

Romans 13:1-4
August 16, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

What do you think of when you hear the word 'government'? [Does the Capitol building in Washington D.C. come to mind? Maybe you get a mental picture of the president or Congress. You might even think about words like 'power' or 'control' or 'rules' or 'politics.']

Q: But can you define 'government'? Take a moment and try. [It's hard, isn't it? Government is so ingrained in our culture and so much a part of our everyday lives that most of us, when asked, can't offer a very good definition of the actual word.]

Dictionaries and scholars define government in different ways. Let's build a word map to help us sort out these definitions. We'll begin by writing the word 'government' and circling it. Then we'll draw lines connecting each definition to our central term.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers three definitions of government:

1. 'the group of people who control and make decisions for a country, state, etc.'
2. 'a particular system used for controlling a country, state, etc.'
3. 'the process or manner of controlling a country, state, etc.'

Notice here that government can be defined by the people involved, the system in place, or the process in use. **Government** is the authority that sets rules for a society, helps its members relate to one another and to others, and keeps it running smoothly, securely, and peacefully.

Purpose of U.S. Government

Now we'll turn our attention to the specific functions of the United States government, which are found in the Constitution's preamble. Here they are:

1. 'To form a more perfect Union'
2. 'To establish Justice'
3. 'To insure domestic Tranquility'
4. 'To provide for the common defense'
5. 'To promote the general Welfare'
6. 'To secure the Blessings of Liberty'

Transition: You have just been given a short history lesson. But in the end, who is the real author of the institution of government? GOD! The authority to rule comes from God. Paul is going to emphasize that we are to submit to our governing authorities. He will give us reasons why we should submit, but he also reveals to us what our motivations might be to yield. I think

after today's lesson, each of us as Christians CAN successfully submit to their governing authority BY embracing any one of the four MOTIVATIONS Paul shows us in today's chapter.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Rom 13:1-4]

V.1:

- Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

V.2:

- Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

V.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 he will commend you.

V.4:

- For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.1: How many of us should be submitting to our governing authorities? [Everyone]

Q: Who is the source of authority? [God]

Q: When you read, "the authorities that exist have been established by God," how do you reconcile that with dictators in other governments who commit evil acts against their own people? [God is sovereign and allows people to have authoritative roles, but *they are accountable* to God for how they govern. Accordingly, *God is not responsible for the sins of tyrants, but only that the authority to rule comes from God.*]

Q: If we rebel against authority, who have we really rebelled against? [God]

Q: So if we want to live without fearing our governmental authorities, how do we do that? [Do what is right! Obey the laws!]

X-Ref: I Peter 2:13-17

Q: In these first four verses, what MOTIVATION do we have to obey the laws? [Avoid punishment or wrath]

LOOK: One motivation for submitting to our governing authorities is to avoid punishment when we break the laws. As we go through this week, let's make it our goal to do the right thing at all times to live peacefully among each other.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

HOOK: <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-government-definition-role-functions.html>

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 556–557). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Our Relationship to the State (Rom. 13:1–14)

God has established three institutions: the home (Gen. 2:18–25), government (Gen. 9:1–17), and the church (Acts 2). Paul was writing to believers at the very heart of the Roman Empire. As yet, the great persecutions had not started, but were on the way. Christianity was still considered a Jewish sect, and the Jewish religion was approved by Rome. But the day would come when it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for a Christian to be loyal to the emperor. He could not drop incense on the altar and affirm, “Caesar is god!”

In our own day, we have people who teach riot and rebellion *in the name of Christ!* They would have us believe that the Christian thing to do is to disobey the law, rebel against the authorities, and permit every man to do that which is right in his own eyes. Paul refuted this position in this chapter by explaining four reasons why the Christian must be in subjection to the laws of the State.

For wrath's sake (vv. 1–4). It is God who has established the governments of the world (see Acts 17:24–28). This does not mean that He is responsible for the sins of tyrants, but only that the authority to rule comes originally from God. It was this lesson that Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the hard way. (See Dan. 4, and especially vv. 17, 25, and 32.) To resist the law is to resist the God who established government in the world, and this means inviting punishment.

Rulers must bear the sword; that is, they have the power to afflict punishment and even to take life. God established human government because man is a sinner and must have some kind of authority over him. God has given the sword to rulers, and with it the authority to punish and even to execute. Capital punishment was ordained in Genesis 9:5–6, and it has not been abolished. Even though we cannot always respect the man in office, we must respect the office, for government was ordained by God.

On more than one occasion in his ministry, Paul used the Roman law to protect his life and to extend his work. The centurions mentioned in the Book of Acts appear to be men of character and high ideals. Even though government officials are not believers, they are still the “ministers of God” because He established the authority of the State.

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 490–492). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

D. In relation to authority (13:1–3).

13:1–3. Rome was the imperial capital, the seat of the empire's civil government. As residents in Rome, Paul's initial readers were aware of both the glory and the shame of that city in the days of Nero, who reigned from A.D. 54 to 68. But they were also citizens of Christ's kingdom (Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:13). Appropriately, therefore, Paul discussed a Christian's

relationship to his government and civil rulers. Both in its length and specific details this discussion is the key New Testament passage on the subject (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1–4; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–17).

The apostle’s basic exhortation is, **Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities** (lit., “higher authorities”). The basic reason for such submission is that those authorities are **established by God** (cf. Dan. 4:17, 25, 34–35). An individual **who rebels against the authority**, therefore, **is rebelling against** (lit., “has taken a stand against”) **what God has instituted** (lit., “the ordinance of God”). Such persons are thus actually rebelling against God, and bring civil and/or divine **judgment on themselves**. Those who obey and **do right** need have no fear of authorities; in fact, civil leaders **commend** those who do good.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1701). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

13:1 Paul urged Christians to be submissive and model citizens because God has installed the governing authorities to keep the civil order and punish wrongdoers. Peter gave similar instructions about submission (1 Pt 2:13–14, 17). However, submission to authorities is not absolute. Both Jesus and the writer of Acts established this central Christian principle. Jesus said, “Give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22:21). Peter and the apostles declared that they must obey God rather than human beings (Acts 5:29). Any submission to the authorities must pass through the filter of God’s will and call upon a believer’s life.

The difficulty here involves discerning God’s will and call in those areas to which Scripture does not speak, which requires determining and applying biblical principles rather than explicit biblical statements. This is the Christian’s crucial duty, for a failure to discern carefully God’s will risks disobeying God and incurring His displeasure. Of course, obeying God against the government may result in incurring the government’s anger—as the NT and subsequent church history well attest—but this puts a Christian in good company (Mt 5:10–12).