

Romans 13:1-14 “The Christian and Society”

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Thesis: As a follower of Jesus, we are called to live in relationship to the government and the people of the culture that God has placed us so that we represent Him as ambassadors. What does it look like to be a Christ-like citizen?

Subject: The Christian and society

Object: Be a Christ-like citizen

1. Submit to Government [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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ Therefore you must be subject, not

only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. 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.

The general principle is stated, *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities* [1]. In essence, God's people should submit to their government regarding civil matters. In Jesus' and Paul's day, Jewish zealots refused to submit to any authority besides God, and refused to pay taxes to Rome. Nevertheless, Jesus taught, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's [Matt. 22:21]. Why should Jesus' followers submit to government? Here are three reasons:

Governments are established and appointed by God [1-2]

For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God [1]. God established and appoints governments [Gen. 9]. *Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God* [2], submitting to government flows from yielding to God. God's people should respect His plan even when they don't respect or agree with the leader. God used Alexander the Great and the Greek conquest to establish a common language that could transmit the New Testament; and the Romans to establish peace and roadways that allowed for the spread of the gospel.

Governments are to punish and deter evil [2-5].

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 [3]. As a general principle, you don't have to worry about the government or police if not violating the law. *For he is God's minister to you for good [4]* is the idea that police generally encourage citizens to do good. On the other hand, *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 [4]*. The sword was a symbol of Roman authority to punish. The purpose of punishment is to deter evil and protect people.

Governments are to receive taxes to provide protection and services [6-7]

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

Customs were a sales tax, tribute an income tax, and poll taxes supported roads and bridges. The purpose should be to support protection and services and not to enrich corrupt officials.

Note: Jesus followers should submit to government unless the command is contrary to God's word [Dan. 3, Ac. 4:19].

Note: Jesus' followers are called to pray for government [1 Tim. 2:1-2, Titus 3:1-2, 1 Pet. 2:13-19].

2. Love Your Neighbor [8-10]

⁸ Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Jesus’ followers have a responsibility to their neighbors as well as their government.

Love and loans: repay your financial debts, and keep paying the debt of love [8]

Owe no one anything except to love one another [8]. Jesus’ followers are to live within their means, and are to payback loans whenever possible. The Bible does not forbid borrowing [Matt. 5:42], but does forbid loaning at unreasonable interest. There is one debt that you can never discharge, the debt of love. Origen, an early Church Father stated, “The debt of love remains with us permanently and never leaves. This is a debt we discharge every day and forever owe.”

Love and the law: loving others fulfills the essence of the law [9-10]

Paul references the second half of the Ten Commandments, that all deal with our relationships with others. The five “shall nots” recorded in Exodus 20 regarding adultery, murder, theft, lying, coveting, are summarized by the one “shall.” If we love our neighbor as we love self as prescribed [9, Lev. 19:18] we would not *harm a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law* [10].

Jesus declared that all of the law and the prophets could be distilled to the essence of love God supremely and love your neighbor as you love yourself [Matt. 22:36-40]. Thus, what God desires and requires of Jesus’ followers flows from responding to His love for you, with passionate love for Him which is proven by sacrificial love for others. Any community that actually adopted those values would be a glorious place to live.

Jesus helps us to discover our tendency not to love our neighbors as we should. The parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10] reminds us to be sensitive to opportunities to show God’s to those in need that we are in proximity to. Jesus’ encounter with the Rich Young Ruler [Matt. 19:16-22] reveals that we love our comfort more than we realize, love others less than we would like to admit, and unfortunately may need the promise of eternal rewards to motivate us to do what is right.

The Jewish concept of “justice” is not the punishment of wrongdoing, but the Hebrew *Tzedakah* relates to fairness or righteousness. Those who are part of a community show their rightness with God by caring for the needs of others in the community.

3. Put on Christ [11-14]

11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

You are called to represent Christ to your society. You are to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* [14]. The Greek tense implies that not only is this commanded, but there is a sense of urgency. In essence, what happened in principle at conversion [Gal. 3:27] must be lived in practice day by day. *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep* [11]. We are challenged to *wake up* from spiritual slumber. *For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed* [11]. The Church Age, the time between Christ's resurrection and the Second Coming, is of finite duration [Cf. 11:26]. Our life on this earth, and opportunity to represent Christ to our community (society) is of limited duration. This is no time for spiritual slumber, apathy, or indifference. We are to *walk properly* [13] meaning to live properly, and walking also implies progress. The essence of living properly is to stop being controlled by the flesh and the resulting *revelry and drunkenness, lewdness, lust, strife*

and envy [13]. Lives that are dominated by escapism through partying, sexual sin, contention and jealousy are generally not very different looking to the society than the unbelievers.

You are to wear outwardly the One Who dwells in you inwardly. This is the time, to say no to the flesh and say yes to Jesus, *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts* [14]. *Putting on* refers to following. *Putting on* also means to exhibit and display. As you learn of and from Jesus through learning and living the word, the goal is that, as others look at us, they will see Christ, the One with whom we are clothed.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. Review the section on submitting to government. What is interesting or challenging in that section? Try to avoid politicizing the discussion.

Q2. Review the section on loving your neighbor. What is interesting or challenging in that section?

Q3. Review the section on putting on Christ. What is interesting or challenging in that section?

Q4. Spend time praying for your government: federal, state, and local.

Digging Deeper

1. Here is an interesting article regarding what the Bible says about government: [https://](https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-government.html)

www.gotquestions.org/Bible-government.html.

2. Here is a great take on the meaning of putting on Christ: <https://www.gotquestions.org/put-on-Christ.html>