

Church & State

Romans 13:1-7



Apostle Paul (~ 5 – 67 A.D.)
By Andrei Rublev (1410)

Church & State Introduction



Church & State Introduction

- In **Romans 1 – 11**, Paul described right belief.
- In **Romans 12 – 15**, he describes right conduct.
- One area of conduct that we Christians have to deal with is our relationship to human government.

Church & State

Introduction



It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the history of the interpretation of Romans 13:1–7 is the history of attempts to avoid what seems to be its plain meaning.

*– Douglas Moo,
Wheaton Graduate School*

Church & State Introduction

- We serve the King of Kings. (1 Tim 6:15, Rev 17:14, 19:15)
- Our citizenship is in heaven. (Philippians 3:20)
- Yet we live within earthly nations under always imperfect human governments.

Church & State Introduction

- Christ must have our first and complete loyalty.
- Still, human government is also instituted by God.
- Even Jesus made this point.

Church & State Introduction

John 19:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” ¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

Church & State Introduction

- Our passage from **Romans** will help us to be better citizens as well as better Christians.
- In truth, the two are only rarely at odds with each other.
- Let's read the paragraph, **Romans 13:1-7**.

Church & State 13:1-2



Church & State 13:1-2

- The key phrase here is “be subject to governing authorities.”
- There is a structure of rank that Christians must respect.
- This applies to the president or emperor as well as to the local bureaucrat or traffic cop.

Church & State 13:1-2

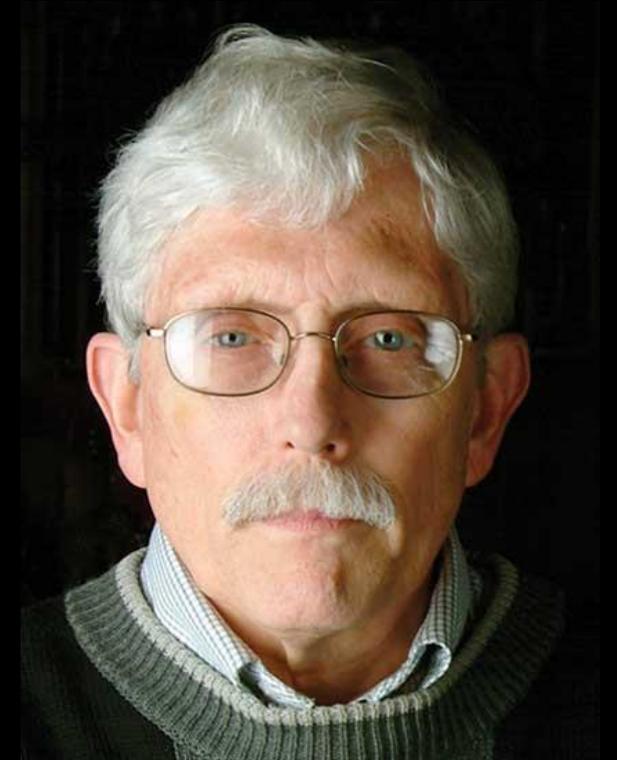
- As Paul instructs his helper Titus,
- **Titus 3:1-2** (NIV)

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

Church & State 13:1-2

We must remember that when Paul was writing this, Nero was on the Roman throne. While he had not yet turned into the evil anti-Christian emperor he was to become, there were definitely signs of anti-Christian activity in the empire ...

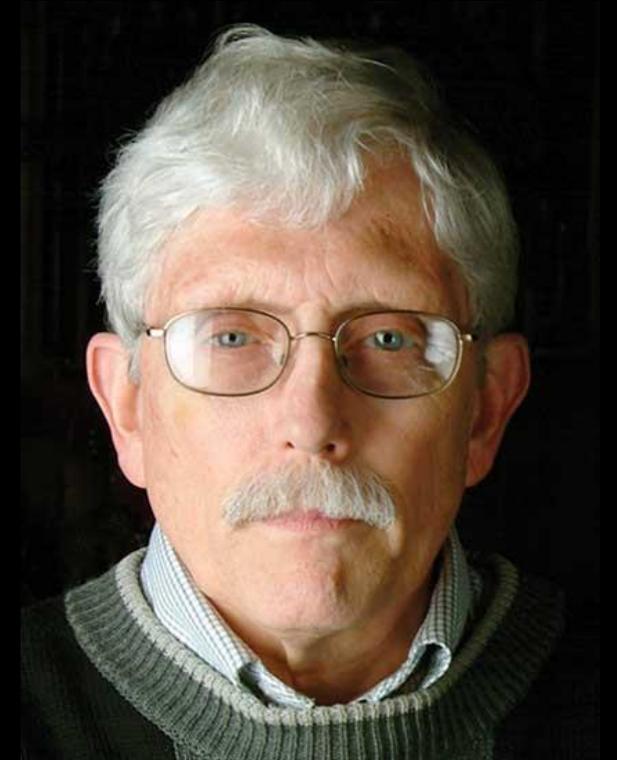
*– Grant Osborne,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*



Church & State 13:1-2

So Paul is not writing this under the kind of government many of us have grown up under, and he still calls upon people to submit.

*– Grant Osborne,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*



Church & State 13:1-2

- God ultimately governs the world.
- He has chosen to do so at this time by delegating authority to people within systems of government.
- We must be subject to that authority.

Church & State 13:1-2



Whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. To rebel against the authority is a serious matter because it means to rebel against what God has instituted, and Paul adds ...

*– Colin Kruse,
Melbourne School of Theology*

Church & State 13:1-2



... those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. The judgment is God's judgment, but, as Paul explains in the following verses, it is carried out by the authorities that he has appointed.

*– Colin Kruse,
Melbourne School of Theology*

Church & State 13:3-5



Church & State 13:3-5



Paul makes clear that government is ordained by God— indeed, that every particular governmental authority is ordained by God— and that the Christian must recognize and respond to this fact with an attitude of “submission” ...

*– Douglas Moo,
Wheaton Graduate School*

Church & State 13:3-5



Government is more than a nuisance to be put up with; it is an institution established by God to accomplish some of his purposes on earth.

*– Douglas Moo,
Wheaton Graduate School*

Church & State 13:3-5

- One of the main purposes of government is to maintain some level of law and order.
- It really is better for us to have authorities over us in this area than for each of us to have to fend for ourselves.

Church & State 13:3-5

- Our job is to stay within the law and do good.
- The authorities have the responsibility for public safety and the punishment of crimes.

Church & State 13:3-5

According to Paul, believers are to refrain from taking personal vengeance, and yet governing authorities are to repay evil with justice and to punish criminals in accord with their crime.

*– Thomas R. Schreiner,
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*



Church & State 13:3-5

- By maintaining public order, the authorities are acting as the servants of God.
- Submission to them is, therefore, a matter of conscience.
- It is also a practical way to stay out of trouble – and this includes the payment of taxes.

Church & State 13:6-7



Church & State 13:6-7

- If this sounds familiar, you may remember the story of the question that was posed to Jesus.

Church & State 13:6-7

- **Matthew 22:15-22** (ESV)

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ...

Church & State 13:6-7

- **Matthew 22:15-22** (ESV)

¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” ²¹ They said, “Caesar's.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” ²² When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

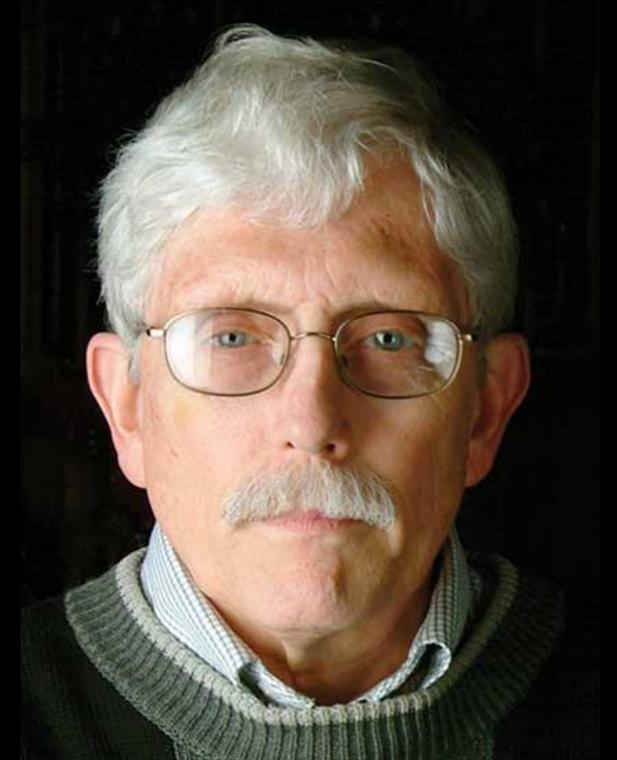
Church & State 13:6-7

- There is evidence that a tax revolt was brewing in Rome at this time, climaxing in 58 A.D.
- Paul may have heard of these sentiments, which could have influenced the Christians as easily as anyone else.

Church & State 13:6-7

Evil in government calls for prophetic warning rather than active revolt; that is, we must call them to accountability and tell them of judgment to come if they do not follow God and govern righteously (as indeed Jesus and the apostles as well as Jeremiah and Amos did with Israel's leaders).

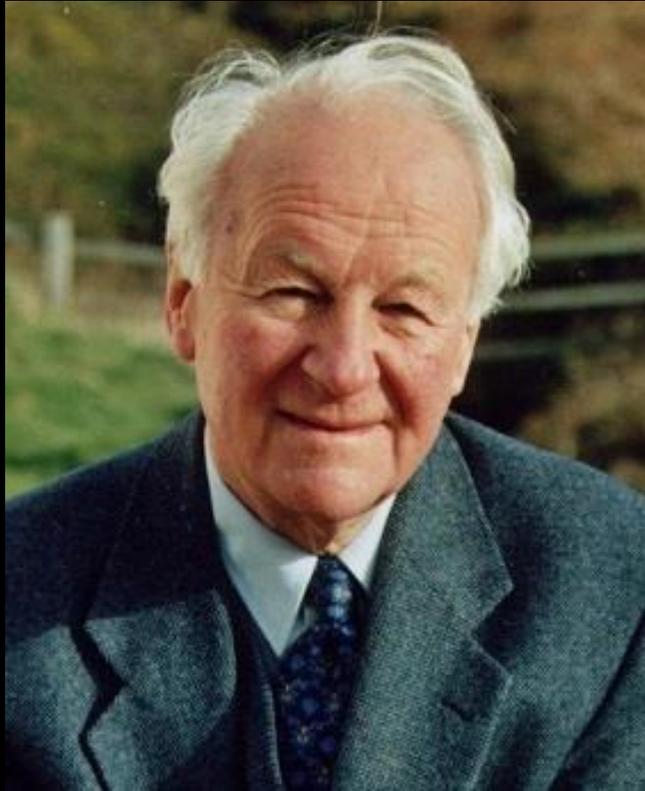
*– Grant Osborne,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*



Church & State 13:6-7

- Even when disobedience is necessary, it is to maintain obedience to God – not simply to rebel against rulers.
- John Stott makes this point well.

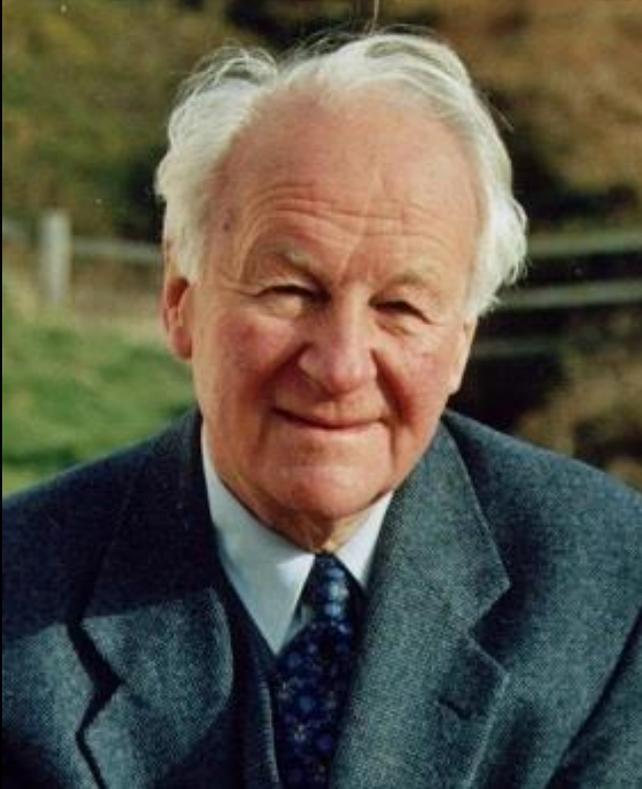
Church & State 13:6-7



Whenever laws are enacted which contradict God's law, civil disobedience becomes a Christian duty. There are notable examples of it in Scripture. When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn boys ...

*– John Stott (1921 – 2011),
All Souls Church, London*

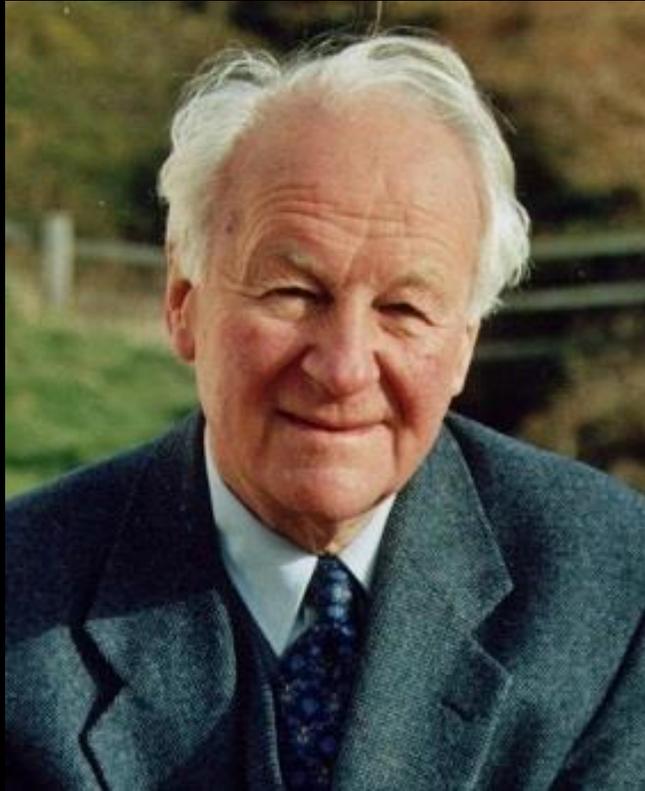
Church & State 13:6-7



When King Nebuchadnezzar issued an edict that all his subjects must fall down and worship his golden image ... When King Darius made a decree that for thirty days nobody should pray 'to any god or man' except himself ... And when the Sanhedrin banned preaching in the name of Jesus ...

*– John Stott (1921 – 2011),
All Souls Church, London*

Church & State 13:6-7



In each case civil disobedience involved great personal risk, including possible loss of life. In each case its purpose was 'to demonstrate ... submissiveness to God, not ... defiance of government.'

*– John Stott (1921 – 2011),
All Souls Church, London*

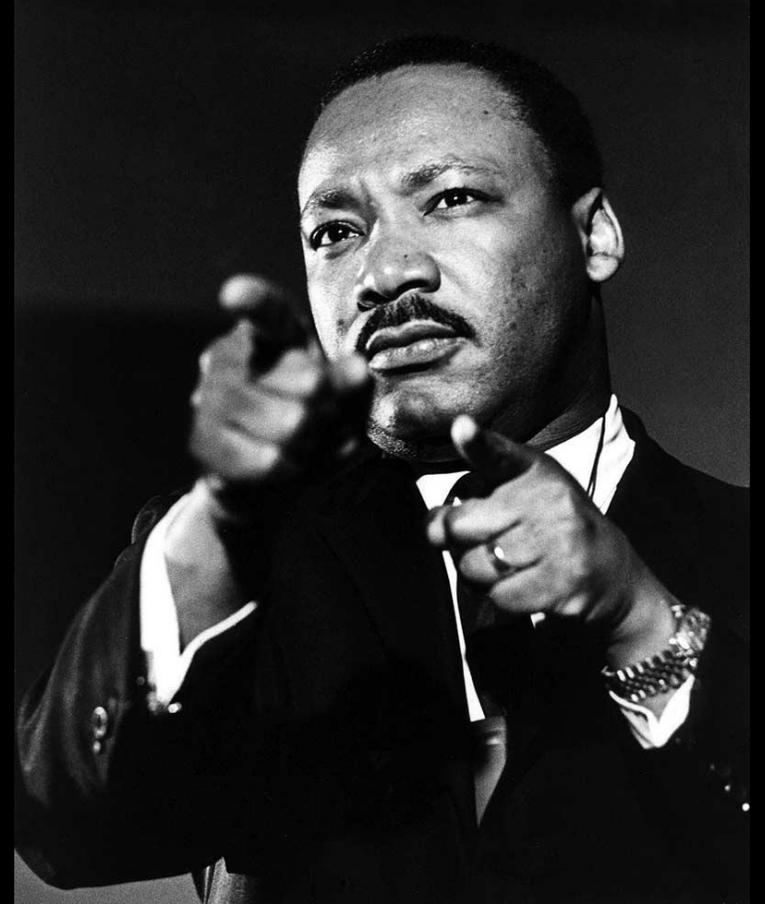
Church & State 13:6-7

- In our nation's recent memory, MLK is probably the probably the most obvious example of this.
- But remember, his non-violent convictions still got him into plenty of trouble.

Church & State 13:6-7

I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive. There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So like the Apostle Paul I can now humbly, yet proudly, say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

– Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 – 1968)

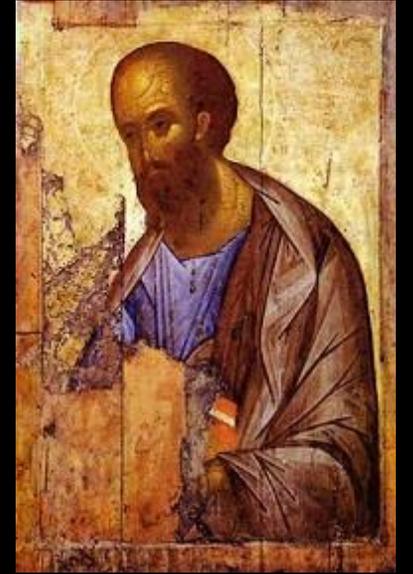


Church & State 13:6-7

- Our place as good citizens is maintained by paying taxes, showing respect and giving honor.
- The fact that we are citizens of heaven under the King of Kings should make us exemplary citizens on earth.

Church & State

Conclusions



Church & State Conclusions

- Perhaps one of the best ways we can show respect for our rulers is to pray for them.
- Paul makes this point elsewhere.

Church & State Conclusions

- **1 Timothy 2:1-4** (ESV)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Church & State Conclusions

- We should also consider where the church and the state share common goals.
- There are many areas in which we Christians can be of active service to our communities.

Church & State Conclusions

In many areas such as education, health and development, there is an overlap between the state's responsibility to provide for the welfare of its citizens and the church's desire to serve others. In these areas, the church and the state have often entered into constructive partnerships.

*– Yusufu Turaki,
Jos Theological Seminary, Nigeria*



Church & State Conclusions

- Finally, we have to be careful to maintain our prophetic role.
- The church should speak out in favor of good and against evil without showing any particular bias.

Church & State Conclusions

Rom. 13.1-7 is an “in the meantime” passage, written at a moment of some peace in the realm, and is guiding Roman Christians as to how to respond if the state is operating in a just and fair manner ...

*– Ben Witherington III,
Asbury Theological Seminary*



Church & State Conclusions

The legitimate claims of the state should not be resisted or rejected. But Roman officials are severely demoted in this passage, for they stand under the authority of the one true God and have power and authority only insofar as he has given it to them.

*– Ben Witherington III,
Asbury Theological Seminary*



Church & State Conclusions

- Our role within our nation and community is vital to the way we live out the reality of the gospel.
- Right belief and right conduct are deeply connected.

Church & State Conclusions

- Key verses: **Romans 1:16-17** (ESV)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”