



Relating to the State

Romans 13:1-7



Our Relationship to God (*Romans 12:1-2*)

- *Offering.* We must offer ourselves (our whole lives) to God (*12:1*).
- *Renewal by God's Grace.* We must not conform to worldly ways of thinking and acting, but rather be transformed by the renewing of our minds (*12:2*).

Our Relationship to Ourselves (*Romans 12:3-8*)

- *Know Yourself.* We should think of ourselves with sound judgment, realizing that God has made us for a purpose, and has given us particular gifts and abilities.
- *Be Faithful.* We are called to be faithful to exercise those gifts and abilities in accordance with God's purposes.

Our Relationship to Others (*Romans 12:9-21*)

- *Love One Another.* We must sincerely love our fellow believers, expressing love through devotion to one another, caring, sharing, hospitality, empathy, honor and humility.
- *Love Your Neighbor.* Our love should extend beyond the family of God, even to our enemies.

Our Relationship to the Governing Authorities (*Romans 13:1-7*)

- ❑ Read Romans 13:1-7.¹ The apostle Paul writes, "Everyone (every person) must submit himself to the governing authorities" (*13:1*).

1. Why should everyone submit to the governing authorities? What reasons does Paul give?²

2. What is the God-given function (ministry) of the governing authorities?³



¹ Similar instruction is found in 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Titus 3:1. Romans 13:1-7 most obviously applies to the relationship between the governing authority and the people within its jurisdiction. However, many scholars also refer to this passage in dealing with interstate or international relationships. In particular, in dealing with opposing, militarily aggressive nations, this passage is often used to support "just war theory." See Jay's paper entitled "Christian Perspectives on War."

² God has established (ordained, instituted, appointed) them (13:1b, 1c, 2a). Rebellion against God-instituted authority will bring judgment (13:2). The governing authorities are God's "servants" or "ministers" (13:4, 6). This does not mean that God is morally responsible for, or approves of, the bad behavior of evil rulers and governments. However, all human authority is derived from God's authority. Before Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, he asked Jesus, "Don't you realize that I have power either to free you or crucify you? Jesus answered, 'You would have no power (*exousia*, authority) over me if it were not given to you from above'" (John 19:10-11).

³ God established governing authorities to promote and reward the good, and restrain and punish the evil (13:3-4). This is the divine ideal. Of course, history has shown that many governing authorities have failed in this function, and have instead misused their authority.

3. In Romans 12, Paul says, “bless those who persecute you” (12:14), “do not repay anyone evil for evil” (12:17), and “do not take revenge ... for it is written, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (12:19). Instead, we are to “bless,” and do good to our enemies. However, Romans 13 speaks of “bearing the sword”⁴ and “bringing punishment on the wrongdoer” (13:4).⁵ How do we reconcile (fit together) these passages?

 4. What should motivate us to submit to the governing authorities? (13:5)⁶

 5. How does Paul specifically apply the principle he is teaching? (13:6-7) What are some other applications in our daily lives?
-
6. Do you think Paul means that Christians are to obey the governing authorities under *all* circumstances? If not, under what circumstances would the requirement for obedience be excluded? Explain.⁷

*Consider Exodus 1:15-17, Daniel 3:4-18, 6:7-13, particularly Acts 4:18-20, 5:28-29.
 “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29)*

Reflection/Application

- Do you obey the rules and laws of the governing authorities? Many of us can say that we obey the “major” laws. But what about things like plagiarism, copyright infringement, software theft, traffic violations (like speeding), etc.? A Christian must “submit himself (or herself) to the governing authorities.” In what areas do you need to submit?
- If you do obey the laws of the governing authorities, do you think that is “good enough?” Who or what is the ultimate authority in your life? The Bible says that God is the ultimate authority in the universe, and His “law” is the required standard. Through faith in Jesus Christ, make a commitment to submit yourself daily to the Ultimate Authority (God).

⁴ “the sword” (*machaira*) – refers to the right of the governing authority to enforce its laws and punish those who violate them. Some scholars say it refers to the death penalty, while others say the reference is broader.

⁵ The authority is an *ekdikos eis orgēn*, “agent of wrath” (NIV); more literally, “avenger who brings wrath” (NASB).

⁶ “not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience” (12:5, NIV). “Conscience” refers to moral responsibility and the recognition of the authority’s God-given role. Our primary motivation should not be fear of punishment, but rather a desire to do what is right according to God, as an expression of our love for Him.

⁷ Our accountability to God supersedes our accountability to human law and authorities. Thus if human authorities command the Christian to disobey the revealed will of God, the Christian must disobey the human command. (Robertson McQuilken, *Biblical Ethics* [Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1989], 484. It should be noted that this subject can become very complex as we consider applying the general principles to particular situations. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to address this subject thoroughly. If you are interested in further study, ask Jay.