

# GOD AND COUNTRY

## ROMANS 13:1-7

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

How fitting, that this past Friday, the first day of my Fourth Of July celebration, I was greeted with a special notice from our local government, the city of Snellville.

It is Independence Day weekend - the 245th birthday of our country. *If ever I'm in a patriotic mood, this is the time!* Despite our checkered history, I'm still proud to be an American. The United States is responsible for a lot of what's

right in our world. *That's why thousands of immigrants are lined up at our border wanting to get in.*

I understand our problems, but if ever there's a time to fly the flag, and wear red, white, and blue, it's today!

And so I eagerly cracked open the envelope, thinking I had received a *"thank-you note"* from the city of Snellville, applauding its citizens for their community consciousness, and their loyal support of the police, and the timely paying of their taxes. How nice, a local municipality fueling the patriotism of its citizens!

The letter's return address read, **"School Zone Safety Program."** I thought, *"How nice, maybe my government officials are letting me know the various ways we're teaching our school children to be safer."*

But that's not what it was... Not by a long shot. It was a **"Notice Of School Speed Violation."** And a payment voucher at the bottom for the amount of \$80.

And to rub my nose in it further Snellville had the audacity of including a photo of my truck on Pate Road in front of the Middle School, with a blow-up of my tag. *As if I'd try to deny my guilt, without sufficient evidence.*

Of course, the first thing I did do was look at my calendar to see if Kathy was driving the car that day? Sadly, she wasn't. I was responsible for this blunder.

And to make matters worse, wouldn't you know it, since I was feeling a little under the weather, instead of me getting the mail out of the mailbox this past Friday, Kathy did, which

means she spotted the envelope. If I had gone to the mailbox, I could've kept this to myself.

And so I began this year's Fourth Of July celebration not only appreciating the blessings of living in America, but also the obligations. **Citizenship is a responsibility.**

Understand, I am a Christian *and* I am an American.

I've met Christians who are Canadians - Christians from New Zealand - Christians who are Italians. And as you'd expect, these Christians love and support their country. I also care about the United States of America.

If my allegiance to Jesus ever conflicts with my duty to America, there's no doubt *I'll follow Jesus*. But in the absence of a clear clash, I have a responsibility to both. **I am a citizen of heaven, and I am a citizen on earth.**

In Matthew 22:21, Jesus made the most remarkable and influential political statement in all of human history. On that day in the Temple, **He held up a small, silver coin, a Roman Denarius, the size of a dime.**

Engraved on it were the bust of the Caesar and the words, **"Tiberias Caesar, son of the divine Augustus."**

Jesus held up the Denarius, and said, **"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."** In the ancient world, coins were considered the property of the person whose image was on them. Therefore, Jesus is saying, **"If this coin belongs to Caesar, give it back to him. But in addition, give to God what belongs to God..."**

*And what bears the image of God, but man himself!* In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve. Male and female are made in His image. Thus, though our money belongs to Caesar, our very lives belong to God

In amazing brevity and conciseness, think of the far-reaching ramifications of Jesus' statement...

First, He affirms **God's sovereignty over government.** Caesar might make demands of our money, but God has a claim on the whole of our lives. Caesar rules in one area of life, but God governs our total existence.

And yet Jesus' statement also affirms that **human government does have a place in God's plan.** Though God is superior to Caesar, civil government is still valid.

There's a dual-obligation to both sacred and secular authorities. As Christians, we have a two-fold responsibility - our lives belong *to God*, but we have a duty *to country*. **We are all bound to God and country.**

And 25 years after Jesus' groundbreaking statement, *here in Romans 13, the Apostle Paul is still chewing on its implications.* Even the wording he uses sounds similar to Jesus, verse 7, **"Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."**

Romans 13 expands on Jesus' statement regarding a Christian's duty to God and country. **Paul explains government's fundamentals, function, and funding.**

Here's a primer on a Christian's civil citizenship. And I can think of no better time for us to tackle it than on July 4th, *especially in the wake of a speeding violation.*

Today, we'll talk about **Christian Citizenship.**

Again, verse 1 tells us, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves..." Here Paul establishes some **fundamental** principles concerning the authority and origin of human government...

First and foremost, **government is God's idea.**

Over the course of time God, has established three institutions - and only three. The *Jaycees*, *Kiwanis*, *Rotary*, *Toast Masters*, even the *Booster Club* may be fine institutions in which folks spend a lot of time and commitment - but none of these organizations are divinely inspired. They're all human inventions.

There are only three divinely-inspired institutions...

In Genesis 2, God established **marriage and the family.** In Acts 2, He birthed **the church.** And in Genesis 9, God originated **human government.**

When Noah exited the Ark, God gave to humanity basic principles by which we should rule ourselves.

Before the universal flood that God used to purge this evil world, He had witnessed enough anarchy, and chaos, and unbridled evil to be convinced that mankind needed some

form of self-rule to avoid another divine judgment, so He instituted human government.

Thus, Paul tells us in verse 1 to be "**subject to the governing authorities.**" The word "**subject**" is the Greek term "**hupotasso**" which means "**to arrange under.**"

As Christians, we are not to buck the powers that be, but to arrange our lives within the parameters our government allows. In short, **we're to play by its rules.**

Of course, the miracle that is America is that our "**governing authorities**" are not just a man or group of men - *a dictator or politburo* - but a constitution or set of laws... Laws that were established to protect not just the rights of those in charge, but everyone's rights.

This is what has made America great. A constitution that limits the power of people who occupy positions of "**governing authority.**" For that, we should be thankful.

Yet Paul says the "**governing authorities**" of **all** nations - kings and emperors - "**are appointed by God.**"

You thought we elected your governing authorities, and in a sense you do, but God is ultimately sovereign.

**God is behind the scenes pulling the strings. It's the Almighty who sets up and takes down administrations.**

And God has allowed the *Hitlers* and the *Stalins* - as well as, the *Obamas* and the *Trumps* - to come to power for His reasons. We don't always see them, but God is orchestrating the political stage according to His prophetic scenario and to accomplish His purposes.

Today, we can see how the Jews would've never garnered the world support, and overcome global prejudice, and gained UN approval to return to their homeland and establish the modern state of Israel without having endured the atrocities of the Holocaust.

In the wake of Hitler's heinous crimes, at least for a brief moment, the world extended its sympathies to the Jews. God certainly holds Hitler responsible for his evil, but nevertheless He used Hitler to accomplish His ultimate plans. God took evil and turned it into good.

Psalm 75:6-7 tells us, "For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south, but God is judge: he puts down one, and exalts another."

Daniel 4:17 declares the same truth, "The most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men." Amazingly, the most High sometimes governs by "the lowest of men."

Three times in Romans 13, Paul refers to the rulers of his day as "God's minister," or servant. Joe Biden, Brian Kemp, Keisha Bottoms are all God's servants.

Politicians in office tend to forget this fact, but they'll find out soon enough. They have a Boss in heaven. Realize it or not, all public servants report to God.

God has appointed presidents, governors, senators, representatives, mayors, commissioners, council people, and we should respect them as *His ministers*...

Jeremiah called a ruthless and wicked Babylonian tyrant, King Nebuchadnezzar, "God's servant." If the Prophet

Jeremiah could do that, then we can use the same term for either a *Ted Cruz* or a *Chuck Schumer*.

God knows that human government is imperfect, but apparently, even a flawed government is better than no government at all. **We need to see the big picture...**

*Democracy AND even dictatorship are both better than chaos and anarchy.* It's interesting that the darkest time in Israel's history is described in the last verse of **Judges 21** as follows, **"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."**

Surely, the best form of government is a *theocracy*. This is where God Himself is sitting on the throne.

And the Bible predicts that one day the earth will be ruled by a theocracy. Jesus will return to Earth, destroy those who defy His will, and establish His kingdom for a thousand years... but until then, **any form of government is better than no government at all.**

Hey, recall who was on the throne in Rome when Paul wrote this letter... I'd vote for anybody, maybe even *Nick Saban*, before I'd vote for *Caesar Nero*.

**If you know history, you know that *Nero was a nut!***  
**He set himself up as a god. He killed his wife and son to consolidate his power. He threw Christians to the lions and burned them at the stake to light his parties. Nero set fire to the city of Rome just to watch it burn. If you think the guys in Washington today are just *fiddling around...* Nero *fiddled* while Rome burned.**



Caesar Nero was a madman. Yet even though Nero was in power at the time, Paul still told the church in Rome to subject themselves to the civil authorities. For their rulers - even Nero - had been appointed by God.

As Christians, we're to subject ourselves to the type of government, *that in our day and over our locale*, happens to be in power. In America, we're blessed to live under a constitutional and democratic republic - **a government that requires citizen participation.**

That's why a Christian in America has a divine calling to be involved politically... *to vote, perhaps run for office, or serve in our military, certainly voice your positions, contact your representatives, sign petitions, pray for your officials, march in the streets at times...*

*For a government of the people, by the people, and for the people to work, its people have to be involved.*

Now does this mean we should allow politics to hijack the mission of the Church? Certainly not!

The church's primary focus is always to *dispense grace and preach the Gospel*. We're a *heavenly entity with a spiritual agenda*. It's been said, **"We should stay focused on fishing for men, not cleaning up the pond."**

It's a tragedy when a church becomes the arm of one political party. I want people of all political persuasions to come to CCSM and hear God's Word.

If we get identified with any one political party, we've hindered our mission. Our allegiance is to God alone!

But the Church should teach its members that part of Christian discipleship is to be a good citizen and bring Christian values to bear in the public square. It's been said, "Evil prospers when good people do nothing."

Christians can't allow themselves to be canceled by those who oppose us. Let's use our right to speak out. Jesus intends for His followers to influence the culture.

As salt flavors food, as light drives out darkness - we should impact the world around us. All Christians need to be involved in government to the extent that we can.

*At the very least we should vote...* and not just vote, but vote for candidates who best support biblical values. Here are a few of the questions you should ask before any election in the upcoming few years...

*Does the candidate support the right to life for unborn babies? Does he or she uphold and protect the biblical definition of marriage? Will the candidate's healthcare and economic policies help all Americans? Will he or she pursue equal rights for all racial groups? Does the candidate have the courage to stand up to America's enemies, and stand by America's allies, around the world? Will he or she seek the fair and compassionate treatment of immigrants? Will this candidate uphold the law and support good policing?*

I realize what usually dominates the thinking of most voters is what's best for the health of my 401K? But we should all read Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." If we value at all God's blessing on our nation; then we need to prioritize the issues that matter most to Him.

Well, that's verses 1-2, the **fundamentals** of government - but notice verses 3-4, the **function** of government. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil." According to our text, government's function is twofold: **punish the criminal** and **protect the community**. Or said another way, the government's goal is to **resist evil** and **reward good**.

The word "**rulers**" in verse 3 can also be translated, "**law enforcement officials, or police officers, or cops.**"

Prison reform advocate, Chuck Colson, once wrote, "**After the Fall, a second task was given to government: restraining evil. Public order must now be maintained through coercion. The angel who drove Adam and Eve out of the garden with flaming sword in hand was the first cop on the beat. In Romans 13, Paul says God has given the state the power of the sword to punish evildoers.**" Policemen are also "**God's ministers.**" *Even the fellow who clocked me doing 43 in a 30 MPH Zone.*

Did you hear about the police officer who was hired by a ritzy restaurant to enforce its dress code?

A guy with his girl walked up to the door wanting a table. He wore a nice suit, but had no tie. The officer told him he would need a necktie. The fellow got angry. He started arguing, but the officer held his ground.

Well, the man goes back out to his car, pulls out a set of jumper cables, and wraps them around his neck. He walks back into the restaurant, and shouts at the officer, "Now I'm wearing a necktie!" That's when the officer warns, "Yea, but you better not start anything."

And this is the job of government, not only to *make rules*, but to quell rebellion and *enforce those rules!*

And it's a good thing... for man is sinful by nature, and without the use of force to bridle his rebellion, his lawlessness will run rampant. Jesus warned us in Matthew 24:12 that in the last days "lawlessness will abound." This is exactly what's happening today... By all counts, violent crime is on the upswing.

And it is the job of a well-funded police, as "God's minister," to restrain evil and protect the community.

Certainly, there are some Barney Fifes out there, a few want-to-be-somebodies - that when you pin a badge on their chest the power goes to their heads...

And events over the last year have also proven that putting on a police uniform doesn't clear that person's heart of racism. Bigoted people have no business being police. Part of the job is enforcing the law without prejudice. If an officer can't guarantee that, he should never have the job. One racist cop is one too many...

Yet the statistics I've read say that the vast majority of police in America and here in Gwinnett County are good police who do their job without racial prejudice.

Don't think for a second *they* can be replaced with *crisis counselors* or *community advocates*. Police need to be funded, trained, and equipped to do their job. But most importantly they need respect. Remember, the Bible calls the police *"God's minister to you for good."*

That's why the next time a nice officer pulls you over for going too fast, let him know you appreciate him. He's *God's minister - on the job serving you.*

Treat him or her with respect and you might just get a warning... *or when you call him "God's minister", he might think you're drunk and arrest you for DUI...*

But either way, **respect the police.**

Sadly, because of the actions of several bad police over the last year, our society has allowed the majority of our police force to suffer an incredible amount of disrespect. It's to the point where we can't find new officers. Blue Flu is now a worse pandemic than Covid.

I'm afraid we've believed too many half-truths. The vast majority of police are folks who want to serve their fellow man and make their world a safer, better place.

Notice what Paul says in verse 3, *"Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good."* Generally speaking, **this is true.** Drive the speed limit, and you shouldn't have to panic when you see a squad car.

Just do the right thing, and you'll have nothing to fear.

Stay out of the wrong places at the wrong times, and you won't have to worry a lot about the police. There're after *bad guys* doing *bad stuff*... they're not after you.

*Generally speaking, that is...* I once attended church in downtown Atlanta. After the service, a buddy and I came back to my car. We were sitting in the front seat talking about what we'd learned about the Lord when suddenly a policeman comes up from behind me and sticks his revolver through my window, right under my nose. He told us to put our hands on the dashboard.

Believe me, we did! *I obeyed God's minister!*

Trust me, it was a case of mistaken identity. Someone had been breaking into cars in the parking lot where we were sitting, and the cop thought it might be us. After grilling us with a few questions, he decided we were in the clear and apologized for the scare.

Maybe you've had a scare or two with the police, but what the Bible says is true, generally speaking, if you do what's right, you have nothing to fear from the cops.

Yet verse 4 tells us, **"But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."** Here we learn that God has given the government and its enforcers the right to bear arms.

In ancient Rome, their governors wore swords on their side. The sword was a symbol of their authority to punish by death. It's interesting in Genesis 9 when God first establishes human government, the one explicit responsibility mentioned is the administration of capital punishment. God told Noah and his sons, **"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man."**

Remember, humans are made in the image of God, thus to destroy a person's life is to mar God's image. And in God's eyes, it's a penalty deserving of death.

Capital punishment is not just a deterrent to murder, it upholds human dignity - that man is not just another animal. We're special and bear God's likeness. Take the life of an innocent human, and you defile what's sacred.

This is why a **just war** is often a necessity in a fallen world. What police do on a local level, our military does on a global level. When evil people plot genocide or oppress and kill innocent people - they need to be stopped - even if it takes killing them to stop them.

I believe pacifism is not just a bad idea, it's theologically heretical. Pacifism assumes all men are good at heart. If left on their own, they'll do what's right, but that's not biblical. The Bible teaches that humans are evil by nature, and if unopposed, we'll act selfishly.

It's a Christian's duty to confront evil with righteousness. To ignore the evil in the world is to allow it to flourish. This is why America needs a strong and ready military. Verse 4 tells us government is "an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."

This Fourth Of July don't just cook out and set off fireworks, but pray for the men and women who serve as United States soldiers, standing against evil in this world and defending the freedoms that we enjoy.

And then verse 5 tells us, "Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake."

Notice the fear of punishment shouldn't be the only reason we obey the authorities. We should also comply out of respect for their position.

I need to drive 30 in the school zone, not just to avoid a ticket, but because it's the law imposed by people trying to do what's right and protect children.

*Of course, my tickets says it happened on June 21, when school was out... But that's another subject...*

But here's Paul's point, Christians of all people should demonstrate respect for authority! For how will **the world** recognize and respect God's law - *an authority they can't see* - if **Christians** don't recognize and respect the authorities that can be seen.

When I coach Little League, I teach my guys it's not whether you're actually safe or out... **what matters is whether the umpire calls you safe or out. As long as the ump is honestly trying his best, we need to respect his position even when we don't agree with his call.**

And the same is true of politicians...

We're not always going to agree with their calls, but we can respect their position. Some laws are just plain stupid, but out of respect we still need to obey them.

I still can't believe we had to buy a permit from Gwinnett County to build a baptismal pool, or plant trees in the parking lot to curb global warming. In both cases, I was tempted to take shortcuts, but we respected the laws of the land. God set up government *to keep civilization civil*, and Christians need to obey.



Several years ago, I was driving to a country church in Arkansas where I was scheduled to speak. As I topped a hill, a wild pig ran across the highway. The animal glanced off my bumper... Damage to the rental car was minimal, but I could see the pig was injured.

When I told the pastor what happened, he got this concerned look on his face. He told me wild pigs were a protected species. I needed to report it to the State Wildlife Commission, and I'd probably be fined \$500.

Well, I was tempted not to call. The last thing I wanted was a \$500 fine. But I know the Bible. It's my duty to obey. I did block my number so they couldn't identify the caller, but I reported the accident. *Yet when I got back to Georgia, guess what was in the mail?*

I had a bill for \$500 from the Arkansas Wildlife Commission. At first, I wondered how they knew I was involved; then it hit me, **"The pig must've squealed!"**

Well, **we've discussed the government's fundamentals and function** - finally let's talk about its **funding**. Our responsibility to the government is *to obey and to pay!*

Verses 6-7, **"For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."**

First, notice the two words used in verse 7 - **"taxes"** and **"customs."** The Greek word **"taxes"** refers to an annual tax - **similar to our income or real estate tax...**

The word translated "**custom**" refers to a random tax, such as a tax on goods - like a sales tax...

And Paul says pay them both!

Notice verse 6 drops a bombshell. Not only are our politicians and police officers "**God's ministers**," but IRS agents are also called "**God's ministers**" - amazing!

It reminds me of the fellow who walked into the IRS office and just sat down. The receptionist asked if she could be of any help. He replied, "**No, I just want to see the people I've been working for all these years.**"

Government serves a vital function ordering society, and protecting the population, but for it to function it has to be funded. Thus, God tells us to pay our taxes!

Hey, there's no way around this... I've looked for a loophole. The Bible teaches, and the early church practiced - the payment of taxes. I'm sure some of you might ask, "**But what if the government spends our tax money foolishly or immorally... are we still suppose to pay the taxes?**" And the answer is an adamant, **YES!**

*Do you think for a moment that all the taxes paid to Nero were used to open Christian schools and old folks' homes? You're dreaming! A portion of Rome's tax base was spent on wild orgies and pagan idolatry - *circuses and carnivals*. Yet Paul paid them anyway!*

Here's how I view this - I sign my 1040 Form, seal the envelope, drop it in the mailbox, and from then on God holds the politicians responsible for how the money gets spent... **I have done my duty.** My God-given responsibility is to pay

my taxes. God holds the government responsible for how the money gets spent.

It's interesting, but taxes in the Roman Empire were more exorbitant than those Americans pay today - yet the early Christians paid every single dime required.

Second Century church leader, Tertullian, made this observation, "What the Romans lost by the Christians refusing to bestow gifts on their pagan temples, they gained by their conscientious payment of taxes."

Government is ordained by God and funded by us!

Let me just say it straight out, **if you cheat on your income tax, you are sinning against God!** *Take a deduction you're not allowed... fudge on an expense report... hide reportable income...* and you're not just bending the rules, you're sinning against God.

I believe in taking every deduction allowable. I don't want to pay the government one dime more than I'm required, but I need to pay them every dime I owe.

The Internal Revenue Service may never audit you - but one day, each one of us will be audited by God.

I've heard the IRS has what they call a *Conscience Fund*, where they deposit anonymous payments made by people who felt guilty for cheating on their taxes.

One letter to the Conscience Fund read, "Dear Sir: My conscience has been bothering me so I've enclosed \$175, which I owe in back taxes." At the bottom of the letter there

was a P.S., *"And if my conscience still bothers me, I'll send in the rest."*

Hey, I've discovered that a *guilty conscience* makes for a *terrible roommate*. A little extra *piece of the pie* is just not worth my *peace of mind*. It's been said, *"A clean conscience makes for a soft pillow."*

And taxes are the other reasons we all should vote... To pay taxes and not vote, is like buying groceries you don't eat, or buying tickets to a game you don't attend. Taxes are the dues you pay so you can cast a ballot.

Well, happy Fourth Of July. What better day to examine our citizenship. As Christians, we are *citizens of heaven*, but we are also *citizens on earth*. Being a good Christian and a good American go together.

Our obligation extends to both God and country.

So **vote, obey the laws, respect the cops, pay your taxes** (all of them), **and pray for the American GI** still stuck in Afghanistan, or the Army Ranger on the bombing raid in Syria, or the Marine sniper tracking pirates in Somalia. Pray for all of our soldiers fighting terrorism abroad and keeping the peace at home.

May God bless you, and may God bless America.