

## INTRODUCTION

A story was told about a game booth at a certain carnival. The host held up a dry towel and pronounced his challenge: “Whoever can squeeze out one drop of water from this towel will win the grand prize.” So there were people lining up for the contest. But no matter how hard they tried they were unable to compete the task. “Don’t we have any strong man in our midst?” The host repeated his challenge. Just when the crowd looked at each other with expectation a skinny guy stepped up. Without flexing his muscle he was able to squash not just one, but a few drops of water from the towel. Everyone was stunned. Out of curiosity, the host inquired: “That was really amazing! Mister, are you a personal trainer at a local fitness center?” “No.” The boney fellow responded. “I don’t even exercise. I work for the IRS.” Often when we look at government officials we feel that they have supreme power. They can do whatever they want. Or can they? In the New Testament world ordinary people were subject to the governance of the Roman Empire. Christians found themselves living in a tension between two worlds. As Christ’s followers they knew that they were citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom. At the same time they were also citizens of the earthly Kingdom. How should they show loyalty to both worlds? We have the same struggle too. Many times we are bombarded with trends and policies from this world that are contrary to the Bible. In Romans 13, Paul gave us some insights into how to resolve the dilemma. Paul told us that a good Christian should be a good citizen as well.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. 君權神授 Borrowing God’s Authority to Lead

First of all, this passage tells us that the rulers of this world are borrowing God’s authority to lead their people. Paul made that clearly in **verse 1**: Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. Please pay attention to the second half of the verse. The authorities in this world are established by God. The verb “established” in this verse means “appointed.” The rulers in every nation, past, present and future in the human history, are appointed by God to serve their countries. In this passage, Paul put it plainly by saying three times that these rulers are only God’s servant. The phrase appears twice in **verse 4**: For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. They are to exercise justice by protecting the innocent people and punishing the law-breakers. Then also in **verse 6**: This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Rulers collect tax from their citizens so that they have funds to manage the society. The government makes sure that the roads are in good shape, water from the faucet is clean, the education system is running smoothly, and the civil servants will get their salary, etc. Since rulers are God’s servants, those who disobey them disobey God. Paul warned us in **verse 2**: Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. The law and justice sector of the government exercises the authority given by God to make sure that citizens live peacefully and safely. When people put on a police or military

uniform the attire itself conveys some solemn fear. You may have encountered the following situation. You are cruising on the road but the drivers behind you flash their lights and honk their horns because they think that you are too slow, though you are driving within the speed limit. Before their patience wear out they quickly cut in front of you. Before long, you realize that these race-car drivers slow down before you. What happens? Lo and behold there is a police car leading the way and not a single driver would dare to go past it. Authority to govern induces fear. However, when we say that it is God who appoints people to rule we would naturally ask: What about those wicked tyrants who show no fear toward God and oppress people for their own gain? We can think of the kings in the historical kingdoms, the Nazis who massacred millions of Jews and many of the emperors in ancient China and leaders in the modern history. Based on what they did it would be hard for us to admit that they were God's servants. However, according to the Bible they existed for the purpose of fulfilling God's will. One example would be Babylon. God said in **Jeremiah 25:9** - "I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the Lord, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin." How did God address Nebuchadnezzar? He called this gentile king "my servant" because God was using Babylon as a spanking rod to the rebellious Judah. If we understand that earthly leaders are borrowing God's authority to rule then we should expect godly character in their leadership. Many Christians may lament over the upcoming presidential election. One person commented: "Of the billions of people in U.S. are those two persons the best candidates we have?" These days when you turn to the local TV channels, advertisements on election flooded the commercial timeslots. Other than making various promises, candidates employ a common tactic of stomping over their competitors. Even my 9 year old son asked me: "How come these people hate each other so much?" Which presidential candidate would you choose? Rather than picking the lesser evil among the two persons some Christians just gave up and decided not to vote. I found some articles written by a conservative Bible scholar quite useful. This author remarked: suppose a voter is leaning toward candidate A but cannot convince himself to cast a vote, it would be like helping candidate B gain a vote. I can understand that both candidates have some questionable character issues. The fact is that even many of the previous U.S. presidents who claimed to be conservative Christians still had flaws and committed major mistakes. It is because humans are far from perfect! A helpful way is to evaluate the far-reaching consequences if one candidate verse another wins out. How will this president make decision on major policies like economy, foreign affairs, defense, and on ethical issues like abortion and homosexual marriage? Besides, the future president will also appoint Supreme Court justices to fill the vacancies. These judges will have a final say in court rulings on the interpretation of laws. Based on those factors, we should pick the person whose character and future plans that are leaning toward Biblical principles. Ultimately, our hope is in the Lord rather than the temporary leaders of the land. For those of you who are eligible to vote, a godly obligation you have is to vote on November 9. I once read a bumper sticker that reads: "I am a Christian, and I vote." That says it all.

## 2. 神權民遵 Following God's Authority to Submit

The authority earthly rulers have is borrowed from God. They are God's servants. As citizens of the land our duty is to follow God's authority and submit to our leaders. Let us revisit the first half of **verse 1**: Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no

authority except that which God has established... A Bible commentator gave this useful definition on submission: to submit to someone is to recognize one's subordinate position in a hierarchy and to recognize people above whom that have ruling power. Our submission to the earthly leaders is a way to show our submission to God. The word "submit" also appears in [verse 5](#): Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. Conscience is the ability to discern God's will in order to do things that God sees as right. We have to follow our conscience to submit to authority. The U.S. Government keeps a "Conscience Fund" that accepts anonymous donations. If people are convicted by their conscience because they cheated the government they can donate money toward the fund. One major source of the money comes from deathbed confession made to the clergy. In some cases the sincerity of the donors can be questionable. One person wrote: "Dear IRS: Enclosed please find a \$ 1,000 check. I cannot sleep because I lied in last year's tax form. If I still cannot sleep I will send you another check." Paying tax is a way to submit to a local government. Therefore, Paul told us in [verse 7](#): Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. In Jesus' time the religious leaders tested Him by asking if people should pay tax to Caesar. Jesus asked them for a coin, then He replied in - [Matthew 22:21](#) ... "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Jesus agreed that it was a right thing to submit even to a pagan king like the Caesar. That leads to an important question on whether we should offer unrestricted submission to civil leaders. What if the government forbids Christians to gather for worship or forces a pastor to officiate a homosexual marriage ceremony? Things like that are happening in other countries. Don't be naive into thinking that it will not happen in U.S.! Since earthly rulers borrow their authority from God ultimately we should pay allegiance to God. We should not compromise our faith when we submit to our leaders. However, if we choose to disobey the government we will face consequence for breaking the law. Let us look at some Biblical examples as illustrations. The prophet Daniel was thrown into a lions' den because he violated the king's edict and kept worshipping Jehovah. Daniel's three friends refused to bow down before the king's idol statue and they were tossed into a furnace. What they said in [Daniel 3:17-18](#) conveyed their conviction: 17 "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." They would not submit to the king if his request contradicted with God's will, even if their disobedience would cause their lives. In both instances God protected His servants. In the early church era the disciples of Jesus faced strong opposition as they went about preaching the gospel. The Jewish religious leaders threatened them, arrested them and beat them up. But yet these evangelists remained faithful. Listen to how Peter and John boldly proclaimed to the leaders in [Acts 4:19-20](#) – 19 ... "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God? 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." These disciples and many other Christians throughout church history were willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the gospel. Peter and John were let go in this instance. However, at the end Peter was martyred and John was exiled to an island at old age. In this country, more than likely we may not face similar life-and-death situation because of our faith. However, religious persecution comes in a different form. Hobby Lobby, an art and craft national chain, is a family-owned business. When you shop there you will often hear Christian music being played over the PA system because the owners are devout Christians. In 2014 the company was sued because it refused to prescribe abortion-inducing medication (so called the "Morning-after Pills") in its

medical insurance plan for its employees. The company won the lawsuit in the Supreme Court. Not only that big corporations are targeted, ordinary citizens like you and I can be affected too. A few months ago the Parkway School District proposed some controversial changes in its sexual education for the students. The curriculum contains elements that are not consistent with a Biblical worldview such as transgender issues, teaching of contraception rather than abstinence, etc. What should Christian parents do? Our submission to the civil authorities should not be in conflict with our ultimate submission to God. But when ungodly things happen we should use peaceful means to express our disapproval. When we argue we do so with respect to people who do not align with our faith. We exercise our rights that are protected by laws and regulations. When needed we may have to go through the legal route to settle a dispute. Thankfully, there are many Christian legal organizations in the U.S. who are willing to fight for our religious freedom. Rather than making big money, some Christian attorneys offer their expertise to provide free counsel to their clients or even go to the court on their behalf when the freedom to express their faith is being threatened.

## CONCLUSION

A good Christian should be a good citizen as well. Our love for God should be reflected in our love for the country where we reside. Since we understand that leaders of this world are God's servant we should submit to them as an expression of our submission to the Lord. We should always pray for these leaders so that they would fear the Lord and do what is righteous and just. Paul encouraged us in [1 Tim 2:1-3](#) – 1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior. We live in a world where the majority dominates everything, and more than likely the majority consists of people with money and power. Some of the rulers may be looking for their self-interest rather than the interest of the citizens. As Christians, while we are saddened by world affairs that do not please God we should never forget that our God has full control over everything. The lyrics in the hymn “This is My Father’s World” serve as good reminder for us. One of the stanzas read: “This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet. This is my Father's world: why should my heart be sad? The Lord is King; let the heavens ring! God reigns; let the earth be glad!”