

Introduction

- Writing a letter to George Bush as a kid. I read in Weekly Reader about how bad pollution was. I wrote him a letter. He sent me back a self-portrait. That's not what I wanted! I wanted him to do something!
- As a third grader, I learned that government seems unresponsive to real people.
- Many of us feel like government is unresponsive to the real needs of real people.
- We see corruption. We see scandal. We assume politicians are in it for themselves.
- As followers of Jesus, what is our responsibility to the government? What do we do if we disagree with our government? What if the government is corrupt? What if the government asks us to do something that violates our faith?
- In these verses, Paul writes, under the rule of Nero. If what Paul wrote applied under the reign of an evil emperor like Nero, it applies now. How we, as citizens of heaven, live as citizens of earth matters. I want us to examine three challenges from this text.

Learn to live under God-ordained authority (vs. 1-2).

- Imagine life in the Roman empire. Emperors demanded loyalty and were worshiped as gods. As a Christian, how could you say, “Caesar is Lord.” That violated your faith.
- If you rebelled against Rome, you could expect execution.
- Nero, who was about four years into his reign when Paul wrote this letter, was the first Roman emperor to sponsor state persecution of Christians. Under the reign of Nero, many Christians would be executed. The Apostle Paul was executed under Nero’s reign.
- vs. 1 - Yet Paul writes, “Let everyone submit to the governing authorities.” Paul was convinced that all authority comes from God, and all authorities are instituted by God.
- Difficult words, but Paul knows that the Roman empire is not his final home and Nero is not the one who ultimately sits on the throne - God does.
- Knowing that God institutes and is in control of all government, we can submit.
- God establishes earthly authority for our good. God established the home for our good - children obey your parents. Wives, follow the spiritual leadership of your husband. God established the church for our good - pastors, lead over the flock with the love of Christ.
- God established earthly authority to give order to this world. The problem is that we tend to corrupt what God has established, but that does not mean that what God has established is not good.
- Every government is in God’s hand, and he even uses corrupted governments to accomplish His purpose (e.g., Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, etc.)

- Even the corrupt Roman government would ultimately pave the way for a massive movement of the Gospel throughout the known world.
- vs. 2 - Therefore, to NOT submit to what God has established is to NOT submit to God. Paul NOT saying that all governments are good, but that we have a responsibility to do what is good and right even when it's difficult.
- Remember Paul's previous instructions: As far as it depends on us, live at peace with everyone (even our elected officials) and leave vengeance to the Lord. God knows how to take care of an evil regime. He places kings and rulers in authority for His purpose, and He removes them for His purpose.
- **What does NOT honor the Lord:**
 - **Constant outrage** - How outraged are you at the government and how often do you express it? Always outraged by the news, quick temper when politics are mentioned, love to talk about how wrong our government is, etc.
 - **Mockery and insults** - We love to insult leaders we don't agree with. Insult their looks, their intelligence, etc.
 - **Constant irritation** - Is your prevailing attitude, "No one can tell me what to do," and then you're constantly irritated because the government tells you what to do? You're irritated when an officer enforces the speed limit. You're irritated when you have to pay taxes. We vent more than we pray. We assume the worst of our leaders. That reveals a heart of rebellion - you submit, but it's with a hard heart.
- If many of us were honest, our attitude towards the government is downright sinful. There may be a problem with a government, but these verses are calling us to confront the problem within us - our tendency to rebel against what God has established.

- What if we were more passionate about the Kingdom of God than we are the politics of this age?

Understand the Purpose and Limitations of Earthly Authority (vs. 3-4).

- Paul is focusing in on God's ordained role for government. He is not telling us what to do when the government departs from God's given role.
- The government is God's servant. vs. 3 - You don't have to be afraid of the government if you are doing what is good. But, if you're breaking the law, know that consequences are coming.
- The government restrains evil. By establishing and upholding laws, by enforcing consequences. vs. 4 - Government "does not carry the sword for no reason.... God's servant that brings wrath..." God has established government to enforce severe punishment for severe crime - even to the point of the sword. God uses earthly governments to bring about justice on earth - although, because of sin, sometimes governments get it wrong or commit injustice.
- The government promotes good. Paul challenges us to "do good" and tells us that the government is God's servant for "your good" (vs. 3-4) The government protects life and protects personal freedoms.
- As an act of God's common grace he has created government for the good of society. The problem is that government is led by sinful people. Sinful people may have good motives and right intentions, but sinful people act sinfully.
- Government can and should be helpful but always limited:
- **Government can restrain and punish evil, but government cannot eliminate evil.**

- **Government can promote good, but government cannot make people righteous.**
- **Government can enact helpful policies for human flourishing, but government cannot give you the life you long for.**
- **Ultimately, there is only One King who can give you what nothing on this earth can give you.**
- Paul says submit to government, but is there an exception? Does this mean blind submission to Nero? To Hitler? To Ali Hosseini Khamenei?
- Paul does not answer that question in this passage. Paul is simply telling us how God uses government for the good of humanity, but what if government steps away from God’s design? [Romans 13](#) does not give us the exception, but there is an exception.
- [Acts 5:29](#) shows us an exception. When Peter and the apostles on trial before Jewish leaders because of their Gospel proclamation: “We must obey God rather than people.”
- Sometimes, disobedience to the government is your duty when:
- You are asked to do something that violates the clear commands of God. (e.g., [Daniel 3](#), or when government tries to suppress your faithful Gospel proclamation)
- You are asked to participate in blatant immorality. (e.g., being required to officiate ceremonies that contradict biblical marriage or provide services that directly facilitate sexual behavior Scripture calls sin)

Honor earthly authority while worshiping God alone (vs. 5-7).

- vs. 5 - Paul gives us two reasons why we must submit to the government. 1. Because of wrath - refers to punishment. If you rebel against the government, you’re going to experience the wrath of those

who are in charge. 2. Because of your conscience - You're accountable to God. God is clear what He desires from you. Your submission to God's Word matters.

- Your submission to the government is an act of worship to the God of all creation who is over all.
- Paul makes it practical. Paying taxes is a tangible expression of submission to God. No one likes to pay taxes, and in the Roman world, where taxation was heavy, people resisted paying taxes and rebelled against the government.
- Paul to early believers: don't rebel. Pay your taxes. Pay your tolls. Pay your obligations. Respect those who are over you.
- They paid taxes knowing that their taxes funded things they would not have agreed with. But, paying taxes was an expression of their submission to their sovereign God.
- Honoring God is not necessarily rebelling against those we disagree with. It's honoring those we disagree while trusting that God is in control.
- Paul not calling us to trust the government. Paul is calling us to trust God's sovereign rule and reign. Worship God by obeying Him even when it's hard - and it's hard to live in a world with governments that are easily corrupted.
- Ultimately, that's what this passage is about: trusting the Lord. You live in a fallen world that's not going to be right until the true King returns. In the meantime, live at peace, do good, and trust the Lord.
- Paul may not answer all of our questions about how we relate to the government, but he does give us clear instructions.
- As we trust the Lord to reign and rule with justice and wisdom, we need to be reminded that:

- **Political obsession is idolatry.** If all of your political goals were achieved would hearts be changed? If everyone you voted for was elected, or if all the political policies you want were put into place, would lives be changed? We have a tendency to obsess over politics forgetting that politics can never do what only God can do. To obsess over politics is to make politics your god.
- **Political involvement is necessary.** We shouldn't obsess over politics, but more Christians do need to be involved in the political process. We need to vote. We need to speak the truth with love. We need to advocate for the less fortunate and the unborn. We need more followers of Jesus working in different sectors of civil service. We need committed followers of Jesus running for office. We need to proclaim the Gospel because we are convinced that only Jesus can bring about true change.
- We need to pray. That's always the best way to involve yourself in politics - pray for God's Kingdom to come. Pray that those who are leading now will lead with wisdom. Pray for the advancement of the Gospel throughout our country and the world.
- We follow a King who modeled this for us. Jesus came to this world on His Father's mission. He submitted to the will of the Father to go to the cross to die in our place. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when the political leaders came to arrest Him, he submitted because He knew the Father's plan. Jesus was treated unjustly by a crooked political system, but He knew His Father was at work. He endured a Roman execution because He knew that through His death, the wrath and justice of God was satisfied. Jesus died and rose again to forgive us of our sins and give us new life.
- Now, we live in this world as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and we look forward to the day when Christ will return, and we will reign and rule with Him forever. We look forward to the day that Jesus will be the recognized as the only King, and every knee will bow to Him and confess Him as Lord.

- Today, if you do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life, repent of your sins and give your life to Him.