



The Church and Civil Authority

Romans 13:1-7

Main Idea: Submit to civil authority through faith in God's ultimate authority over all.

Every believer should submit to civil authority (1-5).

- *All civil authority is ordained by God (1b).*
- *To resist civil authority is to resist what God has appointed (2a).*
 - *Civil authorities are servants of the Lord to help restrain sin in society (3-4).*
 - *Doing good generally leads to approval (3).*
 - *Doing wrong generally leads to judgment (4).*
- *Submission protects the believer's conscience before man and God (5).*

While it's sometimes difficult to read Romans 13 in the context of the United States in 2025, put yourself in the context of the pagan Roman Empire in the first century. That's not just difficult to imagine; it's absolutely unimaginable apart from faith! Caesar demanded that citizens call him Lord and even worship him. There were pagan temples and cult prostitution in every major city, and Christians were thought of as atheists because they insisted that there was only one God. In the capital city of Rome, persecution of Christians was growing, and would end with Emperors doing unthinkable things like burning Christians at the stake to light their outdoor parties at night. It is in this very context that the Lord, through the apostle Paul, spoke these words to his church: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." Every believer should submit to civil authority, and the reason for this submission is grounded in faith and the revelation of the relationship between God and civil authority.

First, all civil authority is ordained by God. This always has been and always will be the truth. Whether for blessing or for judgment, the nations have been established and rulers have been allowed to rule under the sovereign hand of God. Even the pagan, godless rulers of Rome were only in their position of power by the authority of the King of kings. As such, to resist civil authority is to resist what God has appointed. Civil authority – governance through laws and enforcement of laws – is the common grace of God in this world that helps to restrain sin in society. Rulers are God's servants in that work, regardless of whether they see themselves in that role or relationship to God. In general, it's true that doing good usually brings approval while doing wrong often brings judgment. So for our own protection and for the sake of a clear conscience before man and God, the Lord's command for his people is to submit to civil authority.

Understand, though, that submission doesn't mean disobedience to the Lord! Submission means that we obey civil authority when doing so doesn't violate God's Word, but submission also means that we submit to civil authority in judgment when obeying God requires disobedience to civil law. In the latter case, we must entrust ourselves to the Lord, knowing that he is the ultimate ruler and all civil authorities are held to account by him.

1. What are some other passages that are related to the primary command to submit to civil authority in Romans 13:1? Use the BlueLetterBible app to look up cross-references for verse 1, and then discuss the related verses that you identify.



2. In Romans 13:2-4, how does God make it clear that civil authorities are servants to him? Is this something you think about when it comes to people in positions of power and authority at the local, state, and national level in our country? Why, or why not?
3. How should Romans 13:2-4 impact the way we interact with civil authorities as well as the way we live in our community, state, and nation?
4. How does civil authority help to restrain sin in society? Why is this important?
5. How does submission protect one's conscience before God? What about before man?
6. Discuss how submission can mean submitting to judgment under civil authority if required for obedience to God? Did this happen in Rome? Does it still happen today? Discuss this important distinction that is still a part of being subject to civil authority while ultimately being submitted to God.

Every believer should pay what is due to civil authorities (6-7).

- *Pay taxes (6-7a).*
- *Give revenue (7b).*
- *Show respect (7c).*
- *Extend honor (7d).*

A biblical perspective of civil authority is critical for a faith-driven response to what is owed to civil authority. Every believer should pay what is due to civil authorities. Yes, that means taxes. Whether they are faithful in their civil role or faithful to the Lord, civil authorities are servants and ministers of the Lord in their capacity and responsibility in society. Believers – within the context of the society in which they live – are responsible to pay the taxes that are due and that are intended to provide the protections and benefits that should come through civil authority. That's a part of living in subjection to civil authority, and as God expects that we pay him what he's due, he expects the same in our witness where we live. Paying what's due, however, doesn't stop with taxes. Three other things are mentioned as well, including giving revenue that's due, showing respect that's due, and extending honor that's due. Think of revenue in terms of a tariff or custom cost for items that come from other countries. This is the cost of doing business or the hidden tax within the cost of the items we often buy. On an individual and personal basis as well as on a business level, Christians should pay what's due. Additionally, the payment we owe is not only financial. Where respect is due, we must show respect, and where honor is due, we must extend honor. This is the picture of every believer at every level and in every way, paying what is due to the civil authorities that the Lord has put in place at that time and place.

1. When it comes to paying individual taxes and business taxes, do you do that with a heart that's doing it in obedience to the Lord? Why is this important? How can this be a witness?
2. Within our democratic system of government (civil authority), what are ways that we can affect and change law and policy under civil authority? Are believers commanded to try to do that (change civil law and policy)? Should believers try to do that (change bad laws and policy) if they live in a democracy that allows participation in those decisions?
3. How can we show respect and honor to leaders we don't agree with? Use cross-references to find answers to this question in Scripture. Pray for our civil authorities today!