

Hallmarks of the Transformed Life
The Christian and Civil Government
(Romans 13:1-7)

Introduction: Paul's challenge to live a transformed life touches every part of our life. It affects how we treat our spiritual family; it affects how we treat our fellowman. It affects how we respond to our co-workers! In Romans 13 Paul shows how being a Christian impacts our relationship with those who rule over us in government.

The transformed disciple recognizes the authority behind civil government.

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

Since God is the source of all authority, then the authority of government has to originate in God's Himself.

Perhaps Paul is also thinking of the covenant God made with Noah which seems to institute civil government.

"And surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man. (Genesis 9:5-6)

It is amazing that people today argue for the elimination of the concept of God from government institutions. God Himself is the author of civil government!

Also Paul may be thinking of the OT statements that declare that God is sovereign ruler over the governments of the world.

"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." (Daniel 4:17)

When we understand this concept, then no disciple would seek to oppose what originates from God.

The transformed disciple then acknowledges the authority behind civil government. To resist the government in the exercise of what is right is to resist the authority of God himself! To resist the authority of God is to be condemned.

The transformed disciple acknowledges the authorized functions of civil government.

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; 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 upon the one who practices evil. (Romans 13:3-4)

Civil government was ordained by God to serve Him in two ways.

Civil government was ordained by God to promote the general welfare.

Civil government was ordained by God to avenge the evil doer. “It does not bear the sword for nothing” establishes the right of the government to enforce its law by force and to administer capital punishment in keeping with the law of God given to Noah. Beheading was the standard method of execution in the Roman Empire.

Often today those professing faith in Christ are quite vocal in opposition to civil government’s right to punish the evil doer, even by death. However the transformed disciple acknowledges these divinely authorized functions of government and does not interfere with their just implementation.

The transformed disciple renders to civil government all that is due it.

The transformed disciple obeys the law of the land.

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities.

(Romans 13:1a)

Paul uses the common word for respecting the authority of another and being obedient to it.

The transformed disciple renders to all government officials what is due.

For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 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. (Romans 13:6-7)

We must fulfill our financial obligations to government.

Taxes—Translates “phoros”, a payment made by the people of one nation to another, with the implication that this is a symbol of submission and dependence - ‘tribute tax.’

Custom—Translates “telos”. In the ancient world taxes were primarily of two types: (1) a head tax on each individual (which was relatively small) and (2) revenue or tribute paid for goods and produce brought into an area for sale.

We must fulfill our spiritual obligations to government.

Fear

Honor

The motivations for obedience are two-fold:

Because of wrath—Because we may be punished if we don’t.

Because of conscience—Because it is the right thing to do!

Some important things to remember

The Christians submits to all civil governments, not just to representative democracies. The structure of the Roman government was imperial. The

Cesars had almost absolute authority over the empire. The government gave little power to people without wealth and property. This meant that few Christians would have had the opportunity to participate in the legislative aspects of government; yet God said obey!

The Christian must submit to civil government even when he may disagree with its policies or even when its rulers are morally reprobate. Though, at the time of writing, Nero was not the persecutor of Christians that he would become, his moral life was less than exemplary; yet Christians were told to give honor.

The Christian may use civil government for justice and protection as long as its use does not hinder the cause of Christ. Paul used the authority of government for his protection (Ac. 25:11) but rebuked the brethren at Corinth for not solving their own problems rather than taking them before non-believing rulers (1 Cor. 6:1ff).

The Christian is not obligated to obey what is contrary to the will of God. (I've known some Christians who would not support a man to preach the gospel in China because it is against the law in China to do so. Would not the principle of Ac. 5:29 apply here?)

The Christian may not resist government by force of arms to defend his faith under persecuting governments. Instead he is told to prayerfully keep the faith and suffer whatever consequences may come whether imprisonment or death (Rom. 13:9-10) trusting in God to avenge His servants.

God will in His way and in His time remove governments that defy His authority and purposes.

Conclusion: Our lives as citizens should serve as a testimony to the unbelieving world and especially to those who oversee us politically.