

THE GOVERNMENT AND YOU, PT. 2
ROMANS 13:1-7

For those of you who have been to **my office**, you might have noticed a bank of file cabinets outside my office. Those are my resource files — Bible books and topics. And I also have a large digital file on my computer. One of the files that seems to be growing the fastest recently is my “Politics and Faith” file. On Friday afternoon I found 134 articles in that digital file alone (I have no idea how many are in the cabinets).



It actually was just a little discouraging to go back and read through some of the article titles:

- ✓ “Father Gagged, Found Guilty of ‘Family Violence’ For Calling His Trans Daughter A ‘She’”
- ✓ “Canadian Court Rules Parents Can’t Stop 14-Year-Old from Taking Trans Hormones”
- ✓ “A Pastoral Perspective on Illegal Immigration”
- ✓ “Can the Government Do That?” — my own post from a few years ago about the Houston Mayor who subpoenaed the sermons on homosexuality by several Houston pastors
- ✓ “A Letter to the Premiers of the Provinces and Territories of Canada” — a petition against COVID restrictions for churches in Canada — which led to...
- ✓ “Master’s Seminary Pastor Jailed” — the story of Edmonton pastor James Coates
- ✓ And from this week, “Christ Followers Beware: H.R. 5, the Equality Act and Religious Freedom”

And I haven’t mentioned anything about abortion issues, homosexual marriage, doctor-assisted suicide, eugenics and bioethical issues in the courts, court cases against florists and bakers by homosexuals who alleged discrimination, or a host of other topics about the intersection of government, people, and Christ.

Does the Bible speak to what we should think about government? It does. It is explicit about what we should expect from our leaders. Romans 13:1-7 provides several key principles for governments —

EVERY GOVERNMENT IS ESTABLISHED BY GOD TO CARRY OUT HIS PURPOSES.

In these verses, Paul affirms **four realities** about the position and role of government and leaders:

1. **ALL** Government is God’s Government (vv. 1, 4)
2. What Governments are to **DO** (vv. 3-6)
3. What Governmental Leaders are to **BE**
 - ✓ Leaders should not be **EVIL** (v. 3a)
 - ✓ Leaders should be **GOOD** (v. 3b)
 - ✓ Leaders should be **SERVANTS** (v. 4)
4. What the Government **CANNOT** Do

Today’s question is: *What is the government’s role and what does God expect of government and its leaders?*

1. All Government is God's Government (vv. 1, 4)

• God has established EVERY government (v. 1)

- ✓ In verse 1, Paul speaks with remarkable clarity and precision: **every person...the governing authorities...no authority...those which exist**. None of those statements allow for any exception.
- ✓ We've emphasized two statements in this verse:
 - **There is no authority except from God** = God is sovereign over both governments and governors (entities and individuals). There is no one who is in authority and there is no government in authority except that God has given it that authority. God is over the government in general (Democratic President, House, and Senate this year), and He is sovereign over every particular person that serves in any role in government (President, US Senator, governors, state rep's and senators, county commissioners, local party officials, sheriff's deputies, constables, and policemen, Supreme Court justices, Federal judges, county judges, justices of the peace, and county tax assessors, just to name a few. He appoints them all.
 - That's the lesson of stories like Joseph, Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:34-35), and Esther (4:14).
 - Paul also says, **those which exist are established by God**. If there is a government that exists or an official that has a position, he was established (appointed) by God. Every government and every official of every government has always been in that place only because of God's direction. And they continue to have their position in time and place only through His sustaining hand.
 - Whatever my political ideology and my personal preference, I can be at peace every night that those in authority over me are not their accidentally. They are appointed by God for our good.

• God is sovereign over every DECISION and ACT of every government

- ✓ While it isn't stated explicitly in this passage, it is implied that if God controls who is in government, then He also controls every decision that comes from government (Prov. 16:33; 21:1; Ezra 6:22).
- ✓ God — alone — determines the successes and failures of all human plans (Prov. 19:21; Ps. 33:10).
- ✓ One of the best examples of this is the story of Absalom when he tried to usurp David's throne: he had two advisors — Ahithophel and Hushai (who was favorable towards David); rather than take the good counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 16:23), he took the advice of Hushai, to his own detriment. Why? 2 Sam. 17:14 — God was frustrating Absalom's purposes. (Cf. Rehoboam, 1 Kings 12:15).
- ✓ We saw this also in Romans 9:16-17 with Pharaoh, who acted according to his own hard heart, yet he did what he did because God hardened Pharaoh to accomplish His own purposes.
- ✓ Sometimes (increasingly so?), governmental officials make ungodly decisions and do ungodly deeds — yet God is sovereign over those as well, sometimes to bring judgment on a nation — even at times leading to the suffering of God's people (Babylonians taking Judah captive, Hab. 1:5-7).

- ✓ Abraham Kuyper said, “There is no molecule in the universe over which God cannot say, ‘Mine!’” There are no renegade molecules subverting God’s will and there are no renegade governments and government officials overthrowing God’s control. God is doing *exactly* what He wants to do in every place, person, decision, and government. It’s all in His authoritative control.

- Every government is **GOD’S servant (v. 4)**

- ✓ Two times in v. 4 and once in v. 6, Paul says that governments and rulers are **ministers** and **servants** of God (the two terms are essentially synonymous).
- ✓ Let’s make a couple of observations about what Paul says in verse four:
 - The first word in the Gk. sentence is **of God** — it’s Paul’s way of emphasizing that government belongs to God and no one else; the government and leader is put in that place not to do his own bidding but to do the bidding and task of the Lord.
 - Every government and every government official is for the purpose of **servicing** its people — and that is even explicitly acknowledged by many police departments (“to serve and protect”).
 - Former Michigan Governor Rick Snyder was right when he said a few years ago, “The role of government is customer service. The role of government is to serve our citizens as customers — to make a difference in their lives in a positive way....The point is to ask what are we going to do for our citizens — our customers — to make a difference in their lives? And then once you agree on something that’s needed, what resources are needed to achieve that outcome? We need to get back to that. That’s one of the fundamental principles.” He was largely correct.
- ✓ Whether they realize it or not and whether they acknowledge it or not, every ruler has a responsibility to serve the citizens in its jurisdiction. Service is the task of every official in every position — and they are accountable to God for their actions. That accountability is also a comfort to us because we recognize that the Lord will account for every ungodly decision they make.
- ✓ Since every government exists as a servant for God, also means that when they do evil and unrighteousness they are accomplishing God’s purposes. That doesn’t mean their unrighteousness is “good,” but it does mean that whatever they do is within the plan and purpose of God — sometimes for blessing, and sometimes for judgment (Rom. 1:24ff). We need to remember that God does not always design a government to make life easy for the citizens; sometimes God designs government to make things hard for people — and that harshness is good for us when it reveals our hearts. God warned Israel thru Samuel’s ministry that their kings would not always be the blessing to them that they desired (**1 Sam. 8:7, 11ff**). That is true of every nation.
- ✓ Let us also be aware that we don’t always have all the information to rightly evaluate: “what do you think about James Coates’ situation?” “I don’t know...I do know I don’t know his setting, the regulations governing him, his immediate context/pressures. My context is different in the US than Canada and in Texas than Alberta and California and Washington D.C.” Be slow to criticize...

2. What Governments are to Do (vv. 3-6)

• Government RESTRAINS evil (v. 3a)

- ✓ One of the primary roles of the government is to restrain evil, as Paul notes in v. 3 — **rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil**. That is, governments are designed by God not to restrain good works, but evil works. Under government as God has designed it, no man should ever be fearful of doing something that is good and righteous. If one is gracious, kind, submissive, and honorable, he should never have to fear that the government will do something against him.
- ✓ But if he is evil, that is different. When Paul says, **but for evil**, he means that rulers *are* a cause for fear when people do things that are evil.
 - When people do things that are immoral and socially reprehensible, they *should be* terrified of the actions of the government against them. Governments laws and punishments *are* designed to be a deterrent to immoral behavior; people should fear when they act immorally.
 - If government is immoral, then every man will do what is right in his own eyes, and the culture will be destroyed (e.g., Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). “If there is no governmental authority to stop evil people, evil simply increases.” [Grudem, 78.] Cf. Eccl. 8:11.
 - Even when governments are imperfect — even grossly imperfect — there is virtually always some base standard of morality that is protected by the government that benefits the people — and that’s the way God designed it. Even an ungodly government will usually have some measure of restraint — they won’t do *everything* evil; our comfort is that God will be unrelenting in judging every form of evil (e.g., Obadiah 5-7).
- ✓ So the government is given to the people to restrain evil. But the government also...

• Government PROMOTES GOOD (v. 3b)

- ✓ Paul takes the same principle from the beginning of v. 3 and then states it in a positive: **Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise...**
- ✓ This gives us a further requirement of the government. It is designed to promote and reward things that are right and good.
- ✓ The praise offered by the government is an affirmation, admiration, approval, and recognition of the kinds of things that are consistent with moral goodness and godliness.
- ✓ Government should not be opposed to righteous actions, but it should affirm those things that are consistent with truth and righteousness as revealed in Scripture.
- ✓ God designed government to affirm the moral choices and actions of the people. Government should promote good and righteous actions (1 Pt. 2:13-14):
 - Government should promote the protection of marriage (man + woman) and the family.
 - Government should promote the appropriate distinctions between male & female (Gen. 1:27).

- Government should promote equality of care for all people (we are all made in the image of God and neither male nor female is superior, nor any ethnicity, **Gen. 1:27**; Gal. 3:28)
 - Government should protect the weak and defenseless (**Ps. 82:3-4**)
 - Judges should act to protect the interests of those who have been sinned against (Ezra 7:25-26; **Mt. 5:25**; **1 Cor. 6:4**). (Note also that the secular government has no jurisdiction in the church.)
 - Government should enact laws that make it easy for churches to care for people spiritually — that’s our God-given responsibility, and government opposes God when it inhibits ministry.
- ✓ However, what we see too often with government is a perversion of what is truth (Gender Equality Act that was passed by the House on Thursday, 2/25/21 — which is not “equality”). Too often we see an overstepping of responsibilities (arresting and jailing James Coates in Edmonton for preaching to a gathered church of more than 15%) — the government has no right (biblically or legally) to dictate how, when, or where churches gather for worship.
- ✓ In Texas, at the moment, our governor has made it easy for churches to regather under COVID and a variety of other laws are easy to live under; and that’s the way God designed it. But because of the depravity of man, we should not assume it will always be that way.

• **Government is GOD’S temporal avenger of evil (v. 4)**

- ✓ If one does evil, the government is God’s **avenger**. It is one that punishes. And Paul is graphic here — **it bears the sword**. What was the sword used to do? To kill. God gives government the *responsibility* of protecting people to the point of using deadly force against evil.
- ✓ The point is that there is to be *just retribution* against gross evil and violence. Lethal force is proscribed by Scripture for use by the government. Scripture (God) affirms and teaches that there are acts that are so heinous that the perpetrator forfeits his right to continue in society and (at times) to continue to live. The government’s role is to enforce those laws of retribution.
- ✓ This function goes back to creation (**Gen. 9:6**). Punishment is a universal principle (before the institution of the Mosaic Law or the creation of the nation of Israel). If there is no punishment of evil, there is no fear, and if there is no fear, then evil flourishes. It is to the benefit of the people when the government avenges evil. And when it refuses or is restricted from avenging evil, then chaos will ultimately win the day.
 - Punishment should include capital punishment for appropriate crimes (Gen. 9; Rom. 13)
 - Punishment should include appropriate action against criminal offense (1 Cor. 6:4). The judge has a responsibility to judge according to a Law external to himself (**Dt. 16:19-20**; **Prov. 17:26**).

- Government TAXES for the benefit of the people (v. 6)

- ✓ Here is a truth that most of us don't like, but it is clearly in the text — ***you pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God...*** Taxes aren't a manmade system — they are a *God-ordained* system so that officials have the resources they need to carry out their responsibilities of restraining evil and promoting good.
- ✓ They have ***devoted themselves to this very thing*** — it's their responsibility to collect.
- ✓ So government is supposed to restrain evil, promote good, avenge evil, and tax for our good. Our frustration is that it often seems to restrain good, promote evil, avenge or suppress righteousness, and tax foolishly for their own ends. We feel provoked by the government's actions. They make it hard to follow (just like some husbands make it hard for wives to follow). They need to repent, because they will be held accountable

3. What Governmental Leaders are to BE

- I know you have an opinion about what governmental leaders are like and what they should be like. But God also has a standard for them. What does God say about our governing authorities?

- Leaders should not be EVIL (v. 3a)

- ✓ When Paul says rulers ***are not to be feared*** he is clearly implying that they will be fair and just. The character of the ruler is to be against evil; and he can only genuinely be against evil if he is good.
- ✓ If the rulers of nations are given to make laws against evil and support and enforce those laws, then it also follows that they themselves should follow and obey those laws. They are not above the law, but they are to submit and conform to the law as any other citizen does. Wayne Grudem is right when he summarizes, "In a nation with good government, the law rules over the rulers, not the rulers over the law." [*Politics...*, 103-4.]
- ✓ OT kings were regularly rebuked by the prophets for being evil (1 Sam. 13:13-14; 1 Kings 18:18). Kings are not above the law (Mt. 14:3-5) — not even "good kings," like David (2 Sam. 12:7).
- ✓ Unfortunately, too many of our leaders and potential leaders fall under the critique of Romans 1:32 — "they not only do the same (evil), but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." Instead of being law-supporters, and law-keepers, they are law-breakers and they celebrate the breaking of law. Those are illegitimate leaders no matter their name and no matter their party. (But be cautious about how you think and talk about those leaders — more on that next week...)

- Leaders Should be GOOD (v. 3b)

- ✓ If governments and leaders are called to promote things that are morally good, then it is appropriate to ask, "Is the character of his/her life good?" Do they not only affirm the truth and what is moral, but do they actually *do* the things that are good? Cf. Samuel (1 Sam. 12:3-4).

- ✓ This verse is not suggesting that these leaders have to be believers in Christ, but it does say that they must affirm and practice a basic and common morality that God has put in all men (Rom. 2:14-15).
- ✓ The writer of Proverbs has several things to say about this:
 - Prov. 8:15: Kings (should) reign by wisdom and make laws that are just.
 - Prov. 16:10: Kings should not speak unjustly.
 - Prov. 16:12: Kings should be righteous and detest wrongdoing.
 - Prov. 20:26: Kings are supposed to filter the evil out of the kingdom.
 - Prov. 21:1: A king is God's instrument.
 - Prov. 29:4: A king's justice brings stability to a country.
- ✓ Am I placing too much emphasis on things that seem secondary? No, because as Jesus said, the words of a man reveal his heart (Lk. 6:45). A man who lacks loving and gracious words lacks a loving and gracious heart and reveals his lack of love for others — his opponent, the political process, and the people he desires to govern. And even more, it reveals a heart filled with self-love. So the question is, "can an impolite, self-loving, people-despising person make a godly, loving ruler?" The answer is self-evident. It takes "good" people to rule well and with goodness.

• Leaders Should be SERVANTS (v. 4)

- ✓ How often do you hear the words "politician" and "servant" in the same sentence? They don't often go together. But they do in God's economy.
- ✓ The leader leads not for the privilege of lording his position over others; he leads so that he can serve and care for others. Three times in vv. 4, 6 Paul says that they are servants and ministers.
- ✓ The point of these verses is clear: "you aren't God — and you have no authority except that which is derived and given from God, and your task is to serve God (not yourself)."
- ✓ So we do well to ask, "does this individual love to serve others or is he/she wanting service?"
- ✓ I like what Leon Morris says about this principle:

"The Emperor on his throne, and for that matter any petty bureaucrat, might well see his power as something to be exercised as he chose. But Paul is clear that everyone in any position of responsibility is first and foremost God's servant and that it is to God that he will one day be forced to render account." [464.]

- ✓ Someone who is going to lead well at any governmental position must have the character of a humble servant (Mt. 23:11-12). If he isn't, he's unqualified.
- ✓ One of my refrains during COVID has been, "the government would have made it so much easier for people if it had just said, 'we aren't sure what this is, we are going to make mistakes, bear with us, we will do our best and make changes along the way to help as much as we can.'" That's not quite what has happened. And too often that same problem arises on moral issues (e.g., James Coates).
- ✓ If you are a rebellious leader, I urge you to repent so you don't face God's wrath (Rom. 12:19).

4. What Government CANNOT Do

- **Government cannot rule perfectly.** The best government will fail. The wisest government officials are still depraved (Romans 3 applies to them also) — and even if they are believers, they are still imperfect and will make imperfect decisions. So we need to be careful about finding our hope and our confidence in government. We dare not find our confidence in the government to fix the world. It won't. The world will only be right when the righteous King will reign on His throne (Rom. 12:19).
- **Government cannot change men's hearts.** The government will not fix our problems, because it is incapable of changing hearts. *Jesus* will fix our problems because He can change our hearts. (Don't forget Romans 4 and justification and Romans 6-8 and sanctification and Romans 9-11 and sovereignty.)
- **Government cannot subvert God's will.** Every government is from God (v. 1). Every government is established (and kept in place) by God (v. 1). Every government (willingly or unwillingly) is God's servant to do God's bidding. If even Satan cannot act without permission from God, then no government can do anything to undermine God's purposes. We may not approve biblically of what a government does, but we never need to despair; God is still on His throne, just as He was when Potiphar had Joseph imprisoned and when Assyria took Israel captive and Babylon took Judah captive and when Herod beheaded John the Baptist and Paul was martyred...and when Jesus was crucified. You can trust the Lord that life may be more difficult, but God is still sovereignly ruling every molecule.

CONCLUSION: This week we've considered "the government and you..." — what is the government's responsibility to you? Next week we will consider your role in that relationship and your response. But for now, can I just point you to one thing? Whether we are under Pharaoh, Herod, Caesar, a Canadian Prime Minister, or an American President, or a Hood County Commissioner, we are to pray for those over us (1 Tim. 2:1-3). Let's finish this morning by turning our hearts to God in grateful prayer:

- Thank You for the government and governing authorities You have given us
- We ask that You might cause our authorities to submit to their consciences and the Spirit and promote what is good and right and punish what is evil and harmful and to serve us
- We thank You that while government can't change people's hearts, You have given government to us to act as a restraint on evil and provide a civil environment in which to live and serve You
- We thank You that while we don't agree with some decisions of the government, we can rest in the reality that no government makes any decision outside Your will and that You control it all
- We thank You that You are not ever subverted by any renegade ruler or government and that one day soon King Jesus will rule this earth with all righteous authority.
- Keep our hearts and actions submissive to every official (and You) while we wait for Christ's rule

BENEDICTION: Rom. 11:33-35