



DID GOD REALLY SAY...RESPECT THE GOVERNMENT?

~ ROMANS 13:1-7 ~

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¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.



Grace, mercy and peace be yours, through Jesus Christ our Lord,

I can't remember where I first saw this commercial, but it aired shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It was one of those "before and after" commercials. The before picture had a caption that read, "the terrorists wanted to change America," in front of a picturesque American street. The after picture had the caption, "they did," with the picture changing to that same American street, except with every house waving an American flag. For those who are old enough to remember that time, it was a time when America showed its true colors and its patriotism.

Another day when Americans show their patriotism is on July 4th, a day we just celebrated. Hopefully you had the day off of work, hopefully you were able to spend some time with friends and family, wear some red, white and blue, wave a few flags, take in the fireworks. There is no country like the USA, and we can be proud to live here and call this country home. If only we could feel this way every day. But like birthdays and other celebrations, even though we may remember them, we usually wait until they roll around again before we really celebrate them.

On an ordinary, non-July-4th, day we go about our normal routine – work, kid's practices, doctor's appointments, grocery shopping, and we often take for granted the freedoms we enjoy here in the USA. And I'm sure there are times that we live and act in a way which we completely abuse or reject those freedoms. This is most often visible in our disrespect for our government or others in authority. This is why this question we ask this morning is so important, and so applicable to our lives. DID GOD REALLY SAY TO RESPECT THE GOVERNMENT? There's no better section of God's Word to go to for this answer than Romans 13. It is in Romans 13 that the apostle Paul gives to reasons why Christians are to RESPECT THE GOVERNMENT.

1. It is established by God
2. They are God's servants

(1)

Whether or not we should respect our earthly governments has always been a question on the human heart. It again is another question that plants the seed of doubt into the heart. People of ancient times wondered if they needed to respect their rulers, some of them didn't and ended up overthrowing them. The Israelites would have dealt with this in their history too, as the Assyrians and then the Babylonians, and then the Persians ruled over the people of Israel. Were the Jews really supposed to submit to these heathen and pagan rulers? Fast forward a couple thousand years into the Middle Ages. After Martin Luther broke away from the Catholic Church, many thought of his revolution as a political one, not theological. He had to speak some very harsh words to the mass of peasants who wanted to overthrow their feudal lords.

The idea behind all of this is freedom. People don't like having someone tell them what to do, and it doesn't even matter if that person has their best interests in mind. The founding forefathers of America had this in mind when they overthrew the British colonial government and established their own country. This is the desire for freedom. This can be said of people yesterday and it can be said of people today.

We need only harken back to our gospel for this morning, to see the freedom we enjoy as Christians. You will recall Jesus is teaching in the temple and is approached by two groups of people – the Pharisees and the Herodians – and they pose to him a trick question. The question of whether they should pay tax to Caesar or give their offerings to God. Now, of course this was a trick question – if Jesus answered to pay tax to Caesar, they would say he's against giving to God, if he answered give to God, they would have accused him of undermining the government. Jesus' answer however is a good reminder of what Christians are – citizens of two kingdoms. Jesus' answer was this – **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.”**

As Christians we are both citizens of this country and citizens of heaven. As citizens of both, we have our “dues” to give both. Similar to a dual-citizenship one might have today. As citizen of both kingdoms we cannot neglect the one to satisfy the other, and we cannot satisfy the one and neglect the other. And just as we are called to submit ourselves to God and his authority, we are called to **“submit ourselves to the governing authorities.”** The very word “submit” means “to place under.” We are called to place ourselves under our governing authorities.

This is not a very popular thought in today's day and age. Submitting is the very opposite we want to do. We want others to submit to us – whether that's at work, in the home, with friends. Even submitting ourselves to God and his authority is a struggle, especially for Christians. So DID GOD REALLY SAY TO RESPECT THE GOVERNMENT? Yes he did, and he said to do this because **“the authorities that exist have been established by God.”** In fact he repeats that three times in just two verses! Do we always remember that? Do we always remember that our leaders, and policemen, and other public servants have been placed there by God? Do we remember that when we don't give honor to our elected officials, or when we laugh along with the late-night talk shows, or when we mumble curses under our

breath at the policeman who just pulled us over? **“The authorities that exist have been established by God.”**

Since they have been established by God, Paul goes on to say, **“consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.”** It would be as if a parent left the oldest child in charge for the evening, and then found out later the other children purposely disobeyed the eldest. But certainly since we are Christians, and WELS Christians at that, we would never think to rebel against God, so that must mean that any rebellion we have against the government is justified. After all, shouldn't we **“obey God rather than men?”**

I think that may be one of the most popular phrases of Scripture that people take out of context, right behind **“don't judge.”** It's a phrase we use to justify our own rebellion against authority and thereby God. It doesn't matter if our rebellion against authority is bombing an abortion clinic or mumbling under our breath about the latest thing President Obama has done. And yet, despite how you feel about President Obama, or any other leader, they have been placed in that position by God and are deserving of our respect and honor.

It is a respect and honor that we find hard to give, and not only when the guy we didn't vote for is in office. It's hard to give because we just want to have it our way. We want our leaders to give us what we want. And that is never going to be possible all the time. Because no matter how much they give, it will never be enough. We can't even fully give our respect to the God who loves us. But Jesus did, he submitted to God and he respected and submitted to his earthly government. Even when he had a just complaint to make, he remained silent. It's something we know already, but knowing does not equate to faith. Faith is believing what we know. Faith is believing and growing.

And so as Christians, we will not have to be afraid of our rulers, for we do not want to deny our Lord by disobeying them. Christians will serve and obey their government in order that they may be known as loyal citizens and sincere believers. Submitting to the governing authorities and obeying them is a way we show our faith.

(2)

But what about when the government is not acting the way Paul describes it acting here in Romans 13? Paul gives a very high and lofty standard for governments to live up to, a standard, that quite often is not reached. And yet, just because a standard is not reached, does that mean we should ignore what God says? If that were the case, we should ignore God's institution of marriage as well, we should ignore our religious leaders like pastors and teachers, we should ignore any traffic fines or speeding tickets. No, no and no!

Paul gives a high and lofty standard for governments – a standard to uphold peace and justice in our countries. A standard to promote those who act in law abiding ways, to walk in line with the conscience placed inside every person. But when all of these things do not happen, it doesn't mean we stop submitting, or obeying, or honoring our government. And why not? Because the government is **“God's servant to do you good.”** The government is carrying out God's plans in protecting its citizens, in protecting believers. That's why Paul says we should submit to the government **“not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience.”**

Our conscience tells us that obeying the government is the right thing to do. Because when we obey the laws of our country we are seen as law-abiding citizens. This is not any meritorious action on our part, merely living a Christian life. When we obey the laws of our country we have nothing to be afraid of. For it is only when we are in violation of those laws that we need to be afraid of punishment. And the only time that God gives us permission to be in violation of our country's laws, is when they are in direct opposition to God's Word in the Bible. I've already explained how easy it is for us to play that card for when we don't want to obey. This "disobedience" of a Christian, however, will not result in open rebellion and overt acts of violence against the government, but rather in patient refusal to act contrary to Christian conscience, even suffering persecution if necessary, trusting that this patient endurance will **"put to silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."**

But even when the government does not act in a way that a servant of God should, we should not be entirely surprised. For God has never said that the government is the standard of morality. And so we should not complain about the lack of morality in this country, but rather rejoice in the fullness of morality that God has. While you may not be able to ever completely be certain of what might happen to you in the outside world, with God you can always be certain. We can always trust his promises, we can always turn to him when we are weak, and he will always lift us up from our failures in forgiveness. This is what gives us greater motivation to listen to what he says, **"not because of possible punishment, but because of conscience."**

You can try to dance around the words in Romans 13, you can try and defend your own actions. But when it comes down to it, God tells us to submit, to place under, to the governing authorities. We do this not only because they were established by God, but also because are are serving God by serving us. As we take time to celebrate our country this weekend, let us also take time to remember, honor, and pray for our elected leaders. For GOD REALLY DID SAY TO RESPECT THE GOVERNMENT. Amen.