

Romans 13:1-5: Church and Govt.

Oct 20

As in any message on such a massive topic we will not sufficiently cover every aspect there is in relation to *Church and Government*. In a few moments I'll take us to what I believe is the primary biblical text on how we as the Church, and as Christians are to conduct ourselves with and toward our Government, and I'll conclude with 4 priorities as I see them for the Church.

I think the text begs a number of searching questions: What is our attitude toward Government? Do we know what our responsibilities are as Christians with and for our Government?

How often in the past have we found ourselves quick to criticise (not always unjustified I might add) what our governing authorities have done, a decision they've made...yet have spent no or little time on our knees calling upon the Lord to move on their hearts and consciences?¹ Would it surprise you to know that *God has placed them there* and they have a mandate?

I'm mindful in this message that our governing authorities have led this nation through a minefield of significant matters in recent years, to say nothing of matters toward Maori, and Te Tiriti O Waitangi; the morally questionable decisions that have been made, that are *being* made; think of discussions around removing God from the anthem, current referendums before us. How do we make sense biblically of all this?

Prov. 21:30 *There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.*

What I've come to realise, is that it is imperative we understand what the Bible says and we heed its instruction, because to honour God is our priority. We'll see there are some strong and clear imperatives in today's passage, leaving no doubt, about this: God in his sovereignty knows what he's doing. I like what R C Sproul said: there are "no maverick molecules in the universe". He establishes civil and governing authorities. *God does this*. He places them. He takes them away.

Where does this leave us and what are our responsibilities? I offer you *an interpretation* of the text...

¹ What we say about Government and what or how we pray for them is driven by how we view God and God's word, because God's word is clear on this.

(Rom. 13:1-5)

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

Now we've all heard the saying, and perhaps many of us subscribe: "never mix politics and religion". As focussed as Paul was on the church, and his apostolic ministry, there was no avoiding politics and the powers of civil - specifically Roman - authority². Paul was writing to Christians in Rome and by extension the church today on what³ could almost be viewed as a guide of 'how to function' as Christians under Governing authorities.

What makes Paul's letter⁴ even more powerful, is the emperor at the time was Nero who would eventually burn Rome. His treatment of those who wouldn't worship him – namely Christians and Jews – was heinous⁵. Think its difficult today, Christians then had zero influence, voice, or legal standing. Christians were lit up as torches to light Nero's garden; sewn up in wild beasts, then massive dogs were let loose; they were crucified. Yet, they passionately went about attempting to make Christians of the entire population⁶. That's the context for what Paul asked them and applies to us today.

In short, Rome was a city rife with immoral conduct, sexual activity, temples, gods, and cults. All of which were tolerated by the emperor, but Christians weren't! How, for all that could Christians live up to what Paul was writing?

² It's a fact that government and politics has an effect on all we do

³ Universally applies today. (See Rom. 1:7)

⁴ Specifically, these verses...

⁵ Atrocious, wicked...

⁶ *Church History*, pg. 38,40

(READ Rom. 8:18, 28, 38-39)

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us...²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What other hope did they have, what else could they hold onto if not for Christ himself?! As Christians we are first and uttermost citizens of the kingdom of God before we are citizens of a human nation.⁷ There comes a point then, we must trust in the sovereignty of God, because we have no power in and of ourselves to effect the change we might prefer. This is particularly vital when it comes to *Church and Government*.

Let's take the 1st 2 verses again of Ch. 13...

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

1. GOD ESTABLISHES GOVERNMENT (v.1-2)

Paul didn't want any confusion about the position of Christians on Government. In these 2 verses: *everyone (is) subject to the governing authorities...* (and of those authorities) *there is no authority except that which God has established*.

Let's talk about this idea of being "subject" to the authorities "*which God has established*". It seems a lot rides on this. "*Subject*" is a military term and it means to come under rank⁸. We are to line up behind the 'commanding officer', in this case, the governing authorities = any person who represents the state: mayors, MP's, police, through to PM's and presidents. God establishes and institutes all Governments. We may not like who won an election or the direction the ruling party might take our country, but this does nothing to change the confidence we should have that God is sovereign.⁹

⁷ Phil. 3:20..." citizenship is in heaven"; Col. 3:2-3... "minds above" The totality of our Christian lives don't exist for this life but for the life to come.

⁸ <https://biblehub.com/greek/5293.htm>

⁹ Runge, S. E. (2014). High Definition Commentary: Romans (p. 227). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Now listen, that God placed an authority – and globally, we can all list off a few just awful, cruel and unjust ones¹⁰ – is no reflection of God's nature¹¹ and, is not to say that every government pleases God. God instituted marriage but not every marriage (or how people want to redefine marriage) is reflective of the character of God.

Governments are divine institutions (v.2), in the same way Marriage between a man and a woman is *Gods institution*¹², and the people of God are *Gods institution*.¹³ It doesn't matter what human means brought the authority to power, and it doesn't matter whether the power itself is just or unjust¹⁴ – *God has placed them there!* But remember, we are part of the means of that *establishing*, through our involvement and participation in elections.¹⁵

We cannot think that God only establishes good and godly kings...ALL!^{16*} We're to be "*subject*" to the authorities that "*God has established*". When you think about it our whole life is one of submission and this was always Pauls emphasis: our commitment to Christ required a step of submission, we are "*subject*" to his lordship, we are to "*submit to one-another*". Pauls not asking anything extraordinary, right?

(1 Peter 2:13-15) **Submit yourselves** for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

When we live surrendered to a sovereign God, we are conscious everything is God's, and because we are, we submit to what God has done, gladly, for his glory. Peter says it is Gods will and we are doing good when we submit to the authorities that God has established = ordained, set in place¹⁷.

When we resist, rebel or disobey the Government (notwithstanding the "exception clause") we do so against the institution of God.

¹⁰ Bashar-al Assad; Omar Al-Bashir; Mugabe; Kim Jong Un; Hitler; Trump; Churchill; Mandela; Castro; Stalin...doesn't imply all "Kings" are bad

¹¹ See Daniel 4:17. Gods providential rule over everything is specifically applied to the rise and fall of political leaders. This is evidence in what Daniel said to Nebu. (Rom. NIV Comms, pg. 422)

¹² Anything else outside this intended institution cannot be called Marriage...

¹³ Meaning God has instituted it. He created it, etc.

¹⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/submit-to-civil-authority>

¹⁵ Wisdom and prayer essential

¹⁶ 150 years before it even happened Isaiah prophesied and named Cyrus a pagan king as being the one who would be the shepherd to Israel releasing them from 70 years in captivity. ...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."' Isaiah 44:28 NIV

¹⁷ <https://biblehub.com/greek/5021.htm>

You're resisting what God has put in place. You're ignoring the sovereignty of God. Now does the bible provide exceptions to being "subject"? God is always the higher authority. Thus, there will be times when we/you, are faced with a difficult decision to "obey God rather than men", even though, obeying men is obeying God...

(Acts 4:27-29) The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!"¹⁸

When, biblically are the exceptions to "being subject"? The answer is simply, when Christians are asked to do anything that God forbids.¹⁹ Secondly, we cannot do what government forbids us to do, if God commands it.

To illustrate this: If the government forced us to abort babies for population control, we should resist. If the government banned the Bible, we should own and distribute Bibles anyway. If the government commanded us not to preach the whole counsel of God, we should teach what the Bible says anyway.

We cannot do what God told us not to do, at that point we would be disobedient, even at the cost of our lives²⁰. Now I want to say, dependant on the scale of the matter, such decisions if/when they come, need to be made with the greatest of care and wisdom. In the counsel of others. Always in the Spirit. Always aligned with the word.

There are laws the Government have passed and decisions they have made we might say represent the great evil of the day. Things anti-God, things God hates, promoting the kinds of things Paul speak about in Romans 1. *Are there decisions ahead of us now, we must obey God in, rather than man?* This doesn't mean they're any less a "governing authority".

The authorities that exist (still) have been instituted and established by God.

JC Ryle, familiar to many of you no doubt, was the bishop of Liverpool, in the church of England, he was referred to as the man of granite with the heart of a child. Why? He was relentlessly faithful to the word of God, and

¹⁸ See also 1 Cor. 9:16; Acts 5:25-42; Rev. 13

¹⁹ ...or say anything that renounces Christ, or is in complete objection to his word.

²⁰ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-162/obeying-civil-authorities>

was loved and hated because of his loyalty to biblical truth, some, even calling him the lion, because of his grasp on biblical truth.

The relevance of referring to him here, is one of the things that particularly interested Ryle was the relationship between Church and the State...he believed all people and all nations are called to worship the true God as a divine command of God. And when they – individuals and nations – don't, God judges them accordingly.

The Bible's clear: man was created by God, in the image of God, for the glory of God. People, nations, governing authorities do not exist outside of, or independent of God, they all, exist for God.²¹

Whether it's a good government making godly laws and decisions or an abusive, corrupt morally-absent government, a democracy, republic or communist, *God, is at work.* The Government are the authority put there by God, and as such, are responsible to God for the laws and decisions they make. Somehow within the sovereignty of God *this fulfils his purpose's.* No outcome surprises God.

(Dan. 2:20,21) "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. (1 Kings 19:18) Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

God has not only established every authority on the planet –God has delegated them authority over you and I. *God has done this.*²²

Christians never need to be concerned that so-called secular states will ever prevent/inhibit God's plans and purposes. Isa. 40:23-24 is a great reminder of this: "*He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing...he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff*"

Therefore, how we see God at work and God's purposes is determined by our belief in his sovereignty. And in his sovereignty *he establishes Government,* we are subject to, and God has delegated them authority over you and I.

²¹ Adapted from: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/81-94/a-nation-under-god>

²² See also John 19:11. Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

2. GOD'S PURPOSE FOR GOVERNMENT (v.3-4)

For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority?

Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

The *purpose* for the Governing authorities that God has established, as I see in Romans 13:3-4 is to establish law and order to protect the good and punish the bad. The point Paul's making here is you don't have to fear the authorities if you do what's good (obey the law). But if you do what's evil (disobey the law...) authority should make you fear. *"For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason"*

"Rulers" (governing and civil authorities) *"bear the sword"*, they discharge punishments, sentences, judgements and fines, and they do, as *"Gods servants"*. God puts into the hands of these governing authorities the authority to make laws and discharge punishments. None of which surprises God.

Notice twice in these verses Paul mentions the governing authorities are *"Gods servants"* (diákonos = minister, deacon). This means our PM is serving God. Our MP's are serving God. Our Mayor is serving God. Our police are ministers of God. Consciously, or more likely unconsciously, our governing authorities are serving Gods purposes in the world.²³ Now stop and think about the context here again. Nero is emperor, God has put him there and he is a minister of God *"for...good"*.

And so it's important to realise that as Christians we are to come under governmental authority; an authority that God has established; an authority that is an institution of God to protect the good and punish the bad. We are to be law-abiding in recognition of *who God is* and what he has established...

²³ See Daniel 4:17 e.g.

3. OUR OBEDIENCE OF GOVERNMENT (v.5)

Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

Verse 5 summarises the preceding 4 verses. We submit to the governing authorities established by God, obeying the law, living as good and godly citizens in the community and we do this as a "*matter of conscience*²⁴".

I'm going to give you the technical description of what this means: *because we should know better!* Conscious of God, conscious of God ordained authorities, conscious of Gods moral standard.

Remember Peter the apostle wrote that we can silence the ignorant talk about Christianity by our good citizenship.²⁵ (Titus 3:1-2) "*Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone*"

I read about a church in Romania recently, the place they were meeting in was in bad shape, literally falling apart, and they wanted to build a new auditorium. So the church had a *fundraiser*, raised as much as they needed and started building. Well, the mayor of the town came to the site and told them they needed to "shut the project down."

The pastor said, "Why? I thought we were doing what was lawful." Mayor said, "No, you don't understand. You have to have permission to build this from Bucharest and you don't have that." The pastor says, "I didn't realize that. I apologize. I'm sorry." So the church stopped the project. They didn't rebelliously bowl ahead anyway. They got together and prayed and God gave them wisdom.

The pastor went back to the mayor and said, "Since we can't build our church, we have great people here who are hard workers. What projects are going on, we're willing to volunteer to help you out?" The mayor said, "Are you kidding me?" Pastor said, "No, sir. We respect you." Mayor said, "Well, I have got this and this and this." So the church went out and began to work on a bunch of projects.

²⁴ = properly, joint-knowing, i.e. conscience which joins moral and spiritual consciousness as part of being created in the divine image. Accordingly, all people have this God-given capacity to know right from wrong because each is a free moral agent (cf. Jn 1:4,7,9; Gen 1:26,27). <https://biblehub.com/greek/4893.htm>

²⁵ 1 Peter 2:15

Roughly six months later the mayor came back with tears in his eyes and said, "I have never seen the kind of work ethic your people have had in helping us. Our people do not have this. Where do you get this?"

The pastor was able to say, "Well, that is the Lord, they are not like people who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ." The mayor said, "Because of what you people are and the way you live I am going to personally give you permission to build your church."²⁶

It's clear to me in scripture we're to be model citizens, above reproach, peaceable, endearing. Submission to governing authorities is what a sovereign God expects from us, it is a big ask. You know the greatest danger we face as CHURCH here in NZ is not persecution that might result in *"we must obey God rather than man"*.

The greatest danger we face is complacency, being unjust, unloving, not obeying God. When we are openly critical and maligning of governing authorities, is that good, does that glorify God? Government are not set in place apart from Gods sovereignty. This is why we would *"submit...as a matter of conscience"*.

Inasmuch we are to *"be subject to the governing authorities...which God has established"* ...to *"do what is right"* and to remember the authorities are *"God's servants for your good"* ...and to *"submit...as a matter of conscience"* ...inasmuch this is true, we also as a *matter of conscience* before God, as the church, have 4 important things to do:

Pray for our Governing Authorities

(1 Tim. 2:1-2). *"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority..."*

²⁶ Adapted from: https://www.preceptaustin.org/romans_131-5

Speak The Truth

Alongside our prayer, as a matter of conscience, we are to be adherents of biblical truth – we need to have our biblical position clear, first – i.e. are we clear on what the bible says about what is referred to as the 'end-of-life-choice' bill²⁷, about drugs?– and also commending biblical truths and values by every means of persuasion possible, to the Government as laws and decisions are made, we are to *"be not ashamed of the gospel"*

Vote!

Prayerfully and biblically consider the issues at hand. *Prayerfully* cast your vote. We have an important task between now and October 17th and following. NZers will be guided by their varied personal convictions. Our convictions as bible believing Christ followers are based upon God's Word. This means that Christians in NZ have a responsibility to exercise our earthly privileges, but as citizens of heaven. This responsibility extends to voting for those whose character and policies most closely align with the word of God. Be encouraged to be biblically informed, to be led by the Spirit.

We are **Citizens of heaven** – first and uttermost.

Conclusion

Our Lord subjected himself to the will of the Father, willingly suffered, went to the cross, died. He said, "forgive them, they know not what they do" ...governing authorities. Paul is actually showing us here that submission to the lordship of Christ, leads to submission in our relationship to government. Right relationship with Christ provides the basis for right attitude toward the government. So we submit, not for our own sake. Let's seek to obey God in all we do, in step with the Spirit. And, let's remember the battle we are in, and who it is against, yet who has won!

²⁷ The Biblical Response:

1. Sanctity of Life. (Genesis 1:27; 2:7).
2. We have been wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20).
3. Do not Kill (Exodus 20:13).
4. Heaven is our Home.

A Pastoral Response:

1. Ageism is wrong. According to the World Health Organisation – "Ageism is the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age..."
2. The Bible is filled with practical ways we're to value human life (Matthew 25:35–36; James 1:27; 1 John 3:16–18; Ezekiel 45:9; Deuteronomy 10:18–19).
3. Palliative Care.
4. Sharing the gospel "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

(Adapted from: Euthanasia – A Christian Response by Alan Vink 24th Aug. 2020)