

GOD AND COUNTRY

Romans 13:1-7

I. Governmental authority is a bequest from God.

- A. Paul began this section by reminding us of God's design for governmental authority. *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.* Paul made three observations about this principle.
1. There is no authority apart from that established by God.
 2. The authorities that exist have been established by God.
 3. When you rebel against the authorities, you rebel against what God has established.
- B. This idea of submission to authority is woven throughout the New Testament. *¹First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ²for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. (1 Timothy 2:1-2 NASB95) ¹Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, (Titus 3:1 NASB95) ¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. ¹⁶Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. ¹⁷Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13-17 NASB95)*

- C. Paul's principle is that Christians should recognize and give themselves to the authority of government. He would have readily acknowledged that there are times when that is impossible because of the unchristian demands of the government. The Caligulas, Herods, Neros, and Domitians of the New Testament era were succeeded by the Hitlers, Stalins, Amins, and Husseins of ours.

II. God granted governments authority for good.

- A. Paul continued by pointing out that God intended for governmental authority to be a tool for good. *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. 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.*
1. The government is God's minister to do us good.
 2. The government is God's agent to bring punishment on the lawbreaker.
 3. The government is God's servant.
- B. This passage does not state nor imply that every leader in government is Christian. It does not suggest that the government is a Christian entity. It declares that God is able to use the governmental authority as a minister for good. The disdain that we project on the governmental process is an unneeded element. We paint with a very broad brush. Every politician is not crooked. Every politician is not out to better

himself/herself at the expense of their constituency.
Every politician is not a liar.

1. The system of laws that we have is designed to maintain an order of life for us. We are protected by those laws. We are provided for by those laws. We enjoy the benefits of an orderly society. We have the wonderful privilege of free speech that allows us to lambast our government and politicians at will. Yet, we are very fortunate as a people.
2. The Zealots of Paul's day thought they were above man's law. For them, there was no law but God's law. Therefore, they rejected any imposition of authority by Rome. They refused to pay taxes and even persecuted their countrymen who did. As Christians, we are not above the law. We are to give ourselves to it. We are not vigilantes. The Klan and other radical groups who claim some Christian motivation have forgotten that over the years.

III. Christians need to be engaged in the process.

- A. Paul concluded this section with an admonition.

⁷Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. We need to be good citizens. We need to respect the authority of government and encourage it to do good.

- B. The concept of separation of church and state has been misunderstood, misapplied, and misused. There was never a suggestion by our founding fathers that religion had no place in government. There was the firm assertion that the government had no authority to establish or meddle in religion. We have every responsibility to be engaged in the political process.

1. We must vote as informed voters in the election process.
2. We need to encourage Christian men and women to run for public office.
3. We need to hold our leaders accountable for the decisions they make.
4. We need to speak up when we see injustice. We need to be an advocate for those who have a weak voice.
5. We need to live our faith in the public square. We need to take our faith to school, to work, to play. We need not be afraid of recrimination when we assert the principles that come to bear on our life because we follow Christ. Our relationship with Christ should not simply be a bumper sticker or a lapel pin. It should be a life force that shapes every part of who we are.