

The Christian and the Government

What do the apostles mean when they tell us to live in quietness (*I Timothy 2:1-2*), to be submissive to rulers and authorities (*Titus 3:1*), and to be subject to every human institution, including the emperor and governors (*I Peter 2:13-14*)?

Romans 13:1? “*Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*”

- What does this text imply about the role and authority of the government and the role and authority of the church?
- How do the state and the church live in coexistence?
- Are there unique roles for each? Evidently, Paul believed the government of Nero was ordained by God
- How do we apply this perspective in the twenty-first century?

Howard Hendricks, a now retired seminary professor, is famous for this statement: “*In every generation, the church at large has missed the mark somewhere.*” He would follow up that question by asking, “*Do you know where it is missing the mark today?*”

We have arrived at a point in our country’s history where the state is deeply confused over its relationship with the church. What has become known as the wall of separation between church and state has nothing to do with our founding father’s intentions. Our founding fathers intended to create protection of the church from the state – from state imposed religion. Instead of protecting the church from the state, the amendment is interpreted in a way in which it will wash away the influence of the church – in effect, the riddance of religious expression.

On the other hand, the church is equally confused. The greater problem, the greater danger, and the greater loss, is not the degradation of our society, not the erosion of values, not the desire of our country to strike God from textbooks and courthouses, or even moving toward Sodom and Gomorrah. Greater than the degradation of society’s fall from grace into greater and greater evil, is the distraction of the church and the diversion of the church’s resources, manpower, and objectives away from the purpose God has called the church; to make disciples.

The church has become deeply confused in regards to its relationship with the state and its position and posture toward the issues of our day. The greatest loss in our generation is the perspective and purpose of a church. Have we actually forgotten that our relationship to society is not to reform it, but to redeem it through the blood of Christ— one person at a time? Our mission is not moral reformation, but spiritual reformation. Politics can never achieve that end.

There are two declarations of *Romans 13:1*

1. Submission to government is the command of God.

Paul writes, “*Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. . . .*” This is written in the imperative mood, therefore it is not a suggestion; this is a command. We are to submit unless it violates God’s commandments or Word.

2. The institution of government is the creation of God.

Verse 1, “*...For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*” Paul was talking about Nero, and Rome, a godless culture, with idolatrous leaders, what could that mean for us?!

Six Lessons From *Romans 13:1*

1. Christians are to obey the civil laws of government, regardless of the government’s response to the gospel.

We do not just obey the civil laws of the government when they suit us or when they serve our causes. We are to obey the civil laws always, unless they violate God’s written laws and principles in His Holy Word. The Scriptures remind us in verse one, “*...For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*” Therefore we are to be immediately obedient to the civil laws which God has authorized.

2. Christians are not to believe that a moral government or nation is necessary to have a thriving church.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, the culture was at its most depraved level. There were no sexual norms, pedophilia, adultery, and idolatry were rampant. This was the century that Christ determined was the century in which to plant the living church – and the church thrived.

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3. It is not necessary for the church to have influence in the Government and freedom in order to be faithful!

The church in China is surprising the free world with its incredible growth! The first century church thrived even though the government did not support them or provide freedom of religion. Their success – faithfulness to proclaim the gospel message.

4. Christians are not commanded to battle cultural immorality but to demonstrate purity.

A lighthouse never once calmed a storm, never redirected a hurricane, and never calmed the rolling ocean. The church is a lighthouse. We shine brightest when culture is darkest. **1 Peter 2:9** demonstrates this concept of being a shining light of purity in a dark world of sin, “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*”

5. Christians have never been told to depend upon God and concurrently place our hopes on reversing cultural trends.

The moment we believe this, we will disband the purpose and mission of the church to make disciples. Instead, we will focus on cleaning up society or trying to convince it that, morality is better. We have missed our purpose!

Listen to the words Paul wrote to Timothy, a young pastor trying to keep the church on course, during a time when the church naturally wondered how it should live in the face of an ungodly world. “*First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.*” (**1 Timothy 2:1-3**).

The truth is very clear from **Romans 13:1** that God is sovereign over the governments of the world. This truth can be observed from ancient times past. In **Daniel 4:17** the Scriptures teach, “*In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.*” Jesus Christ is in control of the nations of this world – not one day, but always.

In **Acts 17:26**, “*... He [God] made . . . every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.*” It was God who had created their boundaries, their borders, their might, and the length of their existence as a nation. This has not changed in the twenty-first century.

Romans 13:1, demonstrates that we should be model citizens of whatever country we belong to – praying for our leaders, acting as salt and light, shining in the darkness and creating a thirst for God. We are told, in fact, “*For our citizenship is in heaven...*” (**Philippians 3:20a**). We finally and ultimately, pledge allegiance to heaven.

Paul reminded the Corinthians of this when he wrote, “*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ . . .*” And, the content of our diplomatic assignment is, “*... we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*” (**2 Corinthians 5:20**). Our purpose as ambassadors of Christ is to be entirely redemptive. If hearts are changed by the Spirit of God, then the way of thinking will be changed, and the goals will be changed, and the policies will also be changed, and countries can be influenced to change as well. It is change from the inside out! Ervin Lutzer stated it this way, “*If we do indeed, then in the midst of our stormy world, hell-bent on swamping the church and dashing it to pieces . . . if we are indeed firmly fixed upon the rock, then we should not act as if we are clinging to our last piece of driftwood.*” It is time for the church to go back to the business of being the church.

6. We have not been called by God to save America.

We have been called by God to lead Americans to God’s saving Grace. In the book *The City of Man*, Augustine reminded us, our world will one day be destroyed as God recreates a new heaven and a new earth . . . but the city of God will last forever. In the interim, for the last 2,000 years, this is the mission of the church – go into the city of man, through whatever avenue God has called you, and make disciples for the city of God. Baptizing them and teaching them to obey what Jesus Christ commanded us to do. (**Matthew 28:19-20** paraphrased). It is time for the church to become satisfied once again with obedience to this unique commission from God.

Through God’s power we have power over the grave and hell itself. We have the “One” who is living within us who is greater than he that is in the world. We are standing on the rock in the middle of a storm. So let us stop acting as if we are scrambling for a piece of driftwood in case the rock goes under. The church of Jesus Christ is not sinking. Though the attempt is made often, “*... the gates of Hades will not overpower it [the church of Jesus Christ].*” (**Matthew 16:18b**).

We are ambassadors of the King – sent to introduce our world to the true gospel, which is true power – for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (**Romans 1:16**). Let Christians get back to the business of being the church!