

Citizen Christian: The Role of Government, part 2

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 for three responsibilities.

INTRO As we strive toward a Biblical theology of government, we must remember that as Christians our aim is always how we live by faith under the Lordship of Jesus Christ to bear faithful witness to His glory and good. This is the context of our passage, and the consuming aim of our lives.

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

Last week we covered the first portion of this sermon to establish the source of government authority and provided four clarifications of that authority. Government is one of four institutions of God's authority in the world.

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Last week we considered **the role of government as God's servant of authority. God is the source of government's authority on earth.** This principle of authority is important to begin with because the source of authority determines the purpose of government, the scope and extent of authority, how an office should be held and one should conduct themselves in office, and, ultimately, the origin of rights for the people. **Christians believe that government exists for a higher purpose; holding God's vested authority for His purposes.**

TRANS The Bible teaches that government is God's servant with His vested authority to carry out His purpose of good for people on earth. In this message we will focus on the responsibility of government as servants of God's authority.

OBJ **The role of government as the servant of God's authority can be understood by three responsibilities.**

1. **Servant of God's Authority for the good of people.** ...God's servant for your good.... **Rom 13:4**

Paul says that government is for our good. The "good" he references here is not simply by our own or the government's determination, but by God's determination. God desires good for all people, and He designated a way for it to be established and protected in the world through government. **So, what is this God's good that He desires for us?**

In America, the Law of God heavily influenced the foundation upon which the law was written, to determine what is "good". One modern scholar notes, "But the reality is unavoidable: Christianity had done great good for our nation."¹ Samuel Langdon, Harvard College President, delivered a sermon to the Massachusetts Congress one month after the commencement of the Revolutionary War, May 31, 1775, entitled, "Government Corrupted by Vice, and Recovered by

¹ Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo. One Nation Under God. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), p43. Bruce Ashford addresses the ends of this debate spectrum, acknowledging some "bypass the embarrassing wealth of patently religious language", while others "put too much stock in our nation's Christian identity and history, looking back to earlier days with a naive sense of nostalgia."



Righteousness". In his sermon he stated, "Thanks be to God that he has given us, as men, natural rights, independent of all human laws whatever...By the law of nature, any body of people, destitute of order and government, may form themselves into a civil society, according to their best prudence, and so provide for their common safety and advantage."² According to Langdon, "good" is the natural right, independent of human law, that God has given to all people. This is why American has been considered and called a Christian nation. Abraham Kuyper echoes this same intent when he defines a Christian nation as "a nation not without God"³. (And now for what may be the most controversial statement of this series.) It is accurate to say that America was founded as a Christian nation because God was recognized as the One who bestowed rights on people for the government to recognize. This in no way "hallows" America and was never intended to, it doesn't make those who purport this Nationalists, nor does it make us the aim nor the recipient of God's promises. What it does is to rightly recognize God's influence on the Founder's intentions to establish Him as the source of good for people.⁴ [America has been called a "Christian nation" to rightly state how the Law of God influenced the founding of America as good for her people.](#)

The Declaration of Independence acknowledges this; "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness-" "Rights that are "unalienable" are those that are not transferable to another or capable of being surrendered or repudiated."⁵ [Christians hold that we should not release inalienable rights of citizenship because we cannot.](#)

ILLUS Springfield SOGI Ordinance, 2013 – The effort to press this ordinance into law was a push to undo rights as inalienable in favor of government-determined, specialized rights. When you relinquish the value of inalienable rights as from God, government is left to make determinations that they are not authorized to make. [Christians are compelled by love to oppose actions that oppose God's law because it can never be true good for people.](#)

When rights get moved to be as from government, it is always bad for people. Dave Miller states, "When the government loses sight of the function for which it was created, citizens are hampered in their efforts to achieve the purpose for which they were created: to obey God."⁶ This is why the first and most important good that government must serve is the freedom of religion. This establishes their rightful place as servants, and not the source, of God's authority. When government assumes the position to bestow instead of recognize rights, the first to be infringed be the freedom of religion. Government cannot bestow rights onto any people, but they do try. Their job is to recognize the rights bestowed by God in creation. God gives His good to people by the rights He bestows upon us and authorizes government to recognize and defend. [The first and most important responsibility of government is to recognize and guard the rights of people bestowed by God.](#)

When rights are relinquished, it always makes bad for people. Allow me to clarify. Christians remain ready at all times to lay down our freedom of Christian liberty for the sake (mission) of the gospel, to bless, love or serve other people in Jesus' name. Also, we should be willing to personally relinquish our rights as citizens to serve the common good of others. But Christians never release the inalienable rights of people to the government, to replace what is every individual's responsibility by the chosen means of a few in control; we should not release our rights is because we cannot. We should not only oppose this but fight to ensure that it never occurs. [When Christians defend the inalienable rights of every person, we testify to God's goodness for people, and ever person's individual responsibility before God.](#)

How Christians regard inalienable rights serves for good because we recognize God's purpose for the role of government. As we acknowledged last week in establishing the source of government's authority, it serves to shape the conscience of

² Dave Miller. God and Government. (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 2017), p4.

³ Kuyper, 42.

⁴ Wayne Grudem. Politics According to the Bible" A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p64-65. Grudem gives ten questions that helpfully address this issue and what any reference to America as a Christian nation can and does mean.

⁵ Dave Miller. God and Government., p13.

⁶ Miller, p10.



individuals. This is what Paul recognizes in verse five. How the government exercises their authority should be a formative influence that shapes the conscience of its people for good. We often hear, “you can’t legislate morality”, and while this is true it can be terribly misleading. You cannot make a person moral or good by making or enforcing laws. But you can make force them to be bad when you legislate immorality. What must be done is to make good law that influences and shape culture for people. (The longer I live, the more I see the importance of this as a value.) One cannot escape the reality that the state is a moral organism. This strikes at the heart of the major schism in our nation today, defining what is good, right and just. When people submit to the government, it should influence their conscience to be shaped by God’s good for them. [Christians recognize that in this first responsibility of the state as for the good of people, at times we cannot make or create good, but we can push back to resist or at least hold the line against what is not good, immoral or just plain wicked.](#)

2. **Servant of God’s Authority for the [security of people.](#)**

“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.”

Rom 13:4

Security and protection for the good of its people becomes a governments principle task and responsibility. Peter establishes this role along with Paul.^{2Peter2:14} “The Founding Fathers of America recognized that “the purpose of government is to protect its citizens from criminals within and enemies without—what John Jay called ‘domestic and foreign aggressions – enabling them to pursue a virtuous life.’”⁷ Author Dave Miller writes, “The Founding Fathers, en masse, believed that the role of government was to protect it citizens.”⁸ [Government is to secure the rights of its citizens that it recognizes are from God.](#)

Security of people holds two forms. First, security means [sovereignty as a nation among the nations](#). This level of security includes the establishment of national security, defines what citizenship means, and how immigration occurs. Paul and Jesus recognized the sovereignty of the nation in the way they directed people to honor the rulers^{Matt22:21}, in addition to the Old Testament establishment of nation rights and security. The Bible also repeatedly recognizes national citizenship as a distinguishing factor among people, even by recognition of foreigners and sojourners, and the process of immigration, or being welcomed by and becoming a citizen of a foreign nation. [Governments are responsible to secure their people by securing their sovereignty among nations, properly guarding their borders and citizenship.](#)

Second, security includes the [safety and rights of the people of the nation](#). God ordains governments that people should be able to live their life in peace, without threat of attack or abuse. And this right includes not only of persons, but of their property as well. This form of security means justice within the nation by punishing law breakers. As Bruce Ashford states, “It is, in fact, the duty of kings to defend justice with physical force (Psalm 144:1).”⁹ Justice requires the establishment of and enforcement of law and order, that provides and guards the peace within the nation. Francis Schaeffer states, “God has ordained the state as a delegated authority; it is not autonomous. The state is to be an agent of justice, to restrain evil by punishing the wrongdoer, and to protect the good in society.”¹⁰ This can take many forms, but one thing it must not do is cease to be vigilant in its execution. As one law enforcement officer once said to me, “Sometimes we win, often we do not, but if we can’t push evil back, we can at least hold it at bay.” [Governments are responsible to secure their people by establishing and guarding justice for both personas and property within their nation.](#)

One final aspect of security that is important. Jesus told his disciples to take up their swords because the world in which he was sending them was a dangerous place.^{Luke22:35-38} And as we learn in Romans, government wields the power of the sword for the security of its people. These do not stand in conflict but in harmony with one another. That the government is responsible to protect its people does not remove nor negate but heightens the responsibility of every citizen to defend themselves. It is the individual right of every person given by God to take up the sword ^{Luke22:35-38} that establishes the

⁷ Miller, p13.

⁸ Miller, p5.

⁹ Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo. [One Nation Under God.](#), p127.

¹⁰ Francis A. Schaeffer, [A Christian Manifesto.](#) (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1982), 91.



purpose of government to bear the sword. ^{Rom13:4} [The way that government is to secure its citizens is by guarding their God-ordained right to self-defense.](#)

TRANS You are not going to like this last one, but it in fact is Biblical.

3. [Servant of God's Authority by Taxation of people.](#)

"For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing." **Rom 13:6** God ordains governments to collect taxes for the financial system of support for the operation of the government. There is always great danger here because even though they often go together, money and power typically do not make a healthy mix. Though there is plenty of room for corruption, they are a necessity for governments to support their role. Not everything is the government's business to meddle or interfere. This is a lesson we would do well to learn today in the expectations we hold. Government is designed to provide for life but for prevention and removal of hindrances to our goodness, both in opportunity and advancement of life. Developing dependency on government for that which it was not designed to do or provide strips the dignity, value, ingenuity and ambition from people. [Government is responsible to collect taxes to fund that which guards and fosters the goodness of God for the good, well-being and advancement of its people.](#)

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CLOSE Freedom in this world as a basic human right reflects, though imperfectly, the ultimate freedom we receive by faith in Jesus. Christians should be the most ardent defenders of freedom on earth by our declaration of Jesus as Lord, who secured our freedom by His own blood. Freedom is established by the Law of God as the foundation for all true justice, for law and order in the human realm. [Without God's Law, freedom is not known, and true justice cannot exist and will not be obtained.](#)

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! And our theological foundation informs and fuels our engagement, as it shows us the critical and essential role of the Christian witness to King Jesus in the public square.](#)

