

## The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

### Romans Chapter 13:1-14 “The Civil Relationship of the Christian”

Romans 13:1-2, *“Every 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. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”*

What provoked the apostle Paul to mention governments in chapter 13? It is likely because of what he mentioned in the last chapter concerning to *“not to conform to the world”* (Romans 12:1). This world as we know it is temporary at best.

- Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:10, *“...the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”*
- John wrote to the Christians in confirmation of the temporal state of the earth in 1 John 2:17, *“The world is passing away...”*
- Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:18, *“...the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*
- We sing a hymn, *“This world is not my own, I’m just a passing through. If heaven’s not my home, then Lord what will I do? The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door, and I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.”*

All Christians must resist a “loving relationship” with the world, for it will all be gone someday. In the end, the only thing which matters is whether or not we are right with God.

With that as the backdrop, a problem arose when some Christians, in an effort to resist the world, might transfer their anti-world position to an anti-government position. Around the time of the writing of the letter, the attitude of the people began to turn sour against the Empire. The A.D. 50s brought many new challenges to the Roman government.

- The Jewish Zealots began to organize against Rome. They were nothing more than terrorists of a political nature, preaching insurrection and rebellion against the Empire. By A.D. 66, Jerusalem would enter a four year period of insurrection which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in the fall of A.D. 70.
- The Jews, who were exiled from Rome by Emperor Claudius, had just returned after a five year absence. The Romans were very hostile to the sight of Jewish foreigners pouring back into the land. This in return stoked more Jewish hatred against the Empire.
- The Roman historian Tacitus reported in the mid-fifties that there arose resistance among the populace to the high taxes. This resulted in a great tax revolt in 58 A.D. This led to great civil disorder.

Paul reasoned that if the Christians were not careful with their anti-world attitude, they could be swept up into the consequences of the lawless of society. The Christians were to subject themselves to the governing authorities, knowing that God allowed them to come to power.

### The Reality for Christians Today

Being a Christian can be very difficult in the world for which we live. There is so much evil on this earth and it is extremely hostile toward the people of God. Groups like Muslim

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Extremists, Humanists, Atheists, Communists, Socialists, Anarchists, pornographers, eco-environmentalists, narcissists and a thousand other issues, all run in contradiction to the life of the Christian. It is hard to be faithful in a world of the faithless.

What does come easy for the Christians is transferring an attitude of disgust for our government. Let's face it, we presently have a very dysfunctional government made up of some incompetent people.

- They refuse to live within their budget like normal people and have accumulated 18 trillion dollars of debt.
- They load up on sweet deals for themselves and at the same time burden the populace with the ramifications.
- They pass bills they didn't read, can't pay for and don't work in the end.
- In the last few decades the government has taken stake in horrible issues like the killing unborn babies, sanctifying immorality and encouraging the religion of secular Humanism.

There is much to be repulsed about concerning our government. If following it too closely in the news, I actually become so upset that I want to offer them the right foot of fellowship in response. This however is not to be the response of the people of God. The apostle offers two points of logic which reprioritizes the heart of the Christian.

## Paul's argument is simple.

A) God allows all governments to have their authority.

It was not the American people who had the final say in her leaders. It was not the Russians who authorized Putin to be her leader. Kim Jung Un might think he had the authority to take over North Korea, but he did not. ISIS did not come to power through the authority of men. It was God who authorized it.

- 1 Peter 2:13-14, "*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,<sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.*"
- Titus 3:1-2, "*Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,<sup>2</sup> to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.*"
- Daniel 2:21, "*It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.*"
- Daniel 4:17, "*This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men.*"
- John 19:10-11, "*So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."*"

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B) Those who resist the government go against the authority of God.

If God saw fit for a particular government to be in place at a particular time, then to resist it is to resist God. With it comes consequences of the wrath of God, including fines, imprisonment and even death.

Paul would continue in 13:3-4, *“For 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; <sup>4</sup> for 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.”* Our rulers are authority figures to bring civility to society. They pass laws which allow us to coexist together. When we interact with the government in an unhealthy way, the laws will be enforced.

Besides dictatorships, governments in general are structured in such a way to bring societal harmony to a populace. Without law, there exists only lawlessness. When you see the Anarchists marching in the street against all authority, including government leaders, business leaders and religious leaders, it is not that they are warring with them, but with God. They do not want anyone telling them what to do.

It has been very sad to me to witness all the anarchy with certain marchers. They have been railing against police departments around the country. Yes, there are some bad police officers, just like there are some bad school teachers, cooks, lawyers and doctors. The majority of them are great, willing to lay down their lives for people they might not even know in a time of crisis. Many of those marching are against all authority in their lives, which is a byproduct of narcissism.

## What is the Christian strategy in dealing with the government?

There are three necessary steps which Christians deal in our civil duties concerning the government. One is mentioned here in Romans and the other two throughout the Old Testament.

1) We are to PAY along.

Romans 13:5-7, *“Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. <sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”*

As much as we do not like to do it, taxes are an inevitable part of having government. Roads don’t build themselves. Police and fire departments do run themselves. Schools, libraries and city workers are paid in money. The military is a police force for a nation and require funds to protect. Taxes are expected from any government on earth.

This does not say in a Republic we do not encourage the leaders to be wise stewards of the revenue, for we must. We do this through the electoral process and other legal mechanisms built into the constitution.

For the sake of your conscience, we must pay these taxes. We must Pay along when it comes to our position in the government.

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2) We are to PRAY along.

1 Timothy 2:1-2, *“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”*

Paul instructed Timothy to offer prayers on the behalf of all who are in authority. The request to God concerned their ability to make life easier on the Christians. As much as we might not like our leaders, we still have an obligation to pray for them. We are to Pray along to get along with the government.

3) We are to PLAY along.

Matthew 5:13-15 states, *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.”*

Jesus instructs His followers to do their best to reach out with the gospel to others in the world. We work with the world we are in to change their future and hope. Some governments like Saudi Arabia do not allow Christians to proselytize. Others like Ghana encourage it. We have a government in America which is turning ever so hostile to our ways. We must PLAY along concerning to get along with the government.