

Romans

Bible Study

The Believer and Government

Romans 13:1—7

As Paul teaches us how to get along with each other within the Body of Christ, he first explains how important it is for us to have a proper walk with the Lord. We are not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed. We do this by renewing our minds so that we have an eternal, spiritual, godly view. We need to immerse ourselves into God's word and allow the Holy Spirit to make it come alive in our lives. When we have a renewed mind, we will have the mind of Christ and we will then be able to better meet the needs of others. It is only when we are walking in the Spirit that we will be able to properly use the gifts we have been given in order to meet the needs of the members of the Body of Christ.

We also have been given the privilege to come to the Father with all of our troubles, thoughts, requests, supplications and concerns. Philippians 4 assures us that God is listening to us when we pray, and that we can have peace, a settled mind. We, in effect, are letting God do the worrying for us when we give Him our burdens. He is called the God of peace in Philippians 4:9 because He is the source of our peace. This is a supernatural peace that we are promised when we come to Him in prayer. Being at peace, no matter what our circumstances, is a wonderful promise that exceeds God's promise to the Disciples of answering every prayer that they prayed (Matthew 21:22).

Prayer actually works to change our hearts. As we pray to God, we will find ourselves drawing closer to Him and conforming ourselves to His will, but only when we pray properly, in accordance with Paul's writings. This means that we should not pray expecting healing, riches, to bind Satan, etc. We should not pray with faith unwavering and expect God to give us everything we pray for. The Disciples were given the ability to pray for miraculous answers to their prayers, and they understood what this meant (read Luke 9:53–56 to see the power the Disciples had at their disposal). People who pray thinking God will answer every one of their prayers in the way they desire will be disappointed because God does not work that way in this Dispensation of Grace.

Instead, we pray knowing that we often don't know what we should pray for (Romans 8:26). We also pray with the understanding that we are walking by faith, not by sight in this dispensation (2 Corinthians 5:7). In spite of God changing how He was dealing with mankind under Israel's prophetic program, people somehow think that today they can pray and watch for God's specific answer to their specific prayer. Some even keep a prayer journal so that they can keep track of how God is answering their prayers (by sight!). If we are truly walking by faith, we have to live knowing God hears us and cares for us, and wants His best for us even when He seemingly doesn't hear or specifically answer our prayers. All we need to know is that God tells us to pray and that we can expect to have peace in return.

Prayer is an important part of Paul's teaching about caring for one another because as we pray, we often come to see a need or see how we can help someone. As we pray for each other, we are "forced" to think about what they are going through and how we might be able to help them. Prayer is an important part of Paul's admonition to watch out for the needs of others (Romans 12:10–13).

Paul first focuses on practical information about getting along with other believers and emphasizes our duty to watch out for each other's needs. He then moves beyond how believers should treat each other to how we are to interact with non-believers. He now explains our relationship with the government.

Believer's relationship with government

Who hasn't been frustrated with our government? This frustration is often exacerbated as we prepare and pay our taxes. The government often legalizes things that are morally wrong, such as allowing the killing of unborn children, redefining God's definition of marriage, or mandating the teaching of godless values in schools. Instead of protecting us, they often remove or constrict many of our freedoms. Examples of this misuse of governmental power can be found throughout history including Pharaoh in Egypt, the religious leaders in Jerusalem, and currently within every nation on earth. This is because unrighteous, imperfect and self-centered men are put in charge. Although governments are put in the hands of imperfect humans, leading to imperfect rulership, government is an institution that God sanctioned and established, and He did so for our benefit.

Man was given the responsibility to govern himself after the flood. Before the flood, God judged and punished men, often immediately, for their sins. For instance, after Cain killed Abel, God directly intervened and dealt with Cain (Genesis 4:9–15). When men became exceedingly evil, God judged them with the flood (Genesis 6:5–7). After the flood, that responsibility was given over to mankind with the institution of human government (Genesis 9:6). God will take back the responsibility of ruling over man at the Second Coming when Jesus Christ comes back to earth to sit on the throne and rule all mankind (Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 110:1–2; Revelation 2:27).

According to Romans 13:1–2, it was God who ordained the concept of government. He gives government authority over all men (John 19:11). Those who rebel against government are actually rebelling against the God who ordained government. Government was given to us so that we could live a tranquil and quiet life; so that we could freely live our lives for God (1 Timothy 2:2–3). Peter equates those who walk after the flesh with those who despise government (2 Peter 2:9–10). Even bad government is better than anarchy, when men do what is right in their own eyes. Only those who oppose government have something to fear.

We are not only to obey government out of fear of punishment for breaking a law, but as believers, we need to keep in mind that we are ministers and ambassadors of God and therefore, our actions will be a testimony for (or against) God. If we submit ourselves to the governing authorities, we become a positive testimony to those around us. The believer obeys government for God's sake, not for government's sake. We should strive to be obedient to maintain a positive testimony. Romans 12 concentrates on watching out for the needs of other believers. We need to think about their needs and reach out to encourage, build up and strengthen one another. We are also to think about the unbeliever and their needs, specifically their spiritual need for salvation. When they see us submitting to the authorities, they will not be able to say anything negative about us.

1 Peter 2:14–17 ¹⁴ or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. ¹⁵ For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: ¹⁶ as free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. ¹⁷ Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

There are times when believers cannot put themselves in subjection to the government. Although government was set up by God, government does not necessarily live by godly rules and regulations. When government regulations contradict God's commands, then we need to break with government and follow God. This is what Peter did in Acts 5:29 when the religious leaders of Israel told him to quit preaching Jesus Christ. God had raised up Peter so that he would proclaim Jesus Christ to the nation of Israel. He was not able to remain silent. When we go against government, even if to follow Christ, we should expect to suffer the consequences, just like we see with Daniel (Daniel 3:16–18), Peter (Acts 5:41), and Paul (2 Corinthians 11:23–27).

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