

Citizen Christian: The Role of Government, part 1

Romans 13:1-7

MPS Christians recognize government as a servant of God's authority for the good of people to display His glory on earth.

OBJ Every person can understand the government is God's ordained servant of authority by four clarifications.

INTRO In July 1999, Christin and I traveled to Russia to finalize the adoption of our son, Joshua Michail. That would be the first of two international government exposures that we would experience for the purpose of adoption. We landed in Moscow, traveled to Volgograd, formerly called Stalingrad, a historical museum of past-tense, rusting, Russian-glory following WWI. This was our first time to travel internationally. Russia in 1999 was a country desperately trying to maintain its heritage while transitioning to capitalism, but the posture of the people reflected a desperate suffrage under the lingering oppression of a communistic regime's ravaging devastation.

The Scriptures establish four realms of authority that God ordains in the world; individual^{Gen1:27-28}, family^{Gen2:18-25;Eph5:22-6:4}, government^{Rom13:1-7}, and church^{Eph3:10;Heb13:17}. The next two weeks are really one sermon in two-parts, the role of government, and the Christian as a citizen, or relationship to the government. Today we begin with the role of government.

Christians recognize government as a servant of God's authority for the good of people to display His glory on earth.

Note: People, at times, inquire about resources that I refer to or use. A complete Bibliography of sources, along with my Sermon Manuscript that cites those sources can be found on on my website for anyone who is interested.

READ Romans 13:1-7

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Romans 13:1-7

By God's design of government, He ordains to bestow on all people the common grace of His justice, peace and prosperity. This is why Paul exhorts Christians to submit themselves to governing authorities; they are for our good. This we know; that all authority is from God, so our submission to earthly authority recognizes that they are His agents for the good of people. Paul goes on to outline their role in handling authority and how it serves His purposes on earth. [Scripture is neither vague nor unclear on the role of government; government is God's servant for our good.](#)

OBJ My aim today is to set forth [the role of government as God's servant of authority by four important clarifications.](#)

God's Servant of Authority

Government is the institution by God's designation to hold and exercise authority on earth. It is important to begin here because one must rightly understand the authority that is given to the government. Author Dave Miller states, "God has ordained the state as a delegated authority; it is not autonomous."¹ Christians recognize government authority not because it is inherent to them, but because God bestows it on them. This is important to establish first because it serves as the foundation of Paul's argument and appeal to Christians to submit to government authority. [Government does hold authority, but it is neither inherent nor autonomous; authority is vested² in government by God.](#)

¹ Dave Miller. [God and Government](#). (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 2017), p5.

² Abraham Kuyper, [Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto](#). (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 47. Kuyper uses "vested".



TRANS Hear this explanation from an American Founding Father.

Thomas Paine, the English-American political activist, philosopher, and revolutionary, in the summer of 1776, penned what has become a timeless classic entitled, *Common Sense*. His writing inspired the Thirteen Colonies to fight for and declare their independence from Great Britain. His begins by overviewing the role of government, echoing Paul's teaching.

"Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages (relations) intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher.

Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one: for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries by a government, which we might expect in a country without government, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer! For were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other lawgiver; but that not being the case, he finds it necessary to surrender up a part of his property to furnish means for the protection of the rest; and this he is induced to do by the same prudence which in every other case advises him out of two evils to choose the least. Wherefore, security being the true design and end of government, it unanswerably follows that whatever form thereof appears most likely to ensure it to us, with the least expense and greatest benefit, is preferable to all others.

Here then is the origin and rise of government; namely, a mode rendered necessary by the inability of mortal virtue to govern the world; here too is the design and end of government, freedom and security."³

It is critical that we begin by establishing government's role, because as Abraham Kuyper, renowned Dutch Reformed pastor and leading figure in education, politics and theology of late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century, states, "At issue is the principle of authority."⁴ The issue of government is the issue of authority. This principle of authority is important to begin with because the source of authority determines the purpose of government, the scope and extent of domain, how an office should be obtained and held, how one should conduct themselves in offices,⁵ and, ultimately, the origin of rights for the people. If the government is its own source of authority, then whoever holds the office determines of the rights of the individual, to what extent they can exercise those rights, and how they should be administered and secured. But, "A state is not an end in itself," ...but "only a means to prepare for a communal life of a still higher order."⁶ Government exists for a higher purpose. [The Bible teaches that God vests government with His authority for His purposes.](#)

OBJ [The source of government's authority provides four important clarifications.](#)

First, government authority is not inherent. This means that just because one is in a position of or has gained power does not mean their authority comes from their power. Power exercised to establish a government does not determine that they have authority because of that power. [Government that is established by power and might is still accountable to God for the role it serves and the way it carries out its responsibilities, whether they acknowledge this or not.](#)

Second, government authority is not autonomous. This means that government cannot act in any way it pleases, but that it is accountable for its actions. [Government is accountable to God, first and foremost, for the way it governs people.](#)

Third, government authority is not, first and foremost, a product of the collective decision or will of a people. The way a government operates does not become the source of its authority. Again, Kuyper is helpful here when he states, "the various relationships that are manifest in the life of the state did not arise by agreement but were ordained as powers over us, apart from us, and for a sacred purpose."⁷ Kuyper goes on to state that this moral purpose for which the higher power

³ Thomas Payne, *Common Sense: Addressed to the Inhabitants of America*. (Coventry House Publishing, 2016), 1-2, 4.

⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto*. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 43.

⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto*., 44.

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, 43. Kuyper states, "Even the president of a republic, once he has been elected, is to act with the authority that is derived from God and not from those who voted for him."

⁷ Kuyper, 43.



willed the role of government cannot be omitted.⁸ Government serves at the head of state, which is a moral organism. The purpose of the moral organism is the establishment of that which is necessary to maintain what is right among the people. And the determination of what is right does not come from the people, but from the higher power. [God, who vests government with authority, is the One who establishes the “right-ness” of which government is responsible to maintain.](#)

Fourth, the state has a duty to exercise its authority because it is a governing body, not merely an administrative one.⁹ “Government is the servant of God in the sense that, willingly or unwillingly, it is and remains dependent on God. It received its power from him and it serves his counsel.”¹⁰ Recognizing their role and source of authority, [government must hold as its duty to ensure that the right for which they are established is the aim and end in all the exercise of their authority.](#)

Finally, Abraham Kuyper culminates his argument of governments authority by saying, “Essential is the belief that there is a God who has ordained principles of law and rightness, and justice that one must honor, and a government that one must obey.”¹¹ [The Bible makes clear that government is God’s servant with His vested authority to carry out His purpose of good for people on earth.](#)

[Christians recognize government as a servant of God’s authority for the good of people to display His glory on earth.](#)

ILLUS “Dicing with Death” is a documentary surveying the most dangerous roads in the world. It has become one of my favorites recently. One episode features the country of Myanmar, and centers around one driver, whose truck is obviously worse than a bag of rusty bolts, and the deplorable roads and driving conditions on the edge of 1,000’+ cliffs. The show follows him on a 60Km journey through the mountains to deliver his goods to market. For perspective, 60Km is roughly 38 miles. Conditions are so horrible that it takes two days of six to eight hours each of driving to complete the trip. When asked how he copes with it, he replies, “This is freedom. This is so much better than when we were an occupied country and had to depend on the government for everything. How can I complain?”

Remember, we are building a theology of, not outlining a political argument for, government. God ordained government as a realm of authority on earth to establish and maintain good and right in the world. As such, even government, which so often is riddled by and muddled in sin, is an agent of confronting the reality of sin in the world. But the way Christians relate to government is a testimony to our faith in God. We trust God in this. Government leaders will answer to God for how they carried out their responsibility; lawmakers will answer for their laws, law enforcement will answer for their justice, judges will answer for their judgments, and citizens will answer for their lawful or lawless-ness. Christians will answer too, not only for our earthly citizenship but for how we applied our heavenly citizenship while on earth. Christians should labor for justice in every realm as God’s good in the world. But in today’s world, we need to be very clear that we know what justice is, and what it is not. The Law of God is the foundation for all true justice, for law and order in the human realm. [Without God’s Law, true justice cannot exist and will not be obtained.](#)

Are politics, then, averse to or separate from the gospel? Absolutely NOT! Christ Jesus is Lord over the whole universe. God ordained how all things should work to the fulfillment of His will and good for people. Christians do not remove the gospel to discuss politics but bring the glory of God “front and center” for the honor of King Jesus. God’s glory is displayed in all creation for the good of mankind. Christians bear witness to King Jesus’ glory of true rightness, justice, peace and good for all people. [The gospel of Jesus Christ is the heart of our witness! A theological foundation should inform and fuel our engagement, as it shows us the critical and essential role of the Christian witness to King Jesus in the public square.](#)

⁸ Kuyper, 44.

⁹ Kuyper, 46. Kuyper states this to establish the government’s role.

¹⁰ Kuyper, 49.

¹¹ Kuyper, 52.

