

Christians and Citizens

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to Romans chapter 13. We're going to look at the first seven verses of the chapter. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God, and so on.

And by authorities here, of course, he means governments, ruling governments, governments that rule over us as human societies in our own nation and other nations too.

And it seems appropriate that after a general election has taken place and a new government has been set over us as a nation, that we will give attention tonight for a short time to the biblical teaching on government that these words in this passage set out for us.

Of course, it's the case that after every general election, some people are jubilant and some people are disappointed, depending on which political philosophy or party or manifesto we've come to support and we have freedom to support that which we ourselves think is appropriate.

But nevertheless, we all are aware, of course, that in the election of governments, it's not always the party that we personally might represent or that we might support that comes to be elected.

[1 : 32] That is always going to be the case. It's just the way that in the sovereignty of God, these things work out. But what is the biblical view of government?

What does the Bible teach about government? What is this passage saying to us about governing authorities? That is to say, whatever authority of government is set over us.

And of course, this includes not just national authorities and a national government. It includes government and authorities, wherever they're placed locally as well, that have responsibilities to govern, to administer, to be over people and their welfare.

What is this chapter saying to us? What should our view of government be? How should we regard government itself, authority, as vested in a government, elected or chosen by a people or set over a people wherever they may be?

Well, this passage here gives us certain principles from which we can extract some practical teaching as well. And it's important for us as Christians and as a Christian church and congregation that we know about these things, that we understand what the Bible has to say about government, what the Bible has to say about authority, what our Christian responsibilities are under governments that are chosen or elected to rule over us, what the responsibilities of governments themselves are as they are elected by us to rule over us.

[3 : 08] And all of these things come by way of setting out these principles come together in this passage here. And three things we want to look at briefly. First of all, that God's God's appointment of governing authorities and the fact that it is indeed God who has appointed government over any society of people.

And then we'll look at God's purpose in appointing government authorities, as you find that also in this passage. And thirdly, our Christian responsibilities under governing authorities or under a government appointed and ordained by God.

One of the main points is the first one, that God has indeed ordained or appointed, whatever word we use, that God has in fact ordained or appointed governing authorities.

In other words, it is a specific appointment or ordinance of God. It's not something that human society has created over the course of centuries.

It's not something that has actually come into being as a principle that government is necessary over any people, that people need to be governed, that there needs to be a layer of authority at the top of any human society by which that human society is governed and ruled and makes up certain rules and regulations for that human society.

[4 : 38] The fact is that God has appointed, that's an important word, God has appointed that human society, our own society, any other society, that human society be governed.

And the fact of government and the matter of government is something that God himself has ordained, something that he has decreed, something that he has said, this is my will, that human beings actually be governed by a ruling authority and that that ruling authority itself rule over a people and ideally that they govern in terms of God's own ideals, God's own principles, God's own rules, God's own laws.

Now that doesn't of course mean that God has given us in his word that any particular political philosophy is the one that must be chosen by everybody.

That's why we have such things as a general election and that in a general election you have the liberty to actually elect or cast your vote in favor of whichever party or whichever candidate you feel is most appropriate and most in keeping with your own views.

God has not ordained which particular party will rule, God has not specified what type of government actually needs to govern over a people.

[6 : 12] God leaves things like that to our own human devices. He has given us the liberty to actually come up in different parts of the world with different types of government.

What we're being told here is it's not a matter of whether it's a president or a king or a government made up by a cabinet, not a matter of any of those things and which of these is or isn't acceptable. It's not a matter of God having chosen one or other of those but not the rest. What he has established, what he has ordained, is that government will actually take place and that people will be governed by a ruling authority.

They choose what type of authority it is. And that means that although God has appointed that human society be governed and not to do with the party, it's to do with the principle of the thing, that does not mean that God always approves of the type of government or the way that a government operates.

That's why Christians have the responsibility to speak to government, to raise up their voice against government sometimes when government actually, whatever government it is, brings in or wants to bring in things which Christians know is objectionable to God.

[7 : 39] God does not always approve of government's methods, of government's decisions, of government policies, of government manifestos. God does not always approve of the very things that governments sometimes insist will be enacted.

But the principle of government, the principle of being governed, the principle of having a ruling authority is ordained by God.

That means that there is a divine mandate behind the principle of government. And that's something that's very important for us to always bear in mind because the moment you lose sight of the fact that there is a divine mandate behind the principle of government.

Always remember, we're not talking about which political party is governing, we're not talking about the type of government, but the principle of government and having a ruling authority. There is a divine mandate for that.

The moment you lose sight of that, you're in trouble as a society. It means then that human devices, human philosophy, human will comes to rule instead of having God himself as the one who has appointed government for us.

[8 : 56] That's the first thing, that there is a specific appointment. That's what it says. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority, no government except from God.

Those that exist have been instituted by God. That doesn't, of course, mean that God, like we said, approves of every type of government. You can't actually take from this that God is fully in approval of cruel dictators, of persecuting authorities, or anything like that.

But the principle of government is something which has been instituted and ordained by God. And what sort of conclusions, then, do you draw from that?

Well, the passage gives us some of the important conclusions or the logical conclusion, first of all, is that those who rebel against that authority, in verse 2, therefore, you see, that's the conclusion, because God has instituted government and that we be governed by an authority, therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.

Rebellion against a God-appointed authority is, in fact, rebellion against God because the authority is ordained of God, because government as such is ordained of God to resist government, to seek to overthrow government.

[10:19] Come back to these points in a minute, but in principle, what Paul is saying is that whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed. Now, remember, in Paul's day, there was no Christian authority.

There was no Christian government. The government was pagan. The government was Roman authority under the authority of the Roman Empire, under Caesar, and all the layers of governments right down to the local areas in the regions where Paul himself and those who had come to know the gospel and to be established as God's church in the world, the authority was pagan.

The authority was not Christian. And yet Paul is saying whoever resists, the authority resists what God has appointed, because that's an institution of God.

And it was important for Christians in Paul's day to show not only the ruling authority, but to show everyone that becoming a Christian did not make you an insurgent.

That's one of the accusations that were frequently leveled against Christians. And indeed, it was leveled against the Lord himself. That he was nothing better than an insurgent.

[11:36] Somebody who wanted to overthrow lawful authority. And Christians sometimes had to actually insist that they were not insurgents. And sometimes Christians were put to death by Roman authorities, by cruel emperors, by commandments and rules, by the commands and instructions from the top of pagan authorities that they be put to death, just as you find today, just because they're Christians.

Just because they were regarded as a threat to authority. That they were regarded as insurgents and dangerous to the maintenance of good order. And Paul and his companions had to insist again and again, we're not here to resist lawful authority.

We haven't become Christians. We haven't joined the church. We're not as God has given us to be a church. We are not there to overthrow lawful authority.

We're not a danger to lawful authority. We are ourselves citizens of that authority. And that's what's important as well for us today to remember.

The Bible actually teaches us here and elsewhere in such a passage as this, you have to actually make a distinction between what you are as a Christian in the church and what you are as a citizen in the nation.

[13:04] And being a Christian in the church does not mean you're not a citizen or less than a citizen in the nation. And being a Christian in the church and being faced with, even if you were being faced with a totally pagan ruling government it does not give you the authority to seek to overthrow in a way that rebels and through an insurgency that particular authority.

Now there are exemptions of course to that. We're not exempt from government authority just because we're Christians and ruled by the word of God.

But there are exemptions. And one exemption especially is that when Christians are instructed and commanded to do what they know is sin or to be prevented from doing something which they are obliged to do for God then you have to resist lawful authority and you have to do it as far as possible peaceably.

after all Paul and his companions especially the previous apostles Peter and his companions in chapter 4 of Acts you remember that there they were accused of turning the society that they were part of turning it upside down of fomenting all of this the way in which they were turning things so that people were rising up against authority and fomenting all kinds of as they were accused of fomenting this kind of insurgency almost well you remember that they were instructed there at one time that they must not actually preach in this name again the name of Jesus and you remember how Peter responded to that command where they said Peter and John in fact answered them whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God you must judge now that's important he said to the authorities and they let us warn these people the authorities said not to speak anymore to anyone in this name of Jesus you mustn't do that they were saying we're going to ban this and this is Peter and John's response whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God you must judge in other words he's throwing the owners back on the authorities to come to a right conclusion about this but he says we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard they were being commanded to sin because not to speak in the name of Jesus not to preach Christ not to declare the gospel as God had commanded would be itself a sin a sin of

omission and that's what the authorities had commanded and Peter and John said no we will respect lawful authority but if they ask us to sin we have to resist and so it is for yourself as well whatever the authority would say insists on that you do or not do that God tells you is sin you have to say to the authority

I can't do that I can't comply with that I must resist it I must actually insist on being true to my God before I be true to any other authority so that's one of the exemptions that you have from what Paul says here to be in principle that we need to be sure as citizens of any society that we do not resist the authority because we're resisting then what God has appointed and therefore we are resisting God himself now from that also there is this it is also very much a right for any Christian to be involved in government to be involved in government whether it's at a national or at a local level because Christians are citizens and because they have the rights of citizens therefore they have the right to be involved in authority and in government they're not disqualified from that just because they're Christians but in our day that's something that's coming to be brought up with the all the influence that secularism can muster and they do have although a very small group overall a huge amount of persuasive influence even with government and those in authority and what they will say is as they've said even locally in our own local council two or three years ago where one councillor said to me that those who are of a secular mindset had actually brought out this view and insisted on this and wanted to insist on this those people who are elders in the free church because the free church stands for certain things because the free church does not allow certain things that society at large allows because the free church has declared that for example marriage is between one man and one woman and they are against same sex marriage because they insist the bible is against it these people the secular say should not be in government and you have to insist why not what gives a secularist the right to say my secularist philosophy which actually wants to get rid of God from public life is alright and therefore

[19:07] I have the right to be involved in public government but a Christian doesn't and an elder in the free church doesn't that's gross discrimination but that's what you're facing that's what you have to resist on the part of the powers and the forces that are at work in our society that want to actually sideline Christians that want to try and insist that if you're a Christian and especially if you're a certain type of Christian you must be excluded from positions of government locally or nationally we have to insist the Christian is a citizen with every right as a citizen to be involved at every level of government whatever views other people have of it and it is a Christian duty to be involved we mustn't think that politics is just all to do with worldliness and that as Christians we separate ourselves from that and simply don't get involved except when we vote that would be to leave and to evacuate every political movement in the country from a very important influence and voice we mustn't imagine that we can divide things neatly into compartments and say some are secular and some are sacred and some are worldly and some have to do with the spiritual realm it's in the interest of every

Christian to actually take part as far as you can in government in supporting government in being the government in putting yourself forward if necessary for government for places in government locally or nationally because every authority is appointed by God and being a Christian or a Christian elder or a deacon or whatever it still means that you have every right as a citizen to be involved in the government of our nation and that means that in our day we have to look at these logical conclusions that Paul is coming to from what he says here in principle and that we have to be clued up about this and insist that this Bible and this God of the Bible gives us the rights of citizens as Christians who belong to his church so God's appointment of governing authorities it's an important thing to realize that in principle that's who it is and that these things follow logically from that that in fact we are not insurgents but we are citizens we have a right to be involved in government we have a right to insist on the Christian voice and the Christian viewpoint don't let anybody persuade you that when you become a councillor you leave your Christian faith at the door of the council chamber when you become a Christian MP that you leave your Christian faith at the door of the house of commons or the parliament in Edinburgh or whatever it is you cannot just detach your Christian thinking and the principles of scripture from what you must be in public office that's where we insist that a person's personal behaviour is attached to their public office and that there is in fact a very important connection between what I am in private and what I must be in my public office if I have been given one or God's appointment of governing authorities secondly God's purpose in appointing government authorities now it's

interesting that Paul uses the word servant when he speaks here about government see what he's saying here he is in verse 4 by that he means the government he's giving it the masculine as if it is an individual for he is God's servant for your good if only governments would actually live by that conviction that they are indeed servants they are not masters they are not to be lords over people even though they govern government is not dictating to people how they must live their lives government is to govern for people's good he is God's servant servant for your good and ask God's servant the same word is used for minister it's the same word in the bible it's a word servant it's a deacon it's a minister it's what he's talking here about the government that he is God's minister he is God's servant and it's a beautiful thing when you see people who insist that they are servants of those that have elected them to office whether it's in the spiritual sphere in the church or in the civil sphere in government out with the church and in the nation one thing that every government and every individual in office in these categories should remember is I'm not a lord I'm not in charge of people's consciences there is one who is a lord and he was lord of the conscience and I am his servant and I am a servant to the people that should be the conviction of every minister in the church and of every government in the nation in every nation sadly of course it's not he is God's servant for your good and there are two things in God's purpose in appointing government authorities that he mentions here in the passage he is God's servant firstly to deter bad conduct and secondly and indeed to punish bad conduct as well but secondly to reward good conduct correspondingly the government here has to do both he is God's servant for your good but if you do wrong be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain for he is the servant of God an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer that's very strong language and in fact some people in interpreting passage will insist that the use of the imagery there of the sword carries with it an emphasis on capital punishment the right to take life in appropriate circumstances whether or not we actually agree with that interpretation some very good expositors insist that that's still the case whatever is the case whether it's capital punishment or less than that it's certainly punishment and it's the punishment of wrongdoing it's the punishment of the offender of course that carries with it a whole lot of different other things in terms of degrees of punishment and what punishment itself is and what the purpose of punishment is as well but the principle again is what we're looking at that God appointed government as God has appointed government so that government is invested with authority both to deter and to punish wrongdoing so it's not wrong for people to be imprisoned if their offense deserves it it's not wrong for them to be incarcerated to be fined to have various penalties imposed upon them because God is insisting that is what government authority is actually about that's why

[27 : 21] I have ordained authority that's why I have given authority certain rights to do this that's why he's saying here he is God's servant so if you do wrong be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain he is the avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer and that brings up another important point and that is that the more you reject the Bible the less likely you are to believe in this principle the more you reject the teaching of scripture and the authority of scripture itself as that which must form the thinking not just of individuals but also of government policies ideally the more you find a society rejecting the Bible throwing the Bible aside insisting that the human mind itself and human philosophies and especially a non-religious or secular philosophy must be what you have in today's world the more likely you are to end up with not just a rejection of the divine authority of government but increasingly bad conduct indeed increasingly violent conduct and insisting that a person has a right to rule their own life as they see fit you see society degenerates society breaks down when you actually do away with

God's order God is a God of order and that's reflected in how he will have human society to be governed and when you reject God's authority and God's word and that is the basis of our thoughts and of our way of governing people's lives then you're rejecting really what is for our good you see that's what he's saying he is God's servant for your good and it's not for human good that we throw away the Bible and insist on a secular philosophy instead that inevitably leads to all kinds of moral spiritual physical problems and you will not end them by insisting that you remove every aspect of religion whatever religion it may be from public life what you have to do is put Christianity back in put back in the principles that God gives us for government and for being governed because let's face it it's not just that God is actually giving us here the principles by which people are to govern over those that they govern over it's also giving us the principles by which we are in subjection to that government that's the point we'll see in a minute he is here telling us that this is how your

attitude must be under governance as well as the attitude for governments as they govern now as we said these things might seem to us tonight because we're not usually perhaps we're not often enough looking at these kind of topics from the scriptures and it may seem somewhat dry and somewhat non-spiritual it's not like studying the person of

Christ is it but remember who is it who rules over governments whose word is this whose authority is this who has ordained this it's the same Christ isn't it he's not just the head of the church he's the head over all things to the church he rules over every human society he rules over civil government just as he rules over the government of the church this is spiritual this is important this is what God will have us to understand about our own place in civil authority or under civil authority as well as what we are in the church so he's there to deter bad conduct and to actually punish bad conduct when necessary as well that doesn't mean that God always approves of the way that that's done it's again the principle of the thing but he's there also to reward good conduct and we're just noticing this very briefly he's saying here that for he's the servant of

God to execute God's wrath on the wrongdoer therefore he says one must be in subjection not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience and earlier he said rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad then do what is good and you will receive his approval the end of verse 3 so you see that's just as important as deterring wrongdoing and punishing wrongdoing governments ought to be themselves rewarders of those who do good now it doesn't specify how that is but it is a principle and it's an important one and perhaps it's not anything like as much done by governments as the other side of the issue is but it's still there government is responsible to reward good conduct in ways that are appropriate that's the purpose of

God in appointing government authorities in appointing in principle a government over human beings to deter wrongdoing to reward good conduct thirdly finally Christian responsibilities under governing authorities we mentioned some of that in passing I'm sure earlier in our study this evening but there are two things in the passage in terms of Christian responsibilities again in principle first of all is that we are to be subject to the ruling authorities let every person you see it's bringing it to the individual level let every person be subject to the governing authorities whoever resists the authority resists what God has appointed therefore be in subjection in verse five one must be in subjection to the governing authorities subjection compliance with agreeing to be ruled by a governing authority and be subject to the higher powers as it's put in the

[34 : 02] AV for ruling authorities that's the first thing it mentions we are to be subject to that and you can compare with this passage on this point particularly what Peter says in first Peter and chapter two verses 13 through to 17 be subject he says for the Lord's sake to every human institution whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good for this is the will of God that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people live as people who are free not using your freedom as a cover up for evil but living as servants of God honor everyone love the brotherhood fear God honor the emperor in other words Peter is saying just like Paul is saying just because the Christian authority is a pagan one doesn't mean you can throw off that authority and not be subject to it doing good according to

Peter just like Paul here involves being subject to the higher powers to the ruling authority it doesn't depend on whether or not we like or dislike those who rule over us whatever party we ourselves support however we voted at the general election the outcome is as God himself from all eternity appointed it to be the government of the time is the government people have freely elected in our nation we may not like these people who govern us we may not like their philosophy we may not like that particular party or parties but our responsibility is to be subject to them other than where we required or asked to sin against God and it doesn't mean because we have to be subject to the authorities it doesn't mean that people can never rise up at any time in any circumstances against those who rule over them we have seen it in our own nation people rising up against tyrannical authority under the

Stuart Kings for example other parts of the world people have risen up against tyrannical authority under communism for example when you think back a number of decades to the fall of communism people's lives absolutely blighted by such an oppressive government that's what we're saying although God has appointed a government in principle he doesn't approve necessarily of the type of government and when a government comes to sorely oppress a people God is not going to say to such people but you must never rise up against that authority that does evil against you sometimes

there is no option our Lord should be done with as little violence as possible or indeed with no violence at all if possible sadly sometimes in a fallen human world that's not possible either so there's another exemption there it's not always the case that you have to be subject in every sense to a ruling authority although by and large in principle that's what it's saying and then interestingly the second thing that is a

Christian responsibility under governing authorities is to pay your taxes Paul's not embarrassed about that he doesn't think well this is such a non spiritual this is such a worldly thing I dare not even mention it it's there because it's important to him and being subject to the ruling authorities involves paying our taxes we may disagree with the level at which we're taxed those of you who have to do your tax returns if you've got a tax return like ministers have every year it's a time of year that I just detest personally I don't like making up tax returns not because I don't like paying my taxes or because I don't want to pay my taxes it's just a hassle but it's a hassle that's necessary because paying taxes is important in the teaching of the Bible you cannot actually have a society of human beings without finance raised to actually make provisions of different kinds for us and Paul is insisting on government having the right to raise taxes and even if we think the taxes are excessive or in the wrong way applied nevertheless we have a duty and especially as Christians we have a duty to pay our taxes

I just looked up I googled what else we're paying the same one just to try and find out if there's a figure that could be put upon tax evasion and the amount of money that's lost to our nation through tax evasion I couldn't find a figure for this particular last year but a couple of years ago tax evasion was calculated to cost the country 15 billion pounds a year that's taxes that should be paid that were not paid that's people that had to be chased up usually people on very expensive accounts or having a very important position in a company or whatever else it is and of course as you know yourself there are so many ways that have come to be invented by which to avoid paying tax big corporations avoiding the paying of tax through loopholes that may not strictly be illegal in terms of the laws that exist but are certainly immoral because the avoidance of tax and payment of tax is depriving certain people of benefits which taxes pay for and that's why it's a

[40 : 20] Christian duty to pay our taxes when raised by government so many things that we need in human society and in order to do good to people and in order to have people's welfare looked after properly they're depending on taxes and the payment of taxes whenever we renege on paying a tax legitimately claimed by government whenever we renege on that we're denying somebody somewhere what that money could have provided for them we mustn't say well I don't agree with the way government is spending my money we're never going to agree on the way that government spends all our money but we have to come back to the biblical principles God has ordained government God has given to the government that he has ordained the authority to rule the authority to punish the wrongdoer and reward the good conduct he has given us the principle of subjection to government as something required of us even if we disagree with the type of government it is and along with that he's given government the right to raise taxes and he's given us the responsibility to pay taxes and if we come back to the point as to whether or not this is really spiritual and strictly speaking something that isn't we still insist that it is because it's in the teaching of the Bible but one thing that proves more than anything else that it is is that when you look at the main example you find in the Bible of paying your taxes you look no further than Jesus

Christ in Matthew 17 you find him saying to Peter when he told him to cast out and to catch the first fish and caught his hook to take it on to land and you find a coin he says in his mouth take that and pay the tax for me and for you and you remember elsewhere the famous saying in Matthew 22 21 where he was being tested again by the religious authorities of the time is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not give me a coin he said whose head do you see on it he said Caesar then he said render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar and to God the things that are God's and making that distinction and insisting on both sides of the issue is important to every

Christian let's pray Lord our God we give thanks this evening for the way in which in your own concern for human beings to be governed in a way that is orderly and acceptable to you that you have ordained government in the hands of human beings that you have given us principles and rules by which we should be directed in being a government or in being governed we bless you for the authority of your own word with regard to all of these issues that affect our lives from day to day we do pray again for our government we pray for them in their high office we pray for our queen and for her position as well we pray lord that you would grant to our government both nationally and

locally that you would grant to them the wisdom by which to carry out their duties and responsibilities well and by which to consider themselves servants of the people and more especially even servants of the lord himself we pray these things seeking your blessing for jesus sake amen