



Christianity & Politics

"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. — John 17:14

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. — Romans 13:1-4

Perhaps it's especially hard for Christians who are fortunate enough to live in a democracy affording them the opportunity to vote and have a say in who is elected, but such earthly influence is, in reality, only an illusion if we do not recognize the greater spiritual Authority at work. In Paul's opening point on how Christians are supposed to related to governments and rulers, he qualifies "*the governing authorities*" as "*established by God*", "*a minister of God*", and God's "*avenger*". Paul even goes so far to state, "*whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God*". Paul is not providing his own commentary or suggestion, what many scholars would identify as "sanctified opinion", but directly stating this as non-negotiable from God's Word.

American Christians in particular are prone to elevate what they call their "God-given constitutional rights as an American" to such a degree that they begin to erode their higher calling to put into practice God's Word—even in politics. When we strongly dislike a particular leader, movement or political party, we rarely seem to act and trust in the fact that, "*For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God*". If Christians truly believed and put this into practice from the outset, one wonders how their behavior would change when it comes to those times

they interface directly with government or participate in the process. Because it is so rare that we can discern any difference between a “Christian” political action committee or lobbying group from any other, which explains why “Christian” has largely become just a label to identify the way a particular demographic votes. How rarely we seem to proceed from the foundation provided by Christ Himself that we “*are not of this world, even as I am not of this world*” (Jn. 17:14) and that “*My kingdom is not of this world*”. (Jn. 18:36)

The Minimum Requirements

But beyond establishing the doctrinal fact that such authorities are divinely established, Paul provides a practical application pertaining to our *behavior*. He explains that there are not only consequences for disobedience to the basic, earthly rules enforced by those occupying positions of earthly authority, but that this is precisely the reason God put them into place. By contrasting the consequences for good versus bad earthly conduct, the first point Paul establishes is that when it comes to obedience to the minimum earthly standards, Christians are supposed to be on their best behavior, and if they are not, they will reap what they sow. At the very minimum, Christians are model citizens who should expect the same consequences for disobedience as everyone else.

Of course, some of you are already countering, “Then why are there so many governments and rulers who are ‘unfriendly’ to Christians?”

First of all, we have to live by the *whole counsel* of God’s Word. There are going to be situations which require us to interpret Romans 13 within the overall context of **ALL** of God’s Word when it comes to earthly authorities and why they are in power.

Second, there are several other situations we may have to take into account, according to Scripture, when it comes to why there are “unfriendly” governments or rulers:

- Sometimes it is a test from God, as we see in the ten days of testing assigned to the church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:10.
- Sometimes it is a judgment of God, as when He used Assyria as His tool of judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel, and Babylon against the southern kingdom of Judah.

- Sometimes, as we learn from studying the subject throughout God’s Word, it is God enacting His principle that nations get the leaders they deserve.

In any case, the biblical mandate is for Christians to endure the circumstances, trusting in the greater authority of God over and above the earthly situation, and to avoid bringing about *justified* punishment on themselves.

“But,” some will argue, “what if a government or ruler is openly *opposed* to Christ?”

Again, we have to live according to the *whole counsel* of God’s Word. When they were commanded to cease teaching in Jesus’ name, what was Peter’s response on behalf of the Apostles? “*We must obey God rather than men*”. (Acts 5:29) And when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were commanded to worship the king’s idol?

“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” — Daniel 3:17-18

When or if a Christian must cross such a line, Scripture is clear when an intractable stand must be made. Until such time, even as it is getting darker and darker spiritually, and more and more of our “rights” are eroding away, we are instructed to avoid *justified* punishment for disobeying the minimum earthly rules such earthly authorities enforce. Or as Paul stipulates, “*for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*”. (Rom. 13:4) Paul is not saying to blindly obey earthly authorities no matter what they demand, but rather *not to practice evil*—do not bring about justified wrath upon yourself for breaking the law.

A More Stringent Requirement

Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. — Romans 13:5-7

But notice how Paul segues into the next point by beginning, “***not only*** because of wrath, ***but also for*** conscience’ sake”. Christians do not just meet the minimum requirements to avoid justified punishment, but behave in concert with a higher *spiritual* minimum standard.

In movies and cartoons, the conscience is often represented by a little angel who pops up on one shoulder, and a little devil on the other. “That’s not nice!” says the angel, while the devil counters, “Go ahead and do it!” Human beings, regardless of religious persuasion, are all born with some kind of notion of right and wrong. Everyone has the ability to reason and make a choice as to whether they will “do what is right” or “do what I want” in spite of knowing better.

A Christian conscience is predicated on something much higher than the earthly “minimum standards” inherent to everyone; a Christian conscience is formed around God’s Word. Our choice is “His way, or my way”, “His desire, or my desire”, “His name, or my name”, “His glory or my glory”.

A very long time ago, around the time of Lincoln’s re-election, I worked implementing the first generation of computers in the local county court system. I learned very quickly that “legal” and “illegal” often have very little to do with “right” and “wrong”. What is acceptable and allowed by the world’s standards is not automatically an acceptable and allowed standard for Christians according to God’s Word. And I am not just referring to the bigger issues such as same-sex marriage or abortion.

There may be a thousand legal loopholes when it comes to contracts and agreements where earthly law is concerned, but Christ established the greater standard, “*But let your statement be ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil*”. (Mt. 5:37) Legally there is no problem with divorce, but God’s Word instructs otherwise. (1 Co. 7:10-11) Whether we chose (or not) to obey is whole other issue, but God’s minimum standards by which a Christian conscience is supposed to operate is much higher than that of the world because the world will make allowance for sin—a Holy God cannot.

This goes to the core of living **IN** the world but not **OF** the world, and to the issue of our personal witness. It should be shame-inducing for every Christian when an unbeliever seems to know better than a believer how Christians are supposed to act. Even non-Christians know that Christians should not smoke or get drunk, cheat on their spouse, embezzle at work, or live according to the pleasures of the flesh. They even know that Christians do not cheat on their taxes, something Paul highlights in this second point!

What is the first and foremost way that Christians can be a visible witness to earthly authorities? Good or bad, corrupt or ethical, there is one common denominator that binds *all* earthly rulers and governments together—*money*. Even an unfriendly legislator

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or governor will say, “I don’t like what those Christians stand for, but they sure do pay their taxes on time.”

But notice that paying taxes is the *minimum* standard—there is yet a *higher* Christian standard by which we operate:

Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. — Romans 13:7

We are provided with a list of behaviors which elevate us beyond the bare minimum. A Spirit-directed conscience acts according to a higher standard than the boundaries of minimum earthly behavior. We are not condescending, but respectful; we are not derisive and insulting, but polite and considerate; we do not embrace the “right” of free speech to say anything and everything any way we want to say it, but filter our responses with courtesy and due respect.

not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. — 1 Peter 3:9

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. — 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. — Romans 12:17

“Oh, but you’re such an idealist! How I wish I could live in your world of mutual respect and admiration!” Again, look at the *whole* counsel of God’s Word. What immediately follows Paul’s instruction in Romans 12:17 quoted above?

***If possible**, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. — Romans 12:18*

We cannot control the consciences and behavior of others, but we are absolutely commanded to take charge of our own. We not only abide by the minimum earthly standards, but put into practice the higher standard of God’s Word—*regardless* of whether it is received by others as we would wish.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. — Romans 12:21

Christians *never* act as the world acts.

The Highest Requirement

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. — Romans 13:8-10

Notice how Paul transitions from the previous point, "*Render to all what is due them*" (Rom. 13:7) by beginning this third point with, "*Owe nothing to anyone except...*" Christians may live under the law of the land, but ultimately they live under a much higher law as citizens of heaven—the law of love, and what they owe is far greater than just money.

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." — John 13:35

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. — John 14:15

Notice that Paul does not quote from the First Tablet, those commandments which pertain to loving God; he only quotes from the Second Tablet, the proof of our love for others by how we treat them.

Christians should never have a problem avoiding justified punishment for disobedience to the minimum requirements of the earthly law, and should never hesitate in allowing their Spirit-filled conscience to choose the higher standard of God's Word, because theirs should be the highest standard of all: "*Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law*".

God is the greater authority behind all earthly authorities, therefore *His* law supersedes them all. If we attain the highest standard of God's love through obedience to His Word, everything else naturally fits into place. We do not have to struggle with exercising our biblical conscience to counter the world's lower standards; we would never fear bringing about justified punishment on ourselves for civil disobedience.

The Behavioral Foundation

Paul's first point in verses 1-4 addresses basic, minimum behavior. In his second point in verses 5-7, the issue is escalated to the higher standard of a Spirit-filled conscience acting from a stricter biblical standard than the earthly minimum. And in his third point

in verses 8-10, it turns out that the true biblical “minimum standard” is actually the highest standard of them all. Each of Paul’s teaching points takes us to a progressively higher level of behavior.



We are not merely commanded to apply the law of love to individuals, but to governments and rulers as well! Our “God-given American constitutional rights” do not provide some kind of loophole to allow us to act and behave differently when it comes to politics. Biblical, Christian, Christ-like love never ceases to be practiced, even when the object is earthly authorities.

And yet it does not take one very long to peruse so-called “Christian” political websites much less many of our individual “friends” on Facebook to find an exhaustive example of Christians failing to “*render all that is due them*”—showing the very minimum of respect, but also obviously failing to attain to the highest standard of God’s love. I am not saying Christians cannot have a voice, only that they have guidelines which far exceed what the world allows.

*Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; **love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,** does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. — 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

How many Facebook postings, Internet forums, sermons and/or website articles have you seen or heard just on the subject of President Obama alone which conform to the biblical standard of love? Again, I am not saying Christians have no right to speak out, only that when they do so, it is according to a higher standard which visibly and demonstrably sets them apart from the world.

The Big Finish

Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. — Romans 13:11-14

Notice all the references to time, especially “...*knowing the time...for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.*”

Jesus did not rapture you yesterday. (Today is not over, yet, so I cannot speak for today.) Therefore you are one day nearer His Return than ever before. You did not die and go to be with the Lord yesterday, so today you are one day older and closer to inevitable human expiration. Either way, “*salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.*”

One of the reasons Christians live according to a Spirit-filled conscience and fulfill the higher standard God’s law of love is that they do not live for this world, but always in the shadow of knowing that today may be their last day here. And how would we live—how would we behave differently if we truly embraced the reality that whether by Rapture or Resurrection we are presently even closer to transitioning from this life to the next? We would completely dispose of all worldly behavior in our life.

*Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. **But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.** — Romans 13:13-14*

I would argue that other than driving while intoxicated, none of these behaviors are “illegal” by the world’s standards and, in fact, acceptable as long as someone else is not physically harmed in the process. And there is no doubt that, like Paul’s quoting from the Second Tablet in his establishment of the fulfillment of the whole law through love, we cannot engage in *any* of these behaviors without detriment and hurt to others. They are the precise antithesis of the behaviors which typify biblical love.

Christians do not live for this life, but always in the shadow of the next. Christians belong to the light, not the dark. Christians are spiritually awake, not asleep. Christians *prove* all these things by their behavior.

When It Comes to Politics...

- (v.1-4) Christians avoid civil punishment for their own wrongdoing, disobedience, or sin.
- (v.5-7) Christians should be living according to a biblical conscience which always does the right thing according to God's Word and holds itself accountable to a higher standard than the world's.
- (v.8-10) Christians should be fulfilling the law by fulfilling the higher requirements of biblical love.
- (v.11-14) Christians don't live in the flesh pursuing the pleasures of this life, but in the Spirit knowing that today could be the day they meet their Savior either by Resurrection or Rapture.

*"Let your light shine before men **in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father** who is in heaven. — Matthew 5:16*

Again, I am not at all saying that Christians cannot be politically active or make their concerns heard, simply that when we do so, it should be within these guidelines so that we cannot possibly be mistaken for just another political faction. We are supposed to be a witness to the Father not only to individuals, but the entire world—even to the institutions of government. Ultimately, a Christian's behavior mirrors their speech—they live by the Spirit, *not* the carnal flesh.

When we look and act just like any other political group, we might win an election, but we have lost our true witness and purpose.

In Him,

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