromised. He was obedient without being a man-pleaser. And when earthly authorities eventually demanded His death, He submitted to the Father's redemptive purpose rather than attempting to establish an earthly political kingdom.
- **John 18:36 He said** "My kingdom is not of this world..." The Christian must learn the same balance.

IN SUMMARY, THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION from Romans 13:1–7 gives us several practical responsibilities such as:

1. **Respect legitimate authority.** Do not cultivate a rebellious spirit. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." — Romans 13:1
2. **Obeys the law.** Where the law does not require us to sin, Christians should obey it. "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." — Romans 13:2
3. **Live righteously.** Do not give legitimate authorities a reason to punish you because of wrongdoing. "Do that which is good..." — Romans 13:3
4. **Maintain a clean conscience.** Do what is right even when nobody is watching. "...not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." — Romans 13:5
5. **Pay what you owe.** "Render therefore to all their dues..." — Romans 13:7. This includes legitimate taxes and other lawful obligations.
6. **Show proper respect.** "...fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." — Romans 13:7
7. **Pray for those in authority.** "Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made... for kings, and for all that are in authority." — 1 Timothy 2:1–2
8. **Stand for truth when necessary.** If human authority commands us to violate God's Word: "We ought to obey God rather than men." — Acts 5:29
9. **Do not put your ultimate trust in politicians.** "Put not your trust in princes..." — Psalm 146:3
10. **Remember your heavenly citizenship.** "For our conversation is in heaven..." — Philippians 3:20

A CRUCIAL BALANCE

Romans 13 can be summarised in four principles:

SUBMIT — OBEY — HONOUR — BUT NEVER COMPROMISE GOD'S WORD

- **Submit** to legitimate authority.
- **Obeys** lawful requirements.
- **Honour** those who hold office.
- **But never compromise** the commands of God.

The Bible rejects two extremes.

- **Extreme 1: Rebellion** "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." — Romans 13:1
- **Extreme 2: Blind obedience** "We ought to obey God rather than men." — Acts 5:29

The biblical position is between these extremes: **Respect earthly authority while maintaining absolute allegiance to God.**

CONCLUSION

Romans 13:1–7 teaches us that Christians are not called to be lawless people.

1. We are called to be responsible citizens.
2. We should respect authority.
3. We should obey legitimate laws.
4. We should pay what we owe.
5. We should honour those in authority.
6. We should pray for governments and public officials.
7. We should live peaceably.
8. We should be people of integrity.

But there is one authority above every earthly authority: **THE AUTHORITY OF GOD**, so:

1. When government agrees with God's Word, we obey.
2. When government protects what is good and restrains evil, we support the principle of good government.
3. When government is wrong, we can respectfully speak the truth.
4. When government commands us to sin, we must obey God.

Our ultimate allegiance is not to a political party. It is not to a president, prime minister, parliament or king. Our ultimate allegiance is to **Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Revelation 19:16 states** - "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Therefore, let us be faithful Christians and responsible citizens.

1. Let us obey God.
2. Let us honour authority.
3. Let us reject lawlessness.
4. Let us stand for righteousness.
5. Let us pray for those who govern.
6. And let us remember that earthly governments are temporary, but **the Kingdom of God is everlasting. Daniel 2:44 points out that** - "... in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed..."

CLOSING EXHORTATION

Let us live in such a way that government has no legitimate accusation against us, society sees Christ in us, and God is glorified through us.

1. Let us be citizens who obey the law.
2. Let us be Christians who obey the Word.
3. Let us be people who honour authority.
4. Let us be courageous enough to stand for truth.
5. And let us never forget that **"We ought to obey God rather than men." — Acts 5:29**
 - Our earthly citizenship demands responsibility.
 - Our heavenly citizenship demands holiness.
 - And our Lord Jesus Christ demands our complete allegiance.

Amen.