

YOU AND THE GOVERNMENT, PT. 3
ROMANS 13:1-7

While there are probably as many different political opinions in this room as there are people, we can all agree that we live in complex and difficult days politically and socially. While there have always been debated issues on the political and social spectrum, the issues before us today are deeply complex:

- ✓ **Life** — when does life begin and when does it end? Does anyone have a right to terminate life at either its beginning or end? Under what circumstances?
- ✓ **Gender** — what is gender? Is it fluid or fixed? And who determines what one's gender is? Can the gender be altered?
- ✓ **Justice and social justice** — what does it mean to be just?



- Who determines what is just? Is all justice equal in its exercise? Should justice be suspended in circumstances where greater injustices have occurred? Are things like reparations for past injustice appropriate?
- ✓ **Ethnicity and race** — is the idea of systemic racism a reality? If so, how do we alter it and “fix” it? If not, then what is the effect of how we subjugated a race of people for centuries in our country?
 - ✓ **Sexual ethics** — what is pornography, who defines it, and is it wrong? According to whose standard? And what about homosexual conduct and “marriage?” (And what is marriage and who defines what it is?) And what is sexual abuse and how will it be addressed?
 - ✓ **Environment** — What does being a steward and caring for this world look like? Should Christians be concerned about endangered species, litter on the side of the road, global warming, the use of pesticides and herbicides, and highway beautification? (Or can a believer say “Christ is coming to renovate the world, so shoot a deer and walk on the grass...?”)

All those things are in front of us just about daily and I haven't mentioned things like **education, gambling, economic theory, capital punishment, poverty, health care, moral standards, war theory**, and more!

What is significant about all these issues is not just the complexity of attempting to resolve them, but that government is leading our country in making decisions about all those issues. So we need to think carefully not only about those issues, but how we will relate to the government that is making decisions and laws about all those things, many of which are going to be contrary to what we think and believe about them.

How will we respond? Let's remember what Paul says about our relationship to government (Rom. 13:1-7):

EVERY BELIEVER SHOULD ALWAYS HONOR HIS GOVERNMENT.

Or even more precisely, *because God has ordained every government*, every believer should always honor his government. How will we honor the government? In these verses, Paul identifies **three responses** for the believer to the government:

1. **SUBMIT** to the Government (vv. 1-2, 5)
2. Do What is **GOOD** (vv. 3-4)
3. Pay Your **TAXES** (vv. 6-7)

1. SUBMIT to the Government (vv. 1-2, 5)

- Submission is for ALL people (v. 1)

- ✓ When we talk about submission we mean willingly and joyfully placing ourselves under and following the authority of those who are over us. This is the norm concerning our relationship with the government; the norm is not civil disobedience. The baseline is submission.
- ✓ The reason Paul says this is that...

- Lack of submission is rebellion against GOD (v. 2) — This verse answers the “why” question

- ✓ Because God has ordained every government, to rebel against the government is to rebel against God. It is to ***oppose the ordinance of God*** — to stand in judgment of God and oppose His purposes.
- ✓ It’s akin to Peter’s response to Jesus’ promise of going to the cross and dying — “God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall never happen to You” (Mt. 16:21-23). Jesus rebuked Peter as espousing a Satanic lie.

- Submission is for maintaining a clear CONSCIENCE (v. 5)

- ✓ Paul says in v. 5 that ***it is necessary to be in subjection***. Submission to government is a divine constraint. It’s not optional. It is essential to submit to avoid God’s ***wrath*** (v. 5).
- ✓ It’s also necessary to submit so that we train our consciences to act rightly and wisely and so that we do not sin against our consciences which might (should) convict us when we rebel.

- Is submission absolute? Are there EXCEPTIONS? Is it ever permissible to disobey?

1. *We are required to disobey when we are commanded to worship falsely.* (Daniel 1, 3, 6).
2. *We are required to obey God when we are commanded to disobey God’s clear command* (Acts 4:13-21; 5:28-29, 40-41). [Romans 13:3 also fits this category — a command to not do what is good, or to do what is not good.] One clarification and one example:
 - Civil disobedience is not an option given to make us more “comfortable” and give us an easy life. In fact, if we disobey, life may often become more “uncomfortable,” because of the consequences that come from the government. We will honor God when we willingly and joyfully accept the consequences of our disobedience from the government. There’s no complaining if we suffer as a result of our disobedience (Acts 5:41).
 - E.g., Homosexual marriage is now legalized. But disobedience only becomes a possibility for me when I am forced to perform a wedding for a homosexual couple (and the day may come sooner than we anticipate). If I disobey and go to jail, then I go to jail... I am not given freedom to overthrow the government if I don’t like this law (which I don’t).

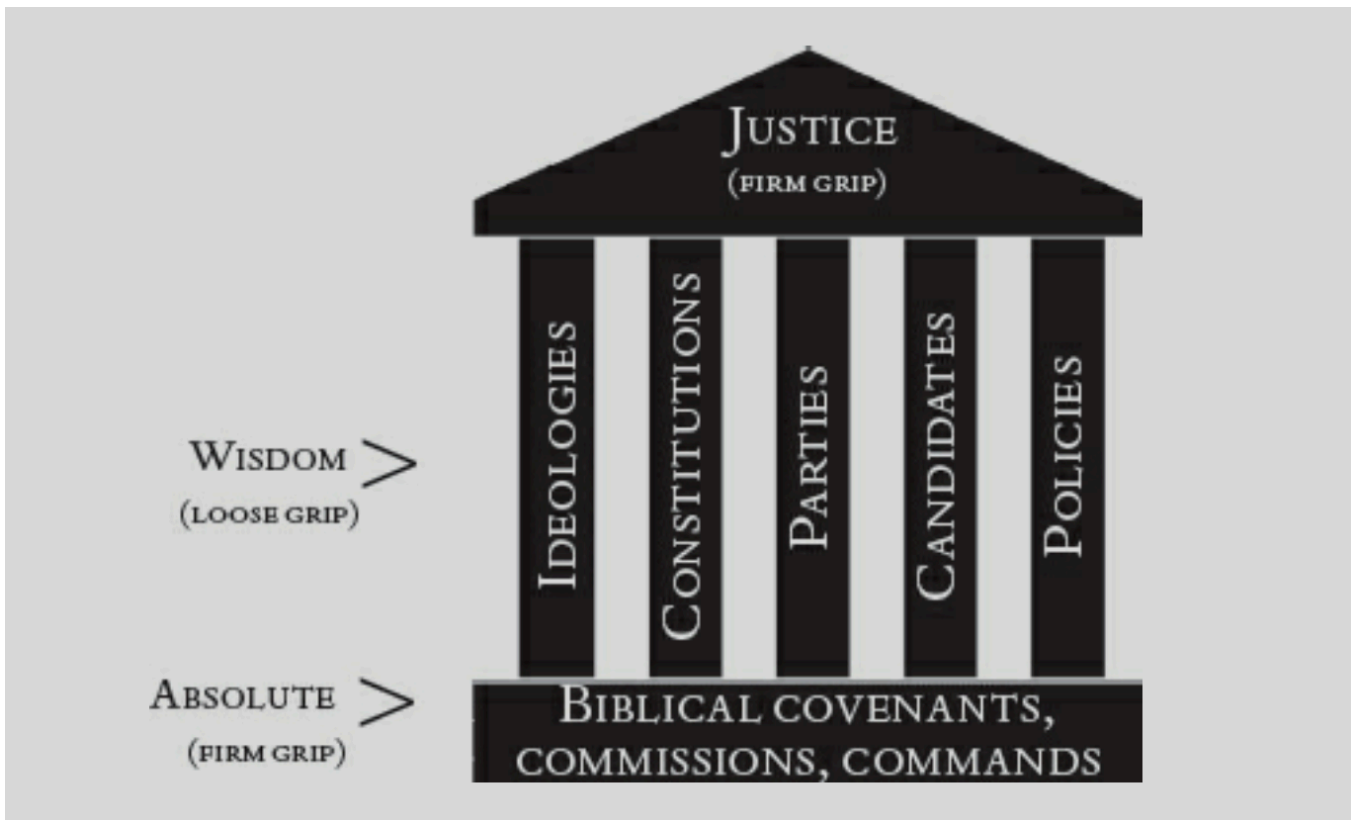
2. Do What is GOOD (vv. 3-4)

- Twice in v. 3 **Paul says to do good** — **good behavior...do what is good**. What did that look like?
 - ✓ The phrase **good behavior** is actually “good works,” and is often used in of the good works of the believer after his salvation (Rom. 2:7; **Eph. 2:10**; Col. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17).
 - ✓ Paul is thinking more broadly than that — the good behavior here also includes obedience to the law of the government (v. 3a) and doing things that are good and beneficial for the government and society — things that have social significance and kindness.
- Paul will talk about one act of goodness in v. 6 (paying taxes), but there are also other good acts:
 - ✓ **Doing good is anything that demonstrates godly love and goodness**, and especially anything that relates to citizenship and doing what is best for country/culture. It is in contrast to those who are **worthless for good deeds** (Tt. 1:16).
 - It could be things like picking up the trash along the road to your house, giving a homeless man a meal, volunteering to serve at the hospital one day a week, delivering meals on wheels, mowing your homebound neighbor’s yard, reading to children at the local elementary school, serving as a delegate to your political party’s convention, fixing a flat tire for a stranded motorist, baking cookies and sharing them at the police station with the officers, saying something kind to your server at a restaurant, hosting a foreign exchange student or a teenager who is struggling at school, or...
 - We should be known for being “good” and doing good like these kinds of things.
 - ✓ **Doing good also means being involved in the political process** (without putting our ultimate hope in that process). We live in a very unique place in history — few have had the options available for us to engage in the political process.
 - So, that means we can (and should) vote; we can enter into politics either as a candidate or as some kind of advocate for a cause or law (which is why GBC supports the BPC and why several GBC members were instrumental in its founding...).
 - We can lobby, petition, and write and discuss and defend the truth. We can engage in thoughtful discussion and debate. But those actions must always be done in a way that honors God and in a way that demonstrates we are still trusting God and not the law or candidate we support.

“It is not enough...for Christians to be law-abiding (so far as our conscience permits us); we are to be public-spirited as well, to be ready (eager, not reluctant) to do whatever is good ([Titus 3:]1b), whenever we have the opportunity. According to both Paul and Peter, the state has the double duty to punish evil and to promote good. So God’s people should be ready to cooperate with it in both these areas.” [Stott, Guarding the Truth, 199.]

- ✓ **Doing good also means praying** for those who are in authority over us (**1 Tim 2:1-2**). We are to pray for whatever they need as they lead (v. 1) and for their salvation (v. 3). And pray with gratitude to God for them (v. 1)! Note also the reason for this in v. 2!
- ✓ And of course **the best good is evangelizing**; we can do no better for others and the culture than to preach the gospel (**10:1, 14-15**; Mt. 5:16; 20:25-28) — sometimes we get involved in political activities because it is easier (and more culturally acceptable) than evangelism.
 - The problem in our country is not the government, but *the people who elect the leaders*. Our leaders are a composite of who we are as a country. And we will only see a change in the government when the people of the country are converted to Christ.
 - I am not generally hopeful about the future of our country (because countries always decline); but I am completely hopeful and confident of the future under Christ the King. Our task is to work in the culture and for the government to the best of our ability with two caveats:
 - ... We understand the government is not ultimate and will inevitably fail (they all have), which means we don't have to despair when governments make ungodly decisions.
 - ... We prioritize the gospel so that as many in this culture as possible will believe (**Col. 4:5-6**).
- ✓ What about a *tyrannical government* or leader? Is it righteous to rebel and overthrow tyranny?
 - At times it is appropriate for government officials to act against superior (higher ranking) officials for the protection of citizens; they act against a "criminal gang masquerading as a gov't."
 - However, fundamentally, that is the wrong question: the right question is "How can I do good for and in submission to a tyrannical ruler?"
 - We need to support our government in its work to protect the people of other nations by acts of war to support and uphold good governments elsewhere.
 - We need to use appropriate, good, legal means within our own governmental system without attempting to take authority for ourselves illegitimately. I cannot think of a situation in Scripture where the people of God were commended for acts of anarchy.
 - I just don't trust myself with this kind of mindset — this reads to me as "when I get my rights taken away, I have a right to rebel..." I don't trust my heart with that kind of thought. I don't have rights as a follower of Christ; I am enslaved to Him.
- We are not under Caesar; **we live in a democracy — what does *doing good* look like there?** How should I think about my relationship to the government since I am "part of" the government — as Lincoln noted in his Gettysburg address, the government is "...of the people, by the people, for the people." [Interestingly, Lincoln didn't come up with that statement: it came from [John Wycliffe](#) who wrote in the prologue to one of his earliest translations of the English Bible in 1384, "This Bible is for the government of the people, for the people and by the people." — When we hear the statement about our government, we do well to think about our relationship to the Bible as the governor of our lives.]
- ✓ **Use whatever legal means you have to influence the government** (this is in the "white lines" of text) —

- Most often, that means we should exercise our responsibility to vote. We do good for our country by voting for candidates & policies that will best uphold their godly calling (vv. 3-4, 6). ... We are not omniscient and we don't have all the information we need to make these decisions. And the decisions are often complex; so let's allow for disagreements about how we each interpret how best to vote. It's popular to say in some circles, "I don't believe you can be a member of [that political party] and be a Christian." Be careful. If that's true, then if that person is a member of your church, you should discipline them out of the church because they aren't believers. So until we are willing to practice church discipline for being a Republican, Democrat, or Libertarian, then we shouldn't say those things. [Caveat: there is a time for such things — e.g., being a member of the KKK or the Nazi party in Germany — but probably not for being a member of an American political party today.] ... I have been helped by this diagram from Jonathan Leeman (*How the Nations Rage*) —



... "As an isolated issue, abortion is different than, say, health-care policy. This is more of a jagged-line [wisdom] issue. Christians might bring biblical convictions to bear in a conversation about health-care policy: we should care for the downtrodden, we should treat all people with dignity and respect, we should seek to remove entrenched cycles of injustice and the poverty that follows, we should ensure the insurers and medical practitioners are fair and honest and don't swindle patients, we should be skeptical of governmental involvement in health care that arguably hurts the quality of care, and so forth. But it's no

easy task to add all these principles together in order to yield the biblical or Christian position. Hence, many Christians would admit that the path from biblical principle to political application is more jagged and unclear. Broadly speaking, we can say that wisdom helps us determine whether an issue is a straight-line issue or a jagged-line issue. Obviously, it's not always clear which is which. That's part of the need for wisdom! Now, even with a straight-line issue like abortion, questions of political strategy and implementation are significant. Just because we agree abortion is wrong doesn't determine which is the best legislative or judicial strategy in stopping abortion. One Christian might argue for one strategy and another for another. Even here, then, wisdom is needed. Also, not all issues fall neatly into the straight-line bucket or the jagged-line bucket. There's a spectrum between the two....Most political issues are jagged-line issues....[Yet] Whether in private conversations among friends or public conversations in the blogosphere, how often do Christians talk as if their position on health care or tax policy or immigration or foreign policy is the only acceptable Christian position, and that all other positions are sin?"

[Leeman, *How the Nations Rage*, 90, 92.]

- ... So be firm on things like justice/righteousness, direct (clear) commands of God, and hold loosely those things that call for wisdom and discernment (we tend to be too firm on all).
- ... While the most basic way we can influence the government is through the ballot box, at times we will either be undecided, or we will be convinced that for us to vote either way would be unwise or even sinful; in those situations, don't sin against your conscience by voting for something you are not convinced of in your mind. Remember, we have *rights* to influence the government for good in these ways, but we are not *compelled* to use them.
- After an election, there are still additional ways to influence the political process by lobbying, calling or emailing politicians, petitioning for candidates or against potential laws, making appeals and use the judicial system (**Acts 25-28**) — all according to your conscience.
- Don't be discouraged when the means you use to attempt to influence the country for good are overwhelmed by injustice or evil; our good efforts will often, usually, inevitably will be overwhelmed by injustice. Just be faithful to God. That's our only accountability to God.
- ✓ **Train your conscience.** Learn the issues and examine what Scripture says about those issues and what our biblical are in those circumstances — and then act (but don't be more firm than the Bible).
- ✓ **Guard your heart and control your words** (**Prov. 4:23**; Tt. 3:2). There is an appropriate way to speak about our government and leaders and inflammatory and slanderous words reveal a heart that is angry and undisciplined — and that anger will inevitably fuel anxiety and discontentment. (I know the importance of this, for this week I've reflected on my own ungodly words and asked forgiveness.)
- ✓ **Be a faithful citizen of both your countries** (**Phil. 3:20-21**); we have responsibilities here, but we have a greater responsibility there. We want to be faithful heavenly citizens.

- ✓ **Remember Romans 11** — God is fulfilling His promises to Israel, not America; I love my country (I chose to be American, after all), but it is not the Promised Land. Be grateful for your (our) country; but understand that what is done here is not ultimate and that we won't bring in God's Kingdom; the King of Kings will set up His own throne at His own time (**11:25-26; Rev. 19:11ff**).

- So, God says that believers are to honor the government by submitting to it and doing good, and...

3. Pay Your TAXES (vv. 6-7)

- This might be the toughest principle for us to accept in this passage. No one likes to pay taxes. But Paul says twice in these verses, **Pay your taxes**. If you owe a tax, pay it.
 - ✓ "But you don't understand — you don't know how unfair the taxes are and how foolishly the money is spent and how ungodly the men are who are spending it..." Yes, Paul does.

In NT times under Herod the Great, taxes in Pal. were levied on almost everything, esp. on the fields....The kinds of taxes grew in such numbers that both rich and poor felt the heavy burden. There were land or real estate taxes, a poll tax (Matt 22:17), export and import taxes collected at seaports and the gates of cities or country, a crop tax (one-tenth of the grain crop and one-fifth of the wine, fruit and oil), an income tax of one percent of a man's income per year, taxes to use a road, to enter certain towns, taxes on animals and vehicles, a salt tax, sales tax, tax on the sale of slaves and the transfer of property, and emergency taxes! [ZPEB]

- ✓ In spite of that, Paul says **because of this you pay taxes** — that is, because of their role as servants of God to restrain evil, they need money to carry out justice and they need money to live while they fulfill that God-ordained responsibility. They have **devoted themselves** to their responsibility and they need funds to carry out their responsibilities and for their own needs of food and shelter, so as citizens we need to provide for them in their roles.
 - ✓ Now that doesn't give them a right to become wealthy in their role, but it does mean that we have a responsibility to pay. Period.
 - ✓ "Christians should accept their tax liability with good grace, paying their dues in full, both national and local, direct and indirect, and also giving proper esteem to the officials who collect and apply them." [Stott]
- Do the tax gatherers abuse their privileges? Certainly.
 - ✓ One historian tells about the emperor Trajan who in 106 A.D. plundered the treasury of taxes and essentially transferred the tax money and spoils of war to his personal accounts, becoming what would be a millionaire today, in the process. [Daily Life in Ancient Rome, 68]

- ✓ Remember the story of Zaccheus? Lk. 19:2ff. He could pay back 4x what he collected and apparently still have some leftover.
- ✓ What would God say? Pay your taxes. That's what Jesus told Peter (Mt. 22:15-22). Note also that while the coin bore the image of Caesar, Caesar also bears the image of God. So in being faithful tax-payers, we also serve God.



- ✓ Another passage also helps us: Mt. 17:24-27 —
 - The lesson is that God's children are exempt from taxes because God is King and no government is ultimately sovereign and every government will ultimately pass away.
 - Yet there is still a responsibility to pay taxes to the government because God ordained every government and authority — they are legitimate authorities. So we should not sin (give offense) by not paying our taxes; we should pay our taxes.

- And Paul goes even beyond paying taxes — **render to all** (v. 7) If anyone might rightly receive anything from you, make sure that you **render** it to him (the sense is that there is a debt that needs repayment).
 - ✓ **tax** — reinforcing what he's just said in v. 6.
 - ✓ **custom** — this is another term that relates to taxation — "revenue" — taxation on goods and services (like the sales of land, houses, oil, and grass).
 - ✓ **fear** — respect, reverence — even (especially?) of those who collect the taxes.
 - ✓ **honor** — to treat honorably all those who are in authority; in Tt. 3:2 Paul says we are to "malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." That sums it up well. We are to talk well about our authorities and treat them with dignity, respect, and honor (1 Pt. 2:17).

CONCLUSION: Prayer —

- We pray for ourselves —
 - ✓ Forgive us for rebellious actions and malicious, spiteful words and attitudes
 - ✓ Give us discernment, ability, and self-control to honor all our leaders well
 - ✓ Give us resoluteness to be unwavering where we need to be firm
 - ✓ Give us wisdom to think through the complexities of difficult issues with biblical accuracy and to relate to others who have differing opinions graciously
 - ✓ Make us bold and clear with the gospel; make us better citizens of Heaven than America
- We pray for our governing authorities (1 Tim. 2:1) —
 - ✓ We pray that you would be gracious and save them from your wrath by Christ's blood
 - ✓ Until you save them, we ask that you would make them rule with justice and righteousness
 - ✓ We ask that you give them wisdom to rule well in difficult days and through complex issues

BENEDICTION: Rom. 11:33-35