

THE CHRISTIAN AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT: PART I & 2

Romans 13:1-7

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. Today I propose to tackle an issue very relevant, especially as we will be holding a major election one week from this coming Tuesday: **2** *The Christian and Civil Government*.
 - A. **3** Civil governments are ordained by God and He expects them to do what He established them to do (**Rom. 13:4**: "...for he is God's minister..."; used three times, twice in v. 4 and once in v. 6).
 - B. God expects civil governments to rule righteously (**Prov. 14:34**: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." **Prov. 16:12**: "It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established on righteousness.").
 - C. If nations fail to do this, God will ultimately overthrow them (**Dan. 4:17**: "...the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men."; so many examples in OT, e.g., Sodom, Gomorrah, Nineveh, Assyria, Syria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Israel/Samaria, Judah, etc.; **1 Sam. 15:23**: "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.").
2. It is said that baseball is "America's favorite pastime." I'm not so sure about that.
 - A. Almost everyone criticizes the "gubmint" in some fashion or form; so this is truly "America's favorite pastime"!
 - B. Many rail against the government whether it's controlled by the Democrats or Republicans.
 - C. But, from a governmental perspective, we are fortunate our Constitution gives us the freedom for such speech (First Amendment in the Bill of Rights).
 - (1) Our founding fathers couldn't criticize the king of England without serious consequences.
 - (2) That's surely the reason the First Amendment guarantees our freedom to speak out against our government.
 - (3) But our criticism can easily go too far; especially if one advocates the overthrowing of our civil government.
 - D. **4** What a government may/may not permit is not what is most relevant to a child of God.
 - (1) A Christian is to conduct himself/herself by God's commandments (Rom. 8:29; 1 Jn. 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 4:11; Col. 3:17).
 - (2) God has "ordained" civil governments to rule the secular and temporal affairs of men, not our spiritual affairs.
 - E. I believe the role of civil government and the Christian's relationship with it are very clearly and plainly spoken of in God's book.
 - (1) But that's not to say there are not some very thorny issues as it relates to this topic.
 - (2) We'll consider these thorny issues, but I certainly don't claim to have all the answers.
 - (3) Many of these questions are deeply personal matters and I believe every Christian must follow scriptural principles and be very careful not to violate their conscience.
3. Christians through the centuries have often found themselves in a struggle of conscience because they live under all kinds of governments and rulers.

- A. Some have decided that since they have been mistreated by the government, they are justified in refusing to obey its laws, pay their taxes or even to go to war against their government to overthrow it (e.g., *Revolutionary War*).
 - B. Throughout history brethren have often disagreed on how Christians should relate to the civil government (e.g., military service, police, capital punishment, political office, voting, etc.).
4. **5** Keep in mind as we go through this study that our primary focus as Christians is to:
- A. Spend our time leading a life that leads us to eternal life (**Matt. 6:33**; **Rom. 2:7**: “...*patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality...*”).
 - B. Preaching the gospel to others so they too can find eternal salvation (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; **Acts 26:29**: “...*might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.*”).
 - C. Our priority in life is not on the “here and now”; not on trying to alter the nature and character of our civil state (cf. **Lk. 19:10**: “*for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*”; **Jn. 18:36**: “*Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’*”; **Phil. 3:20**: “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*”; **Heb. 13:14**: “*For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*”).
 - D. Christians are to be model citizens, even in the most trying and difficult circumstances; even if we live under the most wicked, evil, and corrupt of civil governments (**Acts 25:11**).
 - E. Let’s keep these thoughts and considerations in mind as we study God’s will concerning civil governments and how we as Christians relate to it.

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **6** The Bible’s teaching on civil government:

Rom. 13:1-7: “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.”

1 Pet. 2:13-17: “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men — 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”

A. ****** Civil government is a “God-ordained” institution:

- (1) Civil government is “appointed by God” (v. 1; i.e., ordained, assigned, appointed, set in place, in other words the concept of civil government is God’s arrangement for ruling man’s secular life.).

- (a) We must always remember civil govt is a God-given institution (v. 1: “*there is no authority except from God*”; Jn. 19:11: “*You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.*”).
 - (b) We must remember civil government rules our secular life, not our spiritual life.
 - (c) With that in mind, we certainly want our civil government to abide by godly principles of righteousness (Prov. 14:34), but we must remember all civil governments are ruled by men and all have eventually failed and been repudiated by God and replaced.
- (2) Civil government derives its “*authority*” from God (v. 1: “*...there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God*”; v. 1).
- (3) Everyone (not just Christians) is to be in subjection to the civil government (v. 1: “*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities...*”).
- (a) Applies to the lowest of society to the highest; “no one is above the law.”
 - (b) Why is everyone to be “*subject to the governing authorities*”?
 - (i) Simple: “*For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God...*” (v. 1b)
 - (ii) To resist civil government is to resist God, because He ordained civil government; civil government derives its existence and authority from God.
 - (iii) Very importantly: this doesn’t mean all that civil government engages in is pleasing to God (e.g., legalized abortion, “same-sex marriage; more later).
 - (iv) Very importantly: this doesn’t mean that we must always obey civil government (**Acts 5:29**: “*We ought to obey God rather than men.*”; direct conflict).
 - (c) Our respect for and obedience to civil government applies to all “*governing authorities*”:
 - (i) Government of every type: e.g., democracy, monarchy, communist, totalitarian dictatorship, etc.
 - (ii) Government of every character: Applicable whether the government is “good” or “evil.” Learn importance of this principle from the example of the first century.
 - ☛ Paul wrote the book of Romans when it was ruled by Nero!
 - ☛ The early Christians lived under a series of despotic, tyrannical and oppressive emperors (Claudius, Caligula, and Tacitus).
 - ☛ The Lord, Paul and the early Christians lived under tyrants who ruled with a “fist of iron.” The emperors were totalitarian dictators—the very antithesis of the democracy we are used to; all power was in the hands of one man.
 - ☛ It was a world of oppressive taxes (Lk. 2:1; explain “publicans”).
 - ☛ It was a world of slavery: Our Lord lived in a world in which there were about three slaves to every free man in the Roman Empire.
 - ☛ It was a world of persecution; people were considered chattel (i.e., property, like a hammer, something to be used until it’s worn out, then dispose of it.); many people were unjustly punished; subjected to unimaginable cruelty and viciously killed by these wicked tyrants.

- (d) When it comes to type of government and its character the Bible offers no caveats or exceptions insofar as our subjection is concerned.
- ☛ If Romans 13 applied to Paul and the early Christians under the extremely wicked, oppressive and tyrannical Roman emperors, it surely applies to us in the U.S.!
 - ☛ ****Romans 13 offers no “outs”; no caveats:**
 - ✓ “Be subject to the king UNLESS he is oppressive.”
 - ✓ “You must submit to the civil government UNLESS it does things with which you disagree.”
 - ✓ “You must obey all rulers EXCEPT the evil ones or the usurpers.”
 - ☛ The plain teaching is that all governments in all places are to be honored and obeyed, because every ruler holds power by the sovereign will of God (**Dan. 2:21**: “*And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings;*”; **Dan. 4:17**: “*...the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.*”)(We will discuss exceptions in the second installment of this lesson).

B. **7** Reasons we must be in subjection to civil government: because...

- (1) Civil government derives its authority from God: **v. 2:** “*Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God,*” Civil government is ordained by God to serve His purposes. When civil governments fail to do their job, God judges them, overthrows them and replaces them. But He does so using His criteria and on His timetable.
- Dan. 4:32:** “*And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.*”
- Jn. 19:10-11:** “*Then Pilate said to Him, ‘Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?’ I I Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’*”
- (a) Significantly in each of these cases the rulers were not a part of God’s covenant nation nor were they themselves believers in God.
 - (b) And yet Daniel and Jesus reminded these pagan, unbelieving rulers their authority was not autonomous.
 - (c) Like all civil rulers their authority was given to them by God, and the implication is, they would have to give an account to Him someday.
 - (d) Part of our role as believers, as we have opportunity, is to remind even the most pagan and wicked of governments that their rule is “*ordained by God*”; thus they are under God and accountable to Him.
- (2) Those failing to submit to civil government: “*...will bring judgment on themselves.*”_ (v. 2) To disobey God is to be in direct opposition to His will! **1 Pet. 2:13, 15:** *13 “submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake...for this is the will of God...”*
- (a) Judgment from God (To disobey a duly ordained civil government is to disobey God! I do believe there are exceptions to this rule!)
 - (b) Judgment from the civil government (We become subject to civil sanctions by disobeying the laws of the government!).

(3) Keep a clean conscience: **Rom. 13:5**: “Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.”

- (a) Failing to submit can only come if we “sear” our conscience, because we know submission is God’s will.
- (b) Important, because our government often frustrates us with it’s with stupid, unfair, and asinine laws and regulations. That makes it tempting to do it our way, to complain and disobey (e.g., zoning and building codes).
- (c) Our subjection to civil government must be outwardly and inwardly.
 - (i) With outward compliance, you are honest on your income tax return because you’re afraid if you’re not, you’ll get caught and fined and/or sent to prison.
 - (ii) With inward compliance, you are honest because you want to have a clear conscience before God, who reads your tax forms before you send them in!

(4) Obligated to pay civil government its due:

Rom. 13:6-7: “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.”

1 Pet. 2:13-17: “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men — 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”

Titus 3:1-2: “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”

- (a) Pay our taxes: Lk. 2:1; Matt. 22:21; Mk. 12:17; Lk. 20:25. I admit it...I hate paying taxes, especially when we see so much waste and corruption (remember Rome!).
- (b) Give our proper respect: “fear to whom fear”; respect for authority, respect for the office and position it represents; not necessarily respect for the character of the person holding the office, but be careful! **2 Pet. 2:10**: “...that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.”; Band of Brothers: “you salute the rank, not the man.”
- (c) Show our proper honor: “honor to whom honor”; hold those in positions of authority in civil government with esteem and dignity. I can “honor” the office but still not condone the bad character of the office holder.

(This does not mean we do not confront the evil behavior of civil government (Matt. 14:4; Lk. 13:32—Jesus called Herod “that fox” referring either to his deceptiveness or destructiveness; confront our government over abortion, same-sex marriage, etc.)).

- (d) Pray for them: **1 Tim. 2:1-4**: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For

this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

- (5) Again, our subjection to civil government is not negated by the type or character of the civil government (Remember our Lord! Remember Paul!).

"Nations, countries and Kingdoms rise and fall as instruments at God's bidding. Have we become so arrogant that we think we know all the ins and outs of why Nations are wicked or why they rise and fall? Did the nation of Iraq become one wit more righteous because Saddam Hussein was no longer governing? No, not one wit. Did Iran when this country supported the overthrow of the Shaw? Russia with their change in government? Libya? Nations are used to serve God's purpose to "keep order" when they rise, and also to remove rulers when they fall. But to rebel against rulers is to rebel against that ordinance of God. Indeed, under inspiration of God, the Apostle Paul declares that it is necessary for Christians to be in subjection to their rulers, not only because of wrath (fear of retribution), but also for conscience' sake. In other words, our sense of right and wrong in obeying a divine ordinance in reverence for God's sovereign will and authority. These clear statements apply equally to all forms of government, including unchecked despots, wicked kings or wandering Democracies. These divine commands of God come through the pen of the Apostle Peter as well--so that there is no escaping their God breathed declarations, meaning or relevance." (Tony Warren, "Is it Christian to be Anti-Government?")

C. **8** Purpose of civil government:

- (I) Law and order: protect law-abiding citizens and punish law-breakers.

Rom. 13:3: *"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil."*

- (a) Without "law and order" society civil order lost, society is in chaos, nobody is safe.

- (b) Without a properly functioning civil government man descends back into the situation before the flood:

- (i) Pre-flood world: **Gen. 6:11:** *"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence."*; apocalyptic movies where there is no law and order).
- (ii) Post-flood world: Nimrod established the first known civil government (contrast **Gen. 9:1:** *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth"*; with: **Gen. 10:10:** *"...the beginning of his kingdom was Babel..."*; with: **Gen. 11:4:** *"...let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."*; also first civil government judged by God!

- (c) Maintaining "law and order" requires civil government to be "fair," i.e., punish evil and to encourage "good works."

- (d) In the normal situation no one has anything to fear from civil government as long as we obey the laws of the land:

Rom. 13:3-5: *"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."*

- (e) When a civil government fails in regards to fairly and righteously maintaining "law and order" (i.e., following God's principles of righteousness) they place themselves on the path to eventually becoming subject to God's judgment (**Prov. 14:34:** *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."*; **Psa. 107:34:** *"A fruitful land into*

barrenness, for the wickedness of those who dwell in it.”; **Prov. 11:11**: “By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.”; **Prov. 16:12**: “It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established on righteousness.”).

(2) Avenger of evil:

Rom. 13:4: “...he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”

- (a) God does not permit men to take their own vengeance (judge, jury and executioner); if we were to do so, society would eventually disintegrate (e.g., vendetta).

Rom. 12:17-21: “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. 20 Therefore

‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Leads right into discussion of civil government and its role!

- (b) When wronged, how do we seek vengeance? God says “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay...” How does God do that? God uses civil government as “an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.” (Rom. 13:4) **This is a key role for civil government!**
- (c) Those who break the laws of civil government must face the appropriate punishment (i.e., *lex talionis*; “eye for an eye,” i.e., punishment must fit the crime).
- (d) Civil government is obligated to protect law-abiding citizens from law-breakers.
- (e) Civil government “does not bear the sword in vain”; i.e., God has given civil government the authority to punish law-breakers, including the use of capital punishment.
- (f) The principles of capital punishment are stated in Genesis 9:6 and are not bound by dispensation: **Gen. 9:6**: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.”
- (g) ** Law of Moses punished at least ten crimes by capital punishment (Rom. 15:4):
- ☛ Striking a parent: Ex. 21:15
 - ☛ Blasphemy: Lev. 24:14
 - ☛ Sabbath breaking: Ex. 31:14
 - ☛ Witchcraft: Ex. 22:18
 - ☛ Adultery: Lev. 20:10
 - ☛ Rape: Deut. 22:25
 - ☛ Kidnapping: Ex. 21:16
 - ☛ Incest: Lev. 20:11
 - ☛ Homosexuality: Lev. 20:13
 - ☛ Bestiality (Lev. 20:15).

2. **9** Thorny issues:

A. The principles we've discussed this morning are inspired truth. However, I recognize there are important and sensitive issues and questions that arise as we seek to apply these truths.

B. Examples: on slide 9.

C. **10** Some basic principles to keep in mind as we seek to answer these thorny questions:

- (1) ****** Does God have different laws for non-Christians and Christians? No! Murder is murder whether the one committing the act is a non-Christian or a Christian.
 - (a) It is illogical and unscriptural to indict a Christian with murder and to absolve an alien sinner of all guilt for precisely the same act.
 - (b) All sin is lawlessness (1 Jn. 3:4); in this age, all men, saints and sinners, are subject to the law of Christ (Isa. 2:1-4; Lk. 24:44-49; Matt. 28:18; Mk. 16:15; Eph. 1:15-23).
 - (c) God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:11; Col. 3:25); all in this present age will be judged impartially by the same Judge administering the same law from the same Lawgiver (1 Pet. 1:17; Jn. 5:22; Rom. 2:16; Jn. 12:48).
 - (d) What God permits alien sinners to do, He also permits Christians to do.
- (2) ****** God does not tempt any man to sin, whether he is a non-Christian or a Christian. **Jas. 1:13:** *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."*
 - (a) That being true, God would never require a non-Christian to do something (e.g., policeman kill and criminal) He would forbid a Christian to do.
 - (b) Doing such would be totally against God's righteous and holy nature (Acts 10:34-35; **Col. 3:25:** *"...he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality."*).
- (3) ****** All "killing" is not murder.
 - (a) Ten Commandments; the seventh is: **Ex. 20:13:** *"Thou shalt not kill."* (KJV, ASV, RSV) (NKJV, NIV, NASV, TLB, NLV, YLT) translate the Hebrew word as *"murder."* (i.e., 6 of 9).
 - (b) Comments on Exodus 20:13: *"'Killing' is not what is prohibited, otherwise the judicial infliction of capital punishment, as well as the slaughter of an enemy in defensive war, would be unlawful..." (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary).*
 - (c) Recall that there were at least ten crimes punishable by death in the Law of Moses.
 - (i) If *"Thou shalt not kill"* in Ex. 20:13 means that absolutely every instance of killing is a sin, then God is guilty of sin when He prescribed capital punishment for these ten offenses (also for requiring Israel to kill in war).
 - (ii) *"Put to death,"* in Deut. 17:6; 22:22,25, means, *"die as a penalty = be put to death"* (BDB, 559b). However, a different word is used in Ex. 20:13, *"Thou shalt not kill."*
 - (iii) Therefore, the command against killing was not speaking of participation in the military (e.g., book of Joshua), punishment of criminals, or manslaughter, or self-defense (Ex. 22:2; 17:8-13; Deut. 13:6-10; Num. 35:11-12). It meant *'thou shalt not commit murder.'*
 - (d) Genesis 9:6 unequivocally tells us God does not merely permit capital punishment, He demands it!

Gen. 9:6: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.”

- (e) Genesis 9:6 states a principal that applies in all ages, because the fact that man is made “in the image of God” does not, and will not, change!
 - (f) Thus, God’s word makes a distinction between “killing” that is sinful (i.e., murder) and “killing” which is not sinful (i.e., lawful use of capital punishment, lawful conduct of war, lawful self-protection). This distinction does not prohibit that which some brethren cannot conscientiously do, i.e., put “evil-doers” to death.
- (4) ** Some brethren conscientiously believe all taking of human life violates the highest principle of ethical conduct, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8).
- (a) But love does not eliminate all taking of human life.
 - (b) The highest standard of love and our example to follow is the love of God for all mankind (Matt. 5:43-48; 1 Jn. 4:7-11; esp. v. 8: “...God is love.”).
 - (c) There is no higher standard of love than the love of God (Jn. 15:13; Rom. 5:6-10).
 - (d) But God has taken human life many times (e.g., Lev. 10:1-3; Acts 5:1-11; 12:13).
 - (i) So God not only authorizes but has commanded the taking of human life (e.g., 1 Sam. 15:1-3).
 - (ii) It is God Himself who ordained civil government to uphold justice with lethal weapons and declared this to be good (**Rom. 13:4:** “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.”).
 - (e) Yes, the law of God has changed (OT vs. NT), but His essential nature is unchanging and unchangeable (Mal. 3:6; Num. 23:19; Jas. 1:17). If certain cases (i.e., capital punishment, justified war, self-defense) of killing did not violate His nature of love under the Old Testament, it does not now.
 - (f) I can understand how good, honest people have an exceedingly difficult time reconciling the just, legal taking of human life with love, but the Lord teaches both, and faith in the Lord and diligent study of His word will lead us to accept both.
- (5) ** When the Lord Jesus Christ announced His law concerning killing in the NT, He extended the prohibition to anger, angry words, and hatred (Matt. 5:21-22,43-48), but He did not change the definition of the outward act of murder.
- (a) The use of lawful, lethal force in just warfare is still not murder.
 - (b) Christ forbids personal vengeance (Matthew 5:38-42; Romans 12:17-21).
 - (c) He has ordained civil government to carry out divine vengeance “on him who practices evil” (Rom. 13:1-4).
 - (d) Civil authorities are appointed by God and act in His place to exact temporal, earthly vengeance on evil doers (Rom. 13:1).
 - (e) They are authorized by Christ (i.e., “God’s minister”; 2X in 13:4, 1X in 13:6) to use “the sword,” the instrument of death (Rom. 13:4).
 - (f) When a civil authority, whether police or military, uses legal, deadly force to effect justice, “he is God’s minister to you for good” (Romans 13:3-4; cf. Psalm 82:1-4).

- (g) The Scriptures authorize anyone, whether Christian or alien sinner, to serve in the civil government and be “*God’s minister to you for good.*”
- (6) ** Christians have dual citizenship.
 - (a) We are citizens of a spiritual kingdom (Phil. 3:20; Rom. 14:17), the kingdom of Christ (Eph. 2:19; Col. 1:13), its weaponry is spiritual (Isa. 2:4; 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Eph. 6:10-20).
 - (b) But we are also citizens of a civil nation (cf. Acts 22:25), which has the obligation to enforce justice with lawful, deadly force (Jn. 18:36; **Rom. 13:4:** “...*he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil...*”).

E. **II** Specific thorny questions:

- (1) **Can a Christian criticize/disobey civil government?** Are there times when it is not a sin to not “*be subject to the governing authorities*”? (Rom. 13:1). Can a Christian be involved in civil disobedience? Are there circumstances in which we can criticize civil government and/or civil leaders?
 - (a) Short answer: Yes and No
 - (b) If the civil government’s laws allow protest, then protest is allowed if we follow the laws of the civil government.
 - (c) However, in my opinion, civil disobedience would be allowed even if the civil government does not allow protest when the laws of the civil government are in direct conflict with God’s law(s) (i.e., require me to directly disobey God).
Acts 5:29: “*We ought to obey God rather than men.*”
 - (i) If the government forbid certain sermon topics (e.g., homosexuality, abortion).
 - (ii) If the government forced gospel preachers to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies.
 - (d) However, that does not give the Christian license to engage in unlawful acts to make their point (e.g., bomb abortion clinics, murder abortion providers, deface property etc.).
 - (e) There is also a line the Christian must not cross in regards to his criticism against the civil government: **2 Pet. 2:10:** “*But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*”; **Titus 3:2:** “*to speak evil (i.e., slander, blaspheme) of no man, to be gentle, showing all meekness toward all men.*”
 - (f) Examples:
 - ☛ John the Baptist openly criticized Herod for unscriptural marriage (Matt. 14:1-4).
 - ☛ Nathan openly criticized David for his abuse of kingly power (2 Sam. 12:1-15).
 - ☛ Man of God openly criticized Jeroboam for his illegal altars (1 Kgs. 13:1-9).
 - ☛ Paul questioned the authorities on more than one occasion (Acts 16:37; 22:25).
- (2) ** **Does God permit civil government to execute law-breakers?** Does God approve of capital punishment?
 - (a) Unequivocal “Yes”!

- (b) God has appointed civil government to keep order in society. **Rom. 13:4-5:** “...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.”
- (c) The execution of “evil-doers” is not optional by civil governments!
 - (i) For there is “no authority except from God” (13:1) and they “are appointed by God” (13:1); they are “God’s minister” applying “the ordinance(s) of God” (13:1).
 - (ii) Our civil government’s biggest problem with capital punishment is not its use, but its misuse! **Eccl. 8:11:** “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”
- (d) God’s law on murder is very clear! **Gen. 9:6:** “Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.”
- (e) Furthermore: Note how Paul describes civil government: **Rom. 13:4-5:** “...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.”
 - (i) When military personnel use lethal force to protect us from terrorists, are they doing good? Is standing by and allowing terrorists to bomb law abiding civilians doing good? To oppose the just, legal work of military personnel protecting us from evil doers is to oppose those doing good at God’s bidding.
 - (ii) We are not to avenge ourselves, that’s God’s job (Romans 12:19), and the civil government using lethal, lawful, just force is “God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Romans 13:4). He is not acting out of hatred, nor is he taking his own vengeance. He is God’s minister to execute God’s vengeance. To oppose their just, legal use of lethal force is to oppose “the ordinance of God” (Romans 13:2).

“If it is sinful for civil rulers to use force to uphold just laws, whether against internal or external foes, then the proper state of the world is anarchy. That’s what existed before the Flood (Genesis 6:11,13), and the Lord instituted the principle “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed” (Genesis 9:6) after the Flood to prevent this state of anarchy from occurring again. Ever since the Flood the legal taking of the life of a perpetrator of evil for the greater good of all has been a command of God, has been good, and has never been murder. Civil government is the divinely appointed institution to take the life of evil doers and to prevent anarchy (Romans 13:1-7).”

(3) ** Can a Christian serve as an executioner on behalf of civil government?

- (a) Legal execution of “evil-doers” is obviously permitted (i.e., demanded) by God per Romans 13:1-7.
- (b) Executioner’s involved in a legal, execution sanctioned by a lawful civil government are acting as “God’s minister”; hence, they have God’s sanction and approval.
- (c) God does not have a separate set of laws for non-Christians and Christians. If acting as a legal executioner is a sin for a Christian, it would be a sin for a non-Christian.
- (d) If legal execution were “murder”; that puts God in an untenable position (**Jas. 1:13:** “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”).

- (e) Furthermore, taking the life of a criminal is not “personal vengeance”; therefore, Romans 12 does not apply.

(4) ** Can a Christian serve in the police or military? (Can Christians be involved in “state sanctioned” killing? e.g., police killing an “evil doer”; soldier in war killing an enemy combatant. Can civil government (and a Christian) engage in carnal warfare?)

- (a) Again, God ordains police and military as a function of civil government (Rom. 13:1-7); specifically: **Rom. 13:4-5**: “...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.”
- (b) An entity (nation-state, terrorist group, etc.) that attacks a civil government certainly qualifies it as “him who practices evil” and God has given the civil government attacked the right to “not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”
- (c) Thus, I would argue that a properly functioning civil government has the authority from God to use “force” to protect and maintain “domestic tranquility” (i.e., police) and “force” (i.e., military) to protect itself from external threats.
- (d) Again, if it were a sin to serve in the police or the military then God is “tempting” the one serving to sin; when He has ordained the very existence of the institution (i.e., police or military) (**Jas. 1:13**: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”).
- (e) We’ve already established that God does not have a separate set of laws for non-Christians vs. Christians; therefore, if a non-Christian can serve and not sin, then so can a Christian.
- (f) Furthermore, taking of life by the police/soldier doesn’t involve “personal vengeance” (Rom. 12); it involves legal killing ordained by God (Rom. 13:1-7).
- (g) Examples of people in the Bible serving in civil government and/or military with tacit approval of God:
- (i) Daniel (book of Daniel),
 - (ii) Erastus (**Rom. 16:23**: “...Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you...”),
 - (iii) Cornelius (Acts 10 & 11)
 - (iv) Philippian jailor (Acts 16:25-34)
- (h) The example of Paul requesting protection from civil government (Acts 23:12-31):
- ☛ When Paul’s nephew told him of the plot to assassinate him, Paul sent the young man to tell the Roman’s chief captain of this impending danger.
 - ☛ The captain ordered 470-armed men to escort Paul safely to Caesarea.
 - ☛ Paul both solicited and accepted armed protection from the soldiers.
 - ☛ If it is right for a Christian to request the services of a soldier, why would it be wrong for the Christian to serve as a soldier?
 - ☛ And, if it is wrong for a Christian to be a soldier, then how could it be right for him to request a soldier’s (or policeman’s) services?
 - ☛ Can you think of anything that is wrong for the Christian to do personally, which is right to ask another to do for him? (recall Jas. 1:13)

- ☛ If it were required for the Christian to not serve in the military and/or police; it would make Christians parasites on society, benefitting from the good work of police officers and military personnel but withdrawing fellowship from Christians who help provide the very protection other Christians accept (yea, demand!).
 - ☛ Thus, the fact Christians may seek protection from civil government (Acts 23:12-32) necessarily implies Christians may provide that protection. If it's sinful to provide armed protection, it's sinful to seek or to accept it (Ephesians 5:11).
- (i) Thus, a Christian may serve in the police/military. However, there are some important issues to consider.
- ☛ Just because civil government issues an order, does not make it moral and right (e.g., Nazi Germany).
 - ☛ Thus, Christians in the military must recognize the principle of Acts 5:29 and make every effort to avoid becoming the instrument of an illegal government action.
 - ☛ For instance, if the U.S. Government became the aggressor against an innocent people, the Christian would have to refuse participation at any cost.
 - ☛ There are certainly other good reasons to carefully consider before joining the military (e.g., profane language, alcohol use, difficulty attending services), however, many, if not most professions, have similar drawbacks.
- (j) It is often argued that if Christians are permitted by God to participate in the military it could potentially put them in the position of going to war against their own brethren (e.g., if opposing military forces both had Christians serving).
- (i) God's standard for the use of lethal force is that it must be just and lawful (Rom. 13:1-7).
- (ii) That means that in a lawful, justifiable war; one of the combatants will be justified and one will not.
- (iii) That being the case, then faithful Christians will only be on one side of the conflict. Why would a Christian be fighting for injustice? Acts 5:29

(5) ** Can a Christian protect their self, family, etc. even to the point of employing "deadly force"? Can we kill if we need to protect ourselves?

- (a) Unequivocal "Yes"!
- (b) First, self-protection is not the same as taking "vengeance" (i.e., is not in violation of Romans 12).
- (c) Jesus instructed the apostles to purchase a sword: Lk. 22:36-38 ("The country was infested with robbers and wild beasts...2nd. That self-defense is lawful. Men encompassed with danger may lawfully defend their lives" (*Barnes on the New Testament*, Vol. 2 pg. 150)).
- (i) Jesus knew that thieves preyed upon travelers (Lk. 10:30), so He urged His disciples to prepare accordingly.
- (ii) So important was this point that He taught them it was better to be armed than clothed.
- (d) God's word charges men with the duty of providing for their households (1 Timothy 5:8), which I submit includes the use of armed force to protect property and loved ones.

- (i) According to Jesus, “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace” (Luke 11:21).
 - (ii) Consider the example of the patriarch Abraham who commanded his own private army (**Gen. 14:14-16**: “Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. 16 So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people.” Abraham subsequently received God’s blessings (Genesis 14:18-20; 15:1).
- (e) The ordinary citizen, not holding any public office, not a police officer, and not even employed by the state; nevertheless can act on behalf of the state when it comes to felonious acts.
- (i) When “evil-doers” are about the civil government cannot always be there to protect its citizens.
 - (ii) Therefore, the civil government gives its citizens the right to protect life, limb and property using deadly force (if necessary).
 - (iii) In most states, it is recognized that the home is, in effect, one’s castle. Therefore, there is no duty to retreat in the face of threat (the so-called *Castle Doctrine*).
- (f) Protection of family would also logically fall under **1 Timothy 5:8**: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”
- (i) 1 Timothy 5:8 includes the provision of food, shelter, and clothing.
 - (ii) But, logic says that if food and clothing are routinely stolen, or shelter is violently intruded upon, then security and protection must in some fashion be provided.
 - (iii) There are limits and restrictions to the defense of the Christian and his family:
 - ☛ Self-defense, defense of property, life and limb must employ the principle of *lex talionis* (i.e., don’t shoot somebody for throwing a rock through your window).
 - ☛ Also, self-defense must not be an act of vengeance; we must let civil government do the job God appointed them to do.
- (g) What about “turning the other cheek”?
- Matt. 5:38-42**: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”
- (i) First, this text is dealing with “personal vengeance,” not self-defense (or defense of family members, etc.).

- (ii) When the apostle Paul was about to be scourged as an innocent man, he did not take it with indifference, neither did he “*turn the other cheek*” (**Acts 22:25**: “*Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?*”).
 - (iii) Matthew 5:38-42 deals with *personal* vengeance; immediately previous to Romans 13, Paul wrote in Romans 12:19, “*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.’*”
 - (iv) Matthew 5:38-42 is forbidding the taking of personal vengeance, especially if the situation described came about as a result of one being a Christian.
 - (v) To suggest it is a sin for a Christian if he does not “*turn the other cheek*” when a murderer or rapist is threatening to slaughter him and/or his family is utter nonsense and a wresting of Scripture!
- (6) ** Is it permissible for a Christian to vote?** To be involved in a political campaign? To serve in office? To serve in the civil government?
- (a) Some Christians argue that we are citizens of heaven and thus should not get involved at all in politics; however, if the laws of the civil government, who serves as “*God’s minister*”; allows voting then it surely is not a sin (**Titus 3:1**: “*Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.*”).
 - (b) Recall Christians have a dual citizenship: citizens of heaven, but also citizens of the kingdoms of men. Since we are given a say in who rules over us, to be silent is to allow the ungodly to win the day. Christians who do not vote are abdicating their responsibility and must answer to God.
 - (c) When there are clear-cut principles of morality, justice, righteousness, etc. at stake I believe a Christian is obligated to vote. How could any Christian with a clear conscience not vote against a candidate who endorses, yea, celebrates the murder of the unborn?!
 - (d) To vote in such situations means we are voting on matters of biblical righteousness, not on a partisan political basis. The church’s primary concern is for the gospel and righteousness, not for partisan politics.
 - (e) If my vote can help protect my family from evil government decisions and can help provide a more wholesome environment in which to raise my children, why should I refuse to vote?
 - (f) To be informed and vote accordingly for candidates and issues which will, to the best degree possible, uphold God’s purposes for government it is the right thing to do.
 - (g) To work as volunteers or supporting staff for politicians who uphold justice and morality would not be a sin.
 - (i) This is not required of every believer, but it may be the calling of some.
 - (ii) Those who are not so moved should not censure those who are; and those who are so called should not expect those who are not to be involved to the same degree as they are.
 - (iii) However, with all the mudslinging that goes on in politics today; I think it would be hard for a Christian to serve in such a capacity and remain untainted.
 - (h) To run for political office is also a matter of personal conscience before God. It may be on a local level (school board, city council, etc.) or on a state or national level.

The church ought to be supplying the government with men and women of integrity who fear God.

- (i) I believe, at least for me, that serving in government would make remaining faithful to Christ more difficult (many reasons), but in and of itself would not be sinful.
- (ii) There are two notable examples in the Bible of men who served well in pagan governments: Joseph in Egypt, and Daniel in Babylon, yet remained faithful.
- (iii) In fact, Romans 16:23 states that Erastus, a brother in Corinth, was "*treasurer of the city.*" So there most certainly were Christians in the apostolic age who served as "*governing authorities*" with apostolic approval.

(7) ** Can a Christian refuse to pay his/her taxes? Even if the government misuses of our tax dollars (e.g., waste, corruption, behavior contrary to God's word)? No!

- (a) God has given civil government the right to collect taxes (**Rom. 13:7**: "*Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*").
- (b) Jesus unequivocally taught we are to pay our taxes (Matt. 22:15-22; Lk. 2:4-5).
 - (i) The same Caesar to whom Jesus commanded taxes to be paid was far worse than our civil government!
 - (ii) The taxes paid in the Lord's time paid for things far worse than abortion; those tax moneys financed the judgment of Pilate, paid the salaries of the Roman soldiers who scourged Him, mocked Him and spat upon Him! Those taxes even purchased the nails that held our Lord on the cross. Those taxes crucified the Lord of Glory!
- (c) Thus, the Christian is responsible before God to pay the taxes he owes to the government. Those in the government are responsible before God for the uses to which they put that money. Each answers to God for his own deeds.
 - ☛ The state should repent for all misuses of taxes paid; if they don't God will ultimately judge them (i.e., hold them responsible).
 - ☛ Christians are justified in criticizing the state when they do evil, including financing evil.
 - ☛ And, we should all be on our knees imploring God to stop the horror, but we should still pay our taxes.
 - ☛ We can march on Washington, preach outside local abortion mills, write our congressman, etc.
 - ☛ But as hateful and painful as it may be, we need to trust in God's providence, render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars and unto God the things that are God's.

III. CONCLUSION:

- 1. I recognize that many of these questions are matters of conscience.
 - A. For example, God does not require a Christian to serve in the police or the military.
 - B. God does not require a Christian to vote or run for office.
- 2. Thus, on many of these issues we must not judge one another (Rom. 14); we must not make them tests of fellowship.

3. Let us keep open minds about these questions; always willing to study them and help one another make up our mind in accordance with scriptural principles.
4. I probably have not answered every question you might have insofar as the Christian's relationship with civil government is concerned.
 - A. So I urge you to study these issues on your own.
 - B. If you have questions, I would be more than happy to help you find answers in the scriptures (1 Pet. 4:11).
 - C. If you think any of the positions I've taken are unscriptural or inconsistent, please bring them to my attention and I would be glad to consider your scriptural arguments.
5. As Christians, we should be the best citizens possible, regardless of the type and character of civil government under which we live.
 - A. We should obey the civil government.
 - B. We should pay our taxes.
 - C. We should "respect" and "honor" our leaders, because they are "ordained of God."
 - D. However, we are also obligated to speak out against and stand against any civil government or its agents who try to force us to violate God's Word (**Acts 5:29**: "We ought to obey God rather than men.").
6. Never forget; the best two things we can do for civil government is to"
 - A. Pray for it (1 Tim. 2:1-2; Gen. 18:16-33).
 - B. Be a good citizen (Matt. 5:13; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Rom. 13:1-7).
7. Invitation