

## Are You a Christian? Then Honor Those In Authority

Let's open our Bibles to Romans 13:1-8:

- 1 Obey the government, for **God is the one who put it there**. All governments have been placed in power by God.*
- 2 So those who **refuse** to obey the laws of the land are **refusing** to obey God, and punishment will follow.*
- 3 For the authorities do not frighten people who are doing right, but they frighten those who do wrong. So do what they say, and you will get along well.*
- 4 The authorities are sent by God to help you. But if you are doing something wrong, of course you should be afraid, for you will be punished. The authorities are established by God for that very purpose, to punish those who do wrong.*
- 5 So you must obey the government for two reasons: to keep from being punished and to keep a clear conscience.*
- 6 Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid so they can keep on doing the work God intended them to do.*
- 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and import duties, and give respect and honor to all to whom it is due.*
- 8 Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law.*

Before we continue our study of Romans 13 this morning, I'd like you to consider for a moment how you would describe Christianity to an unbeliever or to someone who thinks they're a Christian but obviously are not. Anyone have the courage to tell us how they would define Christianity? Christianity is a total life experience. It's not something you add to your life like your career or jogging. Nothing is left unaffected by the transformation that takes place when you accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Being a Christian cannot be separated from any part of living. If you read Ephesians 5 and 6 you'll readily see that every relationship is to be touched by the Spirit of God in the life of a believer. If you look at Colossians 3 you'll see the very same thing. But I'd like you to consider what Paul writes to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:1

*1 Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You are doing this already, and we encourage you to do so more and more.*

Paul says you ought to live according to what you know to be right through the teaching

of Jesus. You ought to live according to your faith. Verses 2-8:

*2 For you remember what we taught you in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

*3 God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin.*

*4 Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honor—*

*5 not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways.*

*6 Never cheat a Christian brother in this matter by taking his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before.*

*7 God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives.*

*8 Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

Paul is telling them that now that they are believers, **their faith will affect every relationship they have**. There are to be no more wrongful relationships, no more lust (unrestrained sexual desire), no more unclean relationships, but only true love and pure love. Verses 11, 12:

*11 This should be your ambition: to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we commanded you before.*

*12 As a result, **people who are not Christians will respect the way you live**, and you will not need to depend on others to meet your financial needs.*

In Romans 13 Paul says that our Christianity affects those in authority over us, government leaders on both a local or national level. We are given clear direction as to how we should relate to the government which is over us.

We could probably sum up the whole epistle of Romans thus far by saying that since you have been saved (justified) by the grace of God by faith, since you have been made right with God, since you have become citizens of His heavenly kingdom, since you are now controlled by His Holy Spirit and are living under His lordship, every aspect of your life is now different (Romans 12).

In the last two weeks we've experienced some serious examples of people deciding to take the law into their own hands. You've certainly heard the news stories this week about the disgruntled citizens who feel the legal system failed them. The one decided to kill a judge who ruled against him and wound up actually killing members of the judge's family. The other shot the judge who was presiding over his trial in court. This behavior is the exact opposite of what Paul calls Christians to do.

Christians are called to live as model citizens in order that we may reach the world around us with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. How you behave under the authorities

in your country, state, city, or whatever it is, will demonstrate the legitimacy of your faith to the people in that society. I'd like us to take a look at another passage, 1 Timothy 2:1-4 where Paul is writing to Timothy with instructions for the church:

*1 I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks.*

*2 PRAY THIS WAY FOR KINGS AND ALL OTHERS WHO ARE IN AUTHORITY, so that we can live in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity.*

*3 This is good and pleases God our Savior,*

**4 FOR HE WANTS EVERYONE TO BE SAVED AND TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH.**

We are to pray and give thanks to God for kings and all who are in authority in order that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty. If we want to live a quiet and peaceful life, if we want to live as God wants us to live, our approach is to **pray for those in authority over us**. If we feel the government or legal system has been unfair to us, God wants us to remember that all vengeance belongs to Him. We don't do our leaders any good by protesting, by disobedience, by revolution and uprising, but rather by prayer. FIRST OF ALL WE PRAY. In Jeremiah 29:7 we read:

*7 And work for the peace and prosperity of Babylon. Pray to the Lord for that city where you are held captive, for if Babylon has peace, so will you."*

This is a message to the Jews who have just been captured by the Babylonians and taken off to captivity in Babylon. In other words the Jews had just been defeated in battle and conquered by the Babylonians. God tells them to seek the peace and prosperity of their captors while they are prisoners, and to pray to God for it. In 1 Corinthians 10:3, 4, Paul says:

*3 We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods.*

*4 We use God's **mighty weapons**, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds.*

The most powerful weapon we have as believers to knock down the Devil's strongholds is **prayer**. When you wonder what to do about political and governmental issues, **pray**. Pray for God's wisdom and guidance for the government leaders. Pray according to God's Word about the specific issues when they are something that is specifically contained in the Bible. (For instance, the courts' decisions and legislatures' laws about abortion or euthanasia.) When we conduct ourselves like this, we will have the opportunity to see men and women saved and come to knowledge of the truth. We pray also that God will allow us the privilege of living a peaceable and quiet life, radiating the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

The tranquil and peaceful life is to be the distinctive mark of a Christian.

The second most powerful weapon we have to defeat Satan's strongholds is LOVE. Listen to Romans 18:8, NLT:

*Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law.*

Love breaks down barriers that rebellion or violence cannot touch. Love can speak loudly to our enemies. We are to love them and to love each other. Again, listen to what Paul writes in his first letter to the Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 10-12 (NRSV):

*10 and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more,  
11 to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you,  
12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

Desire to live quietly, learn to seek peace. Christians should pray and live a peaceful life, influencing the world by godly living, loving attitudes and bold preaching of the Gospel message. That is what Christians are to do.

Just like the prophet, Amos; just like the prophet, Nahum; just like the prophet Malachi. We have every right to confront the sins of our society from the viewpoint of the Word of God, but we are not to engage in political acts of violence, protest, or revolution against the government. So Romans 13:1 has told us:

*I Obey the government, for God is the one who put it there. All governments have been placed in power by God.*

Jesus never taught his people to storm city hall. Jesus never taught His people to revolt against the king. He never taught His people to revolt against unjust rulers. He never taught His people to hold sit-ins in the hallway outside the president's office.

We are supposed to reach the world, and in order to reach the world we must demonstrate a godly, loving, virtuous, peaceful kind of life, so that what we have is attractive to others. If our light is to shine in the middle of a perverse and wicked generation, it must be the light of the Gospel message that shines from the glory of Jesus Christ.

Now you may remember from last time that there is only one reason for not obeying the government. That is when the government demands we do something that God says we should not do, or tells us we should not do something that God commands us to do. God

is always the ultimate authority. Let's just look at an example from Scripture concerning this issue. Turn in your Bibles to Daniel 1, beginning with verse 8:

*8 But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief official for permission to eat other things instead.*

Here we have an occasion where Daniel is instructed by the Babylonian monarch to take the food given him and eat it. To do that, however, would have been to violate strict dietary laws that God placed on the Jews. Daniel would not allow himself to do this. Yet, you'll note in Daniel's attitude a spirit of submission to the government. Daniel asks permission to try a test. Verses 9-14:

*9 Now God had given the chief official great respect for Daniel.*

*10 But he was alarmed by Daniel's suggestion. "My lord the king has ordered that you eat this food and wine," he said. "If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded for neglecting my duties."*

*11 Daniel talked it over with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief official to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.*

*12 "Test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water," Daniel said.*

*13 "At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's rich food. Then you can decide whether or not to let us continue eating our diet."*

*14 So the attendant agreed to Daniel's suggestion and tested them for ten days.*

This was a wonderful way for Daniel to seek to obey God without offending this man who was carrying out orders from his king. And look what happened, verses 15-20:

*15 At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king.*

*16 So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the rich foods and wines.*

*17 God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for learning the literature and science of the time. And God gave Daniel special ability in understanding the meanings of visions and dreams.*

*18 When the three-year training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief official brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar.*

*19 The king talked with each of them, and none of them impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they were appointed to his regular staff of advisers.*

*20 In all matters requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, the king found*

*the advice of these young men to be ten times better than that of all the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.*

Because Daniel was completely obedient to God, God eventually placed Daniel in the most important office in the Babylonian Empire under King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was thus able to protect his people who were held in exile under Babylonian control. Daniel, by the way, is the best example in Scripture that it is OK for godly people to serve in government. Christians can be very effective and positively influential when combining their faith with public service.

A bit later in the book we see in chapter 3 that Daniel's three friends refused to bow down to the idol image as commanded by the king. They were true to God and said, "If you want to throw us in the fire, go ahead. God may deliver us but even if He doesn't, we still won't bow down." They took a no compromise attitude, but there was a sense of respect in what they said in Daniel 3:17, 18:

*17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, your Majesty.*

*18 But even if he doesn't, your Majesty can be sure that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."*

If you're not familiar with the rest of the prophecy of Daniel, we've done an in depth study of this book and would be glad to make it available to anyone who's interested. It is a fascinating revelation of God's plan for history.

Now before continuing in Romans, let's summarize what Daniel has taught us:

- 1) Normally we obey, respect, and do everything we can to please those in authority. We are not only obedient outwardly but also obedient in spirit.
- 2) We resist and disobey only when we are commanded to do something the Word of God forbids or are forbidden to do what the Word of God commands.
- 3) Even when government and the Word of God conflict, we should not disobey until we have done all we can do to try and resolve the conflict peacefully.
- 4) If after all of this, disobedience is necessary, we must be willing to suffer the consequences. We must be ready to quietly and peaceably accept the punishment, just as Daniel was willing to do when he was placed in the lions' den.

This kind of behavior reflects the core and integrity of the Christian faith. Christianity is not a political viewpoint. It is a matter of dealing with the eternal destiny of one's soul.

Now as we go back to Romans 13, we'll see that Paul gives **SEVEN REASONS** why we are to behave like this and we find the **first reason** in the last half of Romans 13:1:

*For there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.*

We may conclude from this verse that **government is by divine decree**. Civil authority of any kind comes directly from God. Just as God designed marriage, God designed civil authority (governments). Just as the Church is an institution of God, so is government. Psalm 62:11 says:

*11 God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to you.*

All things in Heaven and earth belong to God. God manages the world for His own purposes. He alone is sovereign and anyone who possesses any kind of power on earth has been delegated power from God alone. All authority comes from God.

Now it's just a matter of time before someone is going to ask, "*Do you mean that this applies to communist China and North Korea and countries like that?*" The answer is yes. I believe Paul speaks to this question in his sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17:26:

*26 From one man **he (God)**<sup>1</sup> created all the nations throughout the whole earth. **He decided beforehand which should rise and fall**, and he determined their boundaries.*

God is the one who has designed and created nations. No tyrant ever seized power without God permitting it. How can we say God has ordained abusive forms of governments such as the Nazis of Hitler and the Iraq of Hussein? Those questions are way over my head. I can't second-guess God. I don't know His master plan. But I do know He's a just God and because I know what I know about Him from the rest of the Bible, I can accept that He would allow corrupt governments for an even better good that none of us can see on the surface.

However, let me add that the abuses of government are not a reflection of God's nature. The abuses of government are no more a reflection of God's holy nature than divorce is a reflection of God's will for marriage. And even though there are many abuses in the Church, the Church is still an institution ordained by God. The abuses are not a reflection of the nature of God. In fact men and women abuse all of God's gifts, don't they? The bottom line here, and perhaps those of us who get to Heaven will be given an explanation of it then, is that **God has designed a reason for every government that has existed and will exist on the face of the earth**. We submit to the government because the government is there by the decree of God.

The **second reason** Paul gives for submitting to the governmental authorities is found in Romans 13:2:

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<sup>1</sup> Parentheses added.

*2 So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God.*

Government as it exists in any situation is for the purpose of God in that situation. Resistance against that government is resistance against God. Do you remember David's dilemma when he had occasion to kill Saul? 1 Samuel 24:9-12:

*9 Then he (David)<sup>2</sup> shouted to Saul, "Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you?"*

*10 This very day you can see with your own eyes it isn't true. For the Lord placed you at my mercy back there in the cave, and some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, '**I will never harm him—he is the Lord's anointed one.**'*

*11 Look at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn't kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me.*

*12 The Lord will decide between us. **Perhaps the Lord will punish you for what you are trying to do to me, but I will never harm you.***

David couldn't harm Saul because God had made it clear to Him that he was to honor those in authority.

Paul gives a **third reason** for obeying those in authority and we also find this in verse 2:

*Those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.*

If you resist the government, you're going to be punished. The **fourth reason** is in verse 3:

*3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.*

That tells us that **we are to submit to the government because government serves to restrain evil.** Do you know that even the Chinese communist government restrains evil? There's no government on the earth that will punish you for not robbing a bank. Maybe I should repeat that in a little different format. There isn't a government anywhere that will send someone to your door and say, "You're under arrest for not robbing the First National Bank." Even the worst kinds of government deal rightly with most matters involving right and wrong.

Ethiopia is a government in extreme political turmoil and it's been that way for some time. There was a missionary who reported a while back about a rape in Ethiopia. He said it happened three years earlier and there hadn't been one since. Perhaps the reason for that is that the day following the rape the guy who committed it was hanging in the

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<sup>2</sup> Parentheses added.



market place. The crime rate in this country is very low and it's because the government imposes strict and immediate penalties for crime. You may think the government corrupt, but they still protect people from such things as rape, theft, and murder. In fact you're probably safer on the streets of Iran at night than you are on the streets of Chicago. So even though for the most part we wouldn't want any part of such governments, they do have some understanding of right and wrong.

Now if you're already a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, you're aware that although you live in the world, you're not of the world. Our true citizenship is in Heaven. Our allegiance is to our Lord, Jesus Christ. But at the same time we have to exist on this earth and thus have a certain citizenship responsibility here as well. We are to be a community within a community. We should function within that community even though our priorities are are to be unique to that community. We should live for eternal reasons and follow the directions of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ given to us in the Bible and activated in us by the Holy Spirit. So we should live with a whole different set of priorities and because of that we need a very clear teaching as to how we are to relate to the government in which we find ourselves.

Unfortunately Christians in the United States of America seem to have lost their sense of distinctiveness, their uniqueness, and are simply drifting along as if on a cloud. Christians in our country seem to be just as preoccupied with a materialistic lifestyle as non-Christians. This country has provided us the potential of a self-indulgent existence that is based on what we can have for ourselves and Christians have become so caught up in this that they've lost their sense of eternal values. They're exchanging these eternal values for earthly things. Christians seem to be buying the whole American dream of *moropia*, a most contagious mental process that concludes, *If some is good, more is better*. This is a condition that is created and spread by people who make a lot of money by convincing other people of how many unnecessary things they need to buy so that they can be happy. We have so-called Christians in our country who are living an over-indulgent life that is exactly opposite to what Christ teaches in the New Testament. That doesn't mean it's wrong for a Christian to be rich, but it is wrong to squander and waste what God gives you on selfish and meaningless pursuits.

Christians also seem to be getting entirely too occupied with politics. I'm concerned not about people supporting a certain position or candidate, or someone writing their senator or representative expressing their feelings on issues. Those are things we're supposed to do, as we said last week. I'm concerned about the battle lines that are forming between evangelical Christians and liberals in the *red and blue* states. I think many people have lost sight of the fact that the two colors represent Republicans and Democrats and now see them as states where either Christian values are supported or rejected. Christians walk a fine line here and we need to be careful not to cross it. When we start feeling hatred and animosity towards those that don't share our political beliefs, we lose sight of what we are to be doing as Christians. Further, as good stewards of God's money, we need to remember it is not right for God's money to be spent on securing political power.

During this past presidential election I believe a lot of fortresses were built on the

political battlefield and now the issues between the two parties aren't so much determined by what is best for the country but by how one side can show the other who has control. There's hatred in the Congress among Republicans and Democrats and Christians cannot allow themselves to be pulled into that kind of quagmire. We need to focus our energies on placing the message of the Gospel before both Republicans and Democrats because they both need it.

If congress were to ask the question, "*What would Jesus do about social security?*" And then pray about it, they might be amazed how quickly someone would come up with a workable solution.

What's going on now in our country between opposing political points of view is totally contrary to the tradition of the Church. The Church has always had a sense of stewardship that its resources be used for the glory of God, not for personal causes. The Church is not an expression of political power but spiritual power. The church can do more for the nation by praying for its leaders and its general welfare than it can by sponsoring political candidates and getting involved in political debates. Paul gives us the formula for Christian behavior within a government in 1 Timothy 2:1-10, and I really like the translation of these verses from *The Message*:

*The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Savior God wants us to live. HE WANTS NOT ONLY US BUT EVERYONE SAVED, you know, everyone to get to know the truth we've learned: that there's one God and only one, and one Priest-Mediator between God and us—Jesus, who offered himself in exchange for everyone held captive by sin, to set them all free. Eventually the news is going to get out. This and this only has been my appointed work: getting this news to those who have never heard of God, and explaining how it works by simple faith and plain truth. Since PRAYER is at the bottom of all this, WHAT I WANT MOSTLY IS FOR MEN AND WOMEN TO PRAY—not shaking angry fists at enemies but raising holy hands to God. And I want women to get in there with the men in humility before God, not primping before a mirror or chasing the latest fashions but doing something beautiful for God and becoming beautiful doing it.*

You might find it interesting to learn, as I did, that the early Christians who were persecuted by the Roman Emperor Nero, were not executed for their religious beliefs but rather because they did not fit in with the rest of society. They set themselves apart from the common ways of life. They were executed because they refused to adapt to the system. There would probably be very few Christians executed in our world today if circumstances were similar.

These early Christians were very distinct from the rest of society. They weren't unloving, they weren't unkind, but they were unique. Tertullian commented that early Christianity

was an association not devoted to political maneuvering but to communicating moral principles to its members and training people to live virtuously. So their preoccupation was living a virtuous or ethical life, a godly life, serving the Lord, and committing themselves to the work of the Kingdom of God. And according to Tertullian **they were executed for their anti-social tendencies.**

The point of all of this is to understand that the members of the early church, who served in all walks of life, some as government workers, some as soldiers, some as businessmen, or whatever, were not perceived as a group concerned with civil government, wealth, or materialism. Rather they were considered to be preoccupied with things that were considered eternal and spiritual. It is my concern that when the history is written about our generation it will say something very different about our form of Christianity. I'm concerned that history will say we were very much preoccupied with the things of this world, that we were very much preoccupied with political maneuvering, and had little concern for holiness, love, virtue, piety, prayer, or the advance of the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men and women.

Jesus was not concerned about bringing in His kingdom politically and that should be our example. But He also never hesitated to get involved with those in authority and tell them what was right and what was wrong. I'd like to leave you with these thoughts until next week and encourage you to think about what we've learned here this morning. Let it change you if change is necessary. And let us not forget for a moment that we are ambassadors in a foreign land, and we are to conduct ourselves with dignity and virtue as we represent our King.