

## **Romans 13:1-7: Proper Christian relationship to governmental authorities**

This is the clearest passage in the NT, written by Paul, on how Christians should relate to the authorities governing their land. A vital background information is that the ruler of the Roman Empire at the time of Paul's writing is Nero, known for his cruelty and temperamental inclinations like his burning of Rome. Nevertheless, Paul's clear and precise command in **v1-2** is to subject fully to the governmental authorities. Note that the command is complete and categorical; referring to every person without exception. Paul gives three reasons for such subjection:

- [1] The first reason is again categorically stated. Without exception, all governments are established by God and resisting such authority tantamount to opposing God's very ordinance or command (v2). God Himself, as stated in v2, will condemn (Greek is "krima" meaning "judge") such actions.
- [2] The second reason is because governments are God's servants to maintain civil order in society (**3-4**). They are also given the power of the sword to punish evil, which would also fall on us if we do not obey. Even evil rulers such as Hitler will implement civil rules to maintain order in society and we should be in submission. We must also look to God alone to remove such evil despots if needed, for they are His appointed servants and He will hold them accountable.
- [3] The third reason in **v5** is our conscience, meaning that we accept it personally as morally correct.

So, it is not just a fear of their wrath but in **v6-7**, we subject as to servants of God their due, such as paying taxes, other official demands and also the proper fear and honor. But if conscience is a reason, it is a two-edged sword, setting also the limit to obedience. To keep a good conscience (**1Tim. 1:19**), we must *disobey*, when it is morally wrong or if God has already spoken. An example (**Acts 5:29**) is the Apostles disobeying the orders of the Jerusalem authorities to stop preaching the gospel. Note that they never rebel or act violently against these authorities. In **Acts 5:18**, they do not resist being put in jail and in **Acts 8:1**, when persecutions begin in Jerusalem, they willingly scatter to Judea and Samaria, which is also in line with **Matt. 10:23**. If the imprisonment by the authorities and the scattering is accepted obediently, then surely the submission to the government has *not* been violated. There are other clear passages on submission to governments, including **Titus 3:1** and **1Pet. 2:13**. It is so explicitly commanded in scriptures that support for Christians to rebel or to overthrow a government is untenable.

*Two related Passages:*

**Romans 12:19**: Romans chapter 13 is just *after* chapter **12:17-21**, where Paul instructs believers on the proper responses to hostility. Believers must be at peace with all men and never take your own revenge (**12:18**). Then come the famous passage, with God stating that "vengeance is mine" (**12:19**). In Greek, vengeance is "*ekdikeo*" or literally "executing justice to someone". **Rom. 12:19** refers to the individual that we do not seek our own revenge but to leave room for God's vengeance. However, the same principle surely applies, when relating to governmental authorities. As the command is for believers to submit, God must then work His justice on these authorities, when needed.

**John 18:36-37**: Jesus insists boldly that He is king, even stating in **v37** that He is born to be one but poignantly states that *His Kingdom is not of this world*. This is the reason why His servants are not fighting and it shows that such rebellious fights are never His way. Definitely, Jesus never promote any political kingdom but only a heavenly one. Indeed Pilate is convinced of His innocence in **v38-40** and even tries to release Him. It confirms that Jesus is submissive to government rulers all His life, up to His death on the cross.