

# THE LIMITS OF GOVERNMENT

Part 3 of God & Government. Romans 13:1-7.  
Peter Foxwell. Cornerstone Church. April 21, 2024.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A GOVERNMENT THINKS IT'S GOD?

**This was the situation in ancient Rome.**

- Rome killed Jesus..
- Rome pressured Christians to affirm Caesar is Lord.
- It would have been challenging for Christians to be good citizens.

## FOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT RELATING TO GOVERNMENT

**Romans 13:1-7 contains helpful advice about relating to government.**

- It was good advice in the first century, and is relevant today.

### **Question 1: What is the source of civil government?**

- Answer: God - verse 1.

Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God.

- God instituted the concept of government.
- He doesn't want anarchy.

### **Question 2: What is our duty to the government?**

- Answer: To cooperate and do good - verses 2-3.

So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval.

- Generally speaking, Christians can stay out of trouble if we don't make trouble.
- This allows the church to function and the Gospel to advance.

### **Question 3: What is the duty of the government to us?**

- Answer: To serve for our benefit and punish wrongdoers - verse 4.

4 For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.

### **Question 4: What does cooperation with the government look like?**

- Answer: Peace and payment - verses 5-7.

Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. 6 And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. 7 Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor..

- We should live in peace for the sake of the church and the Gospel.
- We should cooperate as much as possible and pay our obligations, which are taxes, tolls, respect, and honor.

## **THE LIMITS OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT**

**We're asking a fifth and sixth question: .**

- Question 5: what are the limits of government?
- Question 6: When is it OK to resist the state?
- Governments tend to over reach their authority, and religious freedom is often the first right to get cancelled.

### **Limit 1: Authority - verse 1.**

- The state does not have unlimited powers because the state is not God.
- The government should not seek to control our thoughts and beliefs.

### **Limit 2: Accountability - verses 4 and 6.**

- The government must serve God and govern according to his standards.
- The government must not make wrong right or right wrong (Isaiah 5:20).

### **Limit 3: Law and Enforcement - verse 2-4.**

- The state must punish wrongdoers and approve those who do good (1 Peter 2:14).
- The wicked cannot be allowed to act with impunity because that makes the righteous unsafe.

### **Limit 4: Rights and Freedoms - verses 4 and 6.**

- As God's servant, the government must protect our God-given rights.
- Examples: Grace Community Church. First century Jerusalem.
- "We must obey God rather than people" (Acts 5:29, CSB)

## **SERIES TAKE AWAYS**

### **What did we learn about God's idea of government?**

- Week one: Godly government is possible. Pray for spiritual awakening.
- Week two: The government is like a shepherd. It must protect its people.
- Week three: The government has duties and limits. And we are called to cooperate as much as possible.

# SMALL GROUPS GUIDE

## READING

- This week, work through Chapter 3 of the Kingdom Politics study guide and/or Chapter 3 of the Kingdom Politics book.

## GET STARTED

- Coke or Pepsi? Or water? Discuss.

## DIVE IN

- Review Peter's study guide. What were Peter's main ideas, insights, or Bible passages related to God's design for government in Romans 13?
- Discuss the four questions Peter asked and answered from Romans 13. What insights can you add? What questions do you have? In what ways do you agree or disagree with Peter's answers?
- Work through Peter's list of four limits on the civil government. For each one, think of ways governments have or might over-reach these limits. Share any concrete examples that come to your mind.
- Read 1 Peter 2:13-17. Read in light of the context: an oppressive government that made it very difficult to be a Christian. How does the passage apply today in our context?

## PRAY TOGETHER

- Pray for national spiritual awakening and people in government service.
- Pray for the Cornerstone - people, leaders, health, and faithfulness.
- Pray for our families, communities, and nation.