

Romans Chapter 13:1-7; The Christian's Relation to the State
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The burnt offering life also involves being a good citizen and having a right relationship with and understanding of human government. This is part of the practical elements of the Christian life that can only be fulfilled after a personal burnt offering of the life has been made.

This is one of the most important chapters in the Bible in a practical sense since it deals with our relationship with the State. Human government is usually anti-Christian and evil, yet we Christians must live under such governments. How do we? How do we deal with an evil government? Is resistance to the State ever justified? If so, under what circumstances? When can we disobey government without sinning?

There are many Christians who, when confronted with dealing with an oppressive government, just bleat out "Romans 13! Romans 13! We have to obey our government in everything because of Romans 13!" These people show:

1. They have never studied Romans 13.
2. They have never considered the dozens of examples in Scripture of believers opposing the king and the government and God approving of their actions.
3. They are not good students of Church History, which gives us an almost unlimited sources of examples of resistance against civil authorities.
4. They have not read anything regarding Christian political philosophy.

We could outline this section as follows:

1. Human government established by God 13:1
2. Our relationship to human government 13:2,5-7
3. Government's obligation toward us 13:3,4

A Summary of 13:1-7 regarding Christian Political Theory:

1. Civil government is ordained by God and is supported by Him. Thus, government in and of itself is not evil as it comes from God. It was initiated after the Flood in Genesis 9 when capital punishment was mandated, a penalty that is executed by the State. Government usually degenerates into a evil when it forgets its ordained role and responsibility and when it forgets to acknowledge God.
2. Government is one of the three spheres of human activity:
 - A. Home. This is the highest as it was the first one established, in the Garden of Eden when Eve was created.
 - B. Government, which was next instituted after the Flood.
 - C. Church. You can include the synagogue or tabernacle/temple services here, as we will not limit this only to the New Testament church.
3. Fallen man must have some form of government. Man cannot rule himself without law. The book of Judges illustrates what happens when "there is no king in Israel" and when "every man does that which is right in his own eyes". The depravity of fallen man guarantees that any form of self-rule will end in failure. Fallen man has enough difficulty ruling over himself. How much more these difficulties if he was left to his own devices and was made a law unto himself.
4. God ordains government, both good and bad (as He often gives people the kinds of government they deserve, such as the last 5 American presidents and just about every Congress)

- A. Pharaoh and Egypt- Romans 9:17
- B. Old Babylon in the book of Daniel
- C. Darius/Cyrus of Persia- Isaiah 44:28; 45:1
- D. The Philistines oppressing Israel.
- E. The various Canaanite nations oppressing Israel in the book of Judges.
- F. The Assyrians, who carried the Ten Northern Tribes captive
- G. The Roman Empire
 - i. At no time did either Jesus or Paul ever suggest that the Roman Empire was not a legitimate government, nor did either one advocate revolution of that the Church attempt to overthrow Rome. Neither of them got involved with the politics of the day. The closest the Lord ever got to it was when He was asked whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar. Even then, He did not initiate the discussion.
 - a. Christians are to be in submission to the civil authorities for as long as they are able to. We are not to be looking for a fight or excuses to rebel. Generally, those reasons will soon manifest themselves if we are living under an unscriptural government.
 - ii. Christ did acknowledge Rome's ruling authority in Matthew 22:21.
 - iii. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:17, "Honour the king." The "king" to whom Peter referred was Nero. He was one of the worst emperors Rome ever had. He certainly was no friend of Christians. But Peter commanded the Christians of his day to give him his necessary honor.

5. Rebellion against government is forbidden except under certain circumstances, when obeying it would result in sin, or would pit the State against God, or if we are forced to choose between the State and God. God does not expect us to obey every government and every law it passes without any reservation. Examples of such resistance:

- A. Abram refusing to recognize the King of Sodom- Genesis 14:21-24
- B. The Hebrew midwives disobeying Pharaoh in his order to kill the Hebrew baby boys at birth, and God approving of it in Exodus 1:15-21.
- C. Moses opposing Egyptian slavery in Exodus 4-13.
- D. Resistance to tyrants in the book of Judges by Othniel (Judges 3:8-11), Ehud (Judges 3:12-30), Shamgar (Judges 3:31), Deborah and Barak (Judges 4), Gideon (Judges 6-8), Jephthah (Judges 11,12) and Samson (Judges 13-16, especially see Judges 15:11). Every one of the rebelled against the "powers that be" in their day.
- E. Samuel had to oppose Saul after Saul's disobedience in 1 Samuel 15.
- F. David respected Saul even as Saul was trying to kill him, but David did not "obey" Saul by turning himself in to be executed. Later, David refused to submit to Absalom's revolution (2 Samuel 16-18).
- G. Elijah before Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah was actively opposed to their rule. See 1 Kings 17-19.
- H. Elisha had no respect for Jehoram in 2 Kings 3:14 although he did respect Jehoshaphat. He also had no respect for Ahaziah in 2 Kings 1:9-13.
- I. Rebellion against wicked Queen Athaliah by Jehoiada in 2 Chronicles 22:10-23:15.
- J. Daniel had no respect for Belshazzar in Daniel 5 and disobeyed Darius' foolish edict against prayer in Daniel 6.
- K. Esther and Mordecai resisting Haman, who was acting under approval of the king to kill all the Jews in the Book of Esther.
- L. Amos did not stop preaching, despite orders to go preach elsewhere in Amos 7.
- M. Jeremiah was in constant conflict with the civil authorities during his ministry.
- N. The Lord constantly disobeyed the sabbath laws imposed by the Pharisees during His earthly ministry.

O. The early church was in constant conflict with the Jewish religious leaders in Acts 4 and 5. "We ought to obey God rather than man" Acts 5:29.

P. Christians are to resist the "prince of This World", who is Satan, who controls and rules this age in John 14:30; James 4:7).

Q. There was a time when Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire, yet the Church ignored that law and continued their activities. It is obvious in this case that the State over-stepped its authority. This would be repeated throughout modern Church History, as the Roman Catholic states and later some of the Protestant states during the Reformation would outlaw (Ana)Baptist activities. We would even see this in Colonial Massachusetts. Did they have a Biblical right for forbid Baptist churches or activities in their colony? What about in Virginia, where the Anglican Church State required Baptist preachers to be licensed? What shall we say of the Underground Churches in the old Soviet Union, where it was illegal for them to even exist?

i. Baptists were ordered, by law, to have their children baptized in Massachusetts in the 17th and 18th centuries. They disobeyed in Massachusetts and in European countries that were under the control of either Catholic or Protestant authorities. Were these (Ana)Baptist people justified in their opposition?

ii. Baptists were ordered to obtain a license to preach from Anglican authorities in colonial Virginia. They did not, believing that no Anglican authority had any authority in licensing a Baptist ministry. Were the Virginia Baptists justified in opposing an unjust law from the "higher powers"?

iii. Also throw in the American Revolution. Was it Biblical under Romans 13? It was the preachers that led the drive for independence. If they had followed this incorrect interpretation of Romans 13, we would still be British subjects today.

a. It has often been the preachers and the pulpits that have been the most active and most effective agents of liberty. Why abandon that in the 21st century?

iv. Many Southerners supported succession in 1861 from the Union. There was even talk of the New England states leaving the Union in 1814 because of the War of 1812. Would this have been supported by Romans 13?

v. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s was an uprising against the powers that were in that day.

R. Our Baptist forefathers (Donatists, Albigenses, Lollards, Waldensians) suffered greatly because they refused to obey the civil authorities and the popes in their attempts to regulate and control the church.

S. Should Christians in Communist or Islamic countries obey they laws designed to prevent or severely limit Christians and their church activities? They didn't in the Soviet Union. The Underground Church operated for the full 70 years of Soviet Communism, in opposition to the anti-Christian laws that they were under. Were they right or wrong in disobeying their governments?

T. How many martyrs went to the stake because they could obey the unjust laws regarding worship?

U. God makes it clear that He does not recognize as His "ordinance" or as His "minister" every magistrate that sits upon a throne, for in rebuking the northern kingdom of Israel for their wickedness, He declares: "They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not" (Hosea 8:4).

6. We are to obey the State in all lawful commands (where do not have to sin in giving such obedience), including paying taxes.

A. For example, If the state asks you to install so many fire extinguishers in your building to meet the fire code, that is something legitimate and should be obeyed.

B. Jesus rendered unto Caesar, despite the fact that Rome was not a godly empire- Matthew 22:21. The Lord was no tax dodger or protester. If He said to pay the taxes to a heathen ruler like Caesar, then we are to pay our taxes to the even more wicked IRS.

i. The key here is “lawful”. When rulers start making unlawful demands, our obligations to them cease.

ii. You are to pay your taxes, but you are also free to try to get the taxes lowered by lawful means. You also can refuse to support a tax hike if you have a chance to vote on it. In Delaware, we still have the ability to approve or disapprove tax hikes by the various school districts. I always vote against tax hikes, not because I am anti-education (although I am anti-public education) but because my attitude is “what right do I have to raise my neighbor’s taxes?”

7. Christians may serve in an ungodly State without sin. In this case, I believe the old Anabaptist groups were wrong when they opposed any Christian serving in the government for any reason. Their reason was that no Christian should serve a government that was involved in religious persecution (namely against them) and they had a good point. But overall, it is no sin for a Christian to serve in a government.

A. Nehemiah- Media/Persia

B. Esther- Media/Persia

C. Daniel- Babylon and Media/Persia

D. Cornelius- Rome

E. Offices may be held by Christians as long as sin or unfaithfulness to God is required

i. See Daniel 1,3,4,6

ii. There may arise a problem if the taking of an oath is required. This would also involve serving in the military, where one must swear an oath to the Constitution, despite the fact that the American Constitution is not a Christian document. Christians are forbidden from swearing such oaths (Matthew 5:34-36; James 5:12).

iii. How long a Christian can remain faithful in such an ungodly environment will depend of the circumstances. Every situation will be different.

8. Characteristics of a Godly, Biblical State

A. Built on Biblical law

B. Godly leaders

i. Exodus 18:21 Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people, able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers.

a. Able (qualified)

b. Fear God

c. Men of truth

d. Hate covetousness. This is not just coveting money but also coveting power and position.

ii. He is to be a diligent student of the Law of God. Deuteronomy 17:14,15,18,19 When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. . . . And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them. . . .

iii. 2 Samuel 23:3 The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.

a. Must be just

b. Must rule in the fear of God.

c. This is a reason why I am not a supporter of Donald Trump (in 2020 as I write this) and did not vote for him in 2016 and will not vote for him in 2020. He has some good policies and I agree with some of them, but he is not a Christian. He is an unrepentant adulterer and fornicator and he surrounds himself with apostate "spiritual advisors" like Paula White.

iv. Isaiah 10:1 Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed.

v. The civil ruler is supposed to be a minister "for good" in Romans 13:4. If he is being a minister for evil, then he forfeits any divine authorization he has to rule.

B. Acknowledges Lordship and Kingship of Christ (this the United States does not do as there is no acknowledgment of God whatsoever in the Constitution. The mention of "nature and Nature's God" by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence is so vague that it could apply to any "god".

C. Punishes evildoers

D. Keeps the peace

E. Requires its magistrates to be good ministers of God

9. If it comes to the point where we as Christians and the Church must take a public stand against our governments, we must make sure we do so with much prayer, fear and trembling, discerning the mind of God if we are right or not. We must consider our public testimony and watch our attitudes, that we do not suffer as a wicked man but for righteousness' sake. We must also keep a respectful attitude, even in front of those who would take away our rights and even who would kill us. Notice Jesus in His trials- always respectful, and He never got nasty.

A. Our position is not to necessarily actively rebel against the State but to resist, to refuse to obey sinful laws, not to overthrow the State. God set them up, God will take them down. It is our spiritual duty to respectfully decline to obey and law or decree that would go contrary to the revealed revelation of God or that would cause us to sin.

i. The key idea is resistance, not rebellion.

B. We have a responsibility to our rulers, but our rulers also have a responsibility toward us.

i. Their responsibilities include:

a. Maintaining order

b. Punishing wrongdoers

c. Protecting the lawful citizens

d. Advocating and promoting Biblical law

e. Let us alone so we may enjoy a quiet and peaceable life (1 Timothy 2:2)

ii. When government fails in its responsibilities, then we have the right to resist and to attempt to peaceably change it.

iii. Our responsibilities include:

a. To submit and obey all lawful decrees

b. To pay our taxes

c. To pray for those in authority

"A Christian must resist all unlawful commands of the civil magistrate (whether the one issuing the command is a lawful king or an unlawful tyrant): "We ought to obey God rather than men" Acts 5:29.

It is the duty of Christians both to testify against tyrannical civil government and to

affirm the moral duties of civil magistracy and subjects under God's law. Civil reformation within a nation cannot occur without a faithful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For it is the truth of Jesus Christ that sets people free from sin, from ignorance, and from tyranny. Thus, the position of civil government espoused and defended herein strongly affirms that the primary resistance offered by Christians against tyranny in civil government is by means of moral persuasion accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christians should resist tyrannical civil governments by earnestly praying that God would destroy the throne established by wickedness, that He would be pleased to convert unlawful magistrates who presently are His enemies, and that He would hasten the day when righteousness would shine forth from the scepter of the civil magistrate... It is affirmed by our reformed forefathers that resistance by means of force in cases of self-defense is not contrary to biblical commands which call Christians to be subject to lawful magistrates (and not to resist them), or biblical commands which call Christians to suffer patiently under harsh rulers. Samuel Rutherford has faithfully expounded such biblical passages (as those found in Romans 13:1,2 and 1 Peter 2:13-20), and clearly demonstrates that these passages cannot be made to contradict the rest of God's Word (where resistance by means of force in self-defense is approved), and that these texts themselves do not contradict biblical resistance (whether resistance without force or resistance by means of force). (Greg Price, *Biblical Civil Government Verses the Beast*, pdf version, pages 24-26).

The more I consider it, the more cynical I become about human government under fallen man and (especially) political parties, and that includes the pseudo-Christian and pseudo-conservative "Republican" party. The Republican Party is really a Progressive/Socialist Party, if you study its history from 1912 and Theodore Roosevelt onward. So many Christians give almost an idolatrous allegiance to the Republicans because they are under a mistaken impression that it is both conservative and Christian, when in reality, it is neither. I gave up on the Republicans after the 1996 presidential election as they are not a Christian or a truly "conservative" party. They are little different than the very liberal Democratic Party. There are not too many places for the Bible-believing Christian to put his support when it comes to politics, especially party politics. I have always said that the Republicans treat Christian voters the same way Democrats treat Black voters, both parties take these groups for granted. Christians in other countries will find themselves in a similar, if not worse, predicament. What is a Canadian or a German Christian to do with regards to participation in his country's politics? When it comes to presidential elections, I haven't voted for a "winner" since 1992 since I mainly vote third party now, when I vote at all.

The Christian and the State 13:1-7

13:1 Let every soul^a be subject^{b-present imperative} unto the higher powers.^{c-d} For there is^{present} no power^d but of God: the powers^d that be^{present active participle} are^{present} ordained^{e-perfect passive} of God.

1a "every soul" Every person- Christian and non-Christian, citizen and non-citizen. The "clergy" are not exempt from the civil magistrate, nor are they elevated over it. In civil matters, the civil magistrate outranks the preacher, but in moral and spiritual matters, the preacher has more authority.

1b "be subject to" Be in submission to. This does not mean that you must agree with them or support their policies. Rather, it deals with obeying them as long as you do not need to sin in so doing.

1c **“higher powers”** These “powers” are human civil government, by the context of this chapter. Government is called a “higher power” since it is the strongest common authority established among men to govern their society and interpersonal relationships and conduct. Government is a “higher” power but not the “highest”, for it must also answer to God and be conformed to His laws.

Human government is ordained of God because sinful man must be ruled. He cannot be left to his own devices, to do that which is right in his own eyes as he was doing in the book of Judges. This is because man is a sinner and does not have the nature, the character or the knowledge to rule himself properly under God. Libertarianism can only go so far, politically. The foundations of civil government are laid down in the Noahic Covenant in Genesis 9 and are greatly expanded upon in the case laws of the Pentateuch. God allows man to rule himself to some degree, but along the lines of divinely revealed laws and principles. God sets up these human rulers and grants them the authority they need to keep the peace, maintain order and punish evildoers. These three actions are all that God authorizes for human governments. When human government goes beyond these duties, trouble is the result. In Romans 13, Paul defines what qualifies as a godly government and a godly ruler and what the responsibilities of believers, yea, all men, are to such governments.

Governments that are ordained of God automatically become responsible to be God’s civil ministers in the earth. This obligates them, as such ministers, to obey and enforce the laws of God that they have been entrusted with. Any “ordained minister” of governmental authority that fails in this becomes a poor steward who will have his stewardship removed and will be judged accordingly. There are many Biblical examples of this:

1. Moses refused to obey Pharaoh.
2. Elijah refused to obey Ahab.
3. Elisha had no respect for Jehoram in 2 Kings 3:14 although he did respect Jehoshaphat.
4. Daniel had no respect for Belshazzar in Daniel 5.
5. Amos did not stop preaching, despite orders to go preach elsewhere in Amos 7.
6. Jeremiah was in constant trouble with the authorities.
7. The apostles refused to stop preaching, although ordered to by the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 and 5.

A Christian’s obligation to obey such an unfaithful minister is limited. He is still to obey all Biblically-lawful commands but since the Christian finds himself under the authority of a rebellious and unfaithful minister, his obligations would end right there. Overall, a Christian is not to support such a governmental authority and he would be justified in doing all he can to overthrow such an authority (by lawful and Biblical means and methods) and to give only limited (or the bare minimum required) support and allegiance to it. This is why so few genuine Bible-believing Christians would vote or would support their governments (regardless of level- state, federal, county...). Nearly all human government on earth is unfaithful and rebellious to the law of God today and this is especially true in the United States and in Canada. Why vote? You are only encouraging and offering support for an unfaithful minister. When you vote for an unbiblical government, you are offering your recognition of such an establishment. You wouldn’t support an unfaithful pastor in your church, so why support an unfaithful civil magistrate? I began to learn this lesson after the presidential election in 1996. That was the last year I voted Republican. I realized that both Democrats and Republicans were grossly corrupt and unfaithful to the law of God. Why vote for either one? Vote for the “lesser of two evils?” The lesser of two evils is still evil. Why vote at all? How many genuinely Christian candidates are there on your ballot? Voting is, in essence, a validation on the part of the one voting of the process, the Constitution that sanctions that process (and the Constitution is not a Christian or a Biblical document) and the candidates running. If there was a genuine Christian candidate running for

office, he ought to be supported, but 99.9% of the time, the Christian has no such option. His choices are between the Democratic Heathen and the Republican Heathen.

I would summarize this as "When the Government tries to take away what God has given, to forbid what God has allowed or allows what God has forbidden, it is then time to pray about how you will react against your magistrates, even to the point of disobedience."

It makes no difference if we are under a "good" or "bad" government. The government we find ourselves under was installed by God and are ordained of Him. This includes any form of government- communistic, democratic, socialistic, dictatorship, monarchy. You obey it as long as you do not have to sin in so doing. You obey it as long as they do not try to usurp the authority of God and the Bible in the life of the Church and the Christian. The point of contention then is "What do we do when the State does cross that line? Do we resist? What form will that resistance take? And how far do we take it?"

The slave must, of necessity, do the bidding of his master. The power is unjust. It may be tyrannically exercised. It is, in its very nature, despotic. But the victim of wrong has, for the time, no alternative. By obedience alone can he secure exemption from greater suffering. So the unhappy subject of arbitrary civil rule. He is beneath the iron heel of the despot. He must obey. But it is a forced obedience, wrung from him by the irresistible might of the tyrant's scepter. So also, the Christian may be compelled to yield a kind of submission to overwhelming power. He is in its hand. The sword is ready to enforce the mandates of unholy authority.

Why is government called a "higher power?" There are three spheres of human activity- Church, Home and State. Is Paul placing the State above the Church and Home? This is very unlikely. But humanly speaking, the government does tend to wield the most secular power and only it has the sword by which to punish evildoers. The State tends to have more earthly authority than does the Church of Home.

To give an idea of the arrogance of government and its own sense of deity, ask yourself what mechanism is in place for the calm and orderly shutdown of a government. Every corporation has provisions for the shutdown of the company if it goes out of business or decides to cease operations. Every state has laws that addresses that. But look at the U. S. Constitution. In what article does it deal with how to shut down the current American form of government if the various states decide to dissolve the union? It isn't there. This means the American government believes itself to be divine in origin and authority and that it will not cease operation and that no one has any authority to attempt to change it. I don't believe any country's constitution is any different. But God never hesitates to bring down states and empires if He deems it necessary to do so and the United States will not fare any different than Rome or Babylon.

1d **"higher powers"** In this context, the higher power was the anti-Christian Roman empire.

"higher powers" and **"power"** Strong's #1849 exousia; power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases, leave or permission, physical and mental power, the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises, the power of authority (influence) and of right (privilege), the power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed), the power of judicial decisions, of authority to manage domestic affairs, jurisdiction, one who possesses authority, a ruler, a human magistrate, the sign of regal authority, a crown

1e **"ordained"** This is in the perfect, showing they were ordained in the past and remain so ordained now. That situation will not change as God will always ordain some form of civil government among men.

God has set up, established and empowered human government on earth, even ungodly and persecuting ones, for a reason. Even communist governments or dictatorships are allowed to rule only according to the will of God. God could destroy such governments in a heartbeat

(as the rapid downfall of the Soviet Union in 1991) or he could allow them to continue for a season (Soviet Union, 74 years, Nazi Germany, 12 years...). Why He allows such governments to even exist, or continue, is not always revealed to us, but verses like this assure us that they continue only within the will of God and do so for a purpose. To suppose otherwise is to question the wisdom of God as well as His political plans for man during these Times of the Gentiles.

“The necessity for this section is traceable to the widespread feeling of irritation against the Roman government among the Jewish populations. To the Jew the theocracy seemed to be the only legitimate form of government...The Messianic promise, as understood by the Jews, was hostile to the claims of any pagan government...Judas the Gaulonite had founded a sect which held that it was unlawful to obey earthly rulers...some converts from Judaism may have brought with them their revolutionary sympathies and projects into the Church of Christ...But probably the reason for the paragraph is to be found more precisely in the Ebionite conception that the power that governs the world, and acts through the civil magistracy is devilish. The belonged to the dualistic tendency in Ebionism (H.P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, page 246).” The Jews believed they had no king but God and thus were not accountable to human kings. The Pharisees promoted and defended this view.

13:2 Whosoever therefore resisteth^{a-b-present middle/passive participle-a} the power,^c resisteth^{b-perfect} the ordinance^d of God: and they that resist^{perfect active participle} shall receive^{future middle} to themselves damnation.^e

2a “**resisteth**” Resistance by:

1. Disobedience
2. Refusal to support by paying taxes and tribute
3. Attempting to overthrow

It is rebellion against a God-ordained authority if a Christian refuses to submit to his government in lawful things. The question then arises "What if in obeying my government I am forced to sin against God?" If a choice develops between obeying God or man, the choice is clear- we should obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). Whenever government tries to force a Christian into sin, it crosses over the boundaries God set for it and strays into the authority of the Church or the family. But if you set yourself against a God-ordained authority, you had better have a very good reason for doing so. Such reasons and justifications exist, but you had just better understand what they are.

2b Two Greek words are used for the two uses of the English word “resisteth” in this verse:

1. First usage- Strong’s #498 antitassomai; from anti (Strong’s #473) against, or in the stead of, and tassô (Strong’s #5021); to range in battle against, to oppose one’s self, resist
2. Second usage- Strong’s #436 anthistemi; from anti (Strong’s #473) against, or in the stead of, and histemi (Strong’s #2476) to cause or make to stand, to place, put, set; to set one’s self against, to withstand, resist, oppose, to set against

2c “**power**” Strong’s #1849 exousia; power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases, leave or permission, physical and mental power, the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises, the power of authority (influence) and of right (privilege), the power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed), the power of judicial decisions, of authority to manage domestic affairs, jurisdiction, one who possesses authority, a ruler, a human magistrate, the sign of regal authority, a crown

2d “**ordinance**” Strong’s #1296 diatagê; a disposition, arrangement, ordinance. This is a late Greek word, used in Romans 13:2 and in Acts 7:53.

2e “**receive to themselves damnation**” Because rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft (1 Samuel 15:23). This is a judicial sentence, but a divine condemnation would surely follow.

13:3 For rulers^a are^{present} not a terror to good works, but to the evil.^{b-c} Wilt^{present} thou then not be afraid^{present middle infinitive} of the power?^d do^{imperative} that which is good, and thou shalt have^{future} praise of the same:^e

3a Verses 3 and 4 list the Civil Magistrate’s obligations and responsibilities toward the people to whom they have been placed over:

1. They are to terrorize evil doers, not lawful citizens 13: 3
2. They are to be God's minister for good 13:4. I wonder how many politicians realize this? They are "servants", or "diakonos", in the Greek, the same word as for "deacon". Government is supposed to serve its citizens, not the other way around!
3. They are to execute wrath in God's stead against him who does evil. Government is to reward the law-abiding citizen by ministering unto him for good (best done by leaving him alone) and to punish the criminal who disturbs and threatens both society and the law-abiding citizen. This principle is first given back in Genesis 9:6

3b Thus, an unfaithful and evil government can be identified by:

1. It terrorizes the good, law-abiding citizens and rewards evildoers
2. They minister evil, not good.
3. The magistrates do not function as the ministers of God for good

The first sign of an evil state is where the good law-abiding citizens are persecuted while the evil lawbreakers are unmolested. Any state that persecutes Christians falls into the category of an evil state, since Christians tend to make the best and most productive citizens, even in non-Christian and anti-Christian societies.

But this verse is a double-edged sword, for it would also condemn “Christian” states (sacral states actually) that persecute other Christians. Calvin’s Geneva and Puritan Massachusetts are prime examples. These “Christian” sacral states persecuted other Christians who disagreed with them theologically. The murder of Michael Servetus is an eternal blot on the name of Calvin. The persecution of the Baptists by Massachusetts and colonial Virginia was evil and unscriptural. The Reformation states in Europe that persecuted the Anabaptists can never be justified. Maybe that’s one reason why such persecuting states did not endure for long, as no doubt God would have judged such an evil “Christian” state. The persecuted groups simply desired the right to worship and believe as they pleased, but their non-conformity was a threat to the sacralistic governments and so they must either conform to the State Church monstrosity or be destroyed, for the good of the “unity” of the “Church”.

This is where the real issue boils down to- what exactly is the role of the State? Governments are instituted among men. That fact cannot be denied. Thus, human government in and of itself is not evil or sinful. But that government has very specific limits imposed on it in terms of its authority. Basically, the State is to maintain order, punish evildoers and generally keep the peace. That’s about it. The modern idea of the leviathan state is totally foreign to the Bible (either testament). Sinful man must have some degree of government over him, but 99.99% of the time, it will be other sinful men, who are not in submission to the Word of God, who will be in authority over those men. And when that happens, the fallen nature of man takes over and what might start as a limited, biblical government turns into an iron-fisted dictatorship.

The modern State is based and founded upon power and such power always corrupts. The Biblical model was that civil service was exactly that- service. The magistrate served God first and then the people second. It was a ministry more than a career. That was radical idea in the early years of the American republic. One reason why those who served in the House of Representatives (the “people’s body” of government) for only two years was that the Founding Fathers assumed that Representatives would only serve for a few years and then voluntarily step down. They did not anticipate career politicians who served only to build and further their own power and that of the State.

So what do we do when we have a State that is bent to evil? One that is obsessed with expanding its own power and bringing its population under its iron heel? A State that devolves into a Nanny State that is intent on micromanaging your life? One that is taking away your liberties rather than defending them? That State is a minister of evil, not of good. The State then becomes an unfaithful minister. That is when the Christian would have a basis to resist such a government.

I hold to a minimalist government and State, the smallest form of government required to fulfill its Biblical mandate is the best. The smaller the State, the more Biblical it is and the more likely that the people living under such a government will enjoy personal liberty. I am not anti-State in the concept of the State for God established human government and we must have some form of it as fallen man simply cannot rule over himself properly.

3c **“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.”** When you fear your government for doing well or for following God and His law, then you are living under an unbiblical government that is unfaithful to the God that ordained it! In those cases where Christians have been able to withdraw from intolerable situations, no sin is involved. The Huguenots fled from France to England, and the Puritans from England to America, for freedom of conscience. Christ said, "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another." Escape is sometimes possible, and is not rebellion, but merely self-preservation. But where could persecuted Christians flee today?

When your government starts rewarding evil and punishing good, then it ceases to be a Biblically-ordained institution. In America, our government gives millions of dollars a year to Planned Parenthood, which does nothing but operate abortion mills. In the Pandemic Scare of 2020, many states continued to fund Planned Parenthood and allowed them to stay open (as an “essential” service) while forcing churches to close. Governments that did that forfeited any divine authority for being a recognized organization in the eyes of God.

3d **“be afraid of the power”** Evildoers should fear the sword of the magistrate, since the godly magistrate will act as God’s appointed agent on earth to bring judgment to that offender. The peaceful law-abiding citizens should have nothing to fear in a godly society. The operative word is “should” since it doesn’t always work out that way.

3e **“do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same”** In an ideal, godly state, this would be the case. But all bets are off in an ungodly state, or in a state that does not identify with the Bible and that does not base its government or legal code on Scripture (like the United States).

13:4 For he is^{present} the minister^a of God to thee^b for good.^c But if thou do^{present subjunctive} that which is evil, be afraid;^{imperative} for he beareth^{present} not the sword^d in vain: for he is^{present} the minister^a of God, a revenger^e to execute wrath upon him that doeth^{present active participle} evil.^f

4a **“minister”** (both uses) This is the same word as “deacon”, showing that the civil magistrate is a minister of God who is to serve his people, not to rule over them as a lord. This shows that the civil magistrate is appointed by God and serves at God’s pleasure. What an awesome responsibility this is, then, for God will certainly judge an unfaithful minister/civil magistrate.

A minister of God! We must note the context when Paul wrote that- Nero was Caesar! Nero was a “minister of God” and was to be obeyed and honored in all lawful commands and laws. How difficult that can be, especially with the devil incarnate on the throne. But God put him there and maintains them there within his will, and to rebel against that is to rebel against God’s will. A very fine line must be walked if the Christian finds himself having to take a stand against such a ruler. Yes, he is to “obey God rather than man” but there are times when to obey man is to obey God, if that context is governmental. If Paul could urge Christians to recognize Nero as a “minister of God” and obey his laws and pay his tributes, then can’t we do the same today for our governors and presidents, who, as bad as they might be, are nowhere near as horrible as a Roman Caesar was?

4b **“to thee”** The magistrate is to minister to us for our good and be the servant of the people, not the other way around.

4c **“for good”** he mark of a godly magistrate, where an unfaithful one would be promoting and doing evil to those in his charge.

The other traditional translations all render this “For he is the minister of God for thy wealth” but I would think more than economic issues are at stake here unless “wealth” has a larger, classical, definition here.

4d **“sword”** Only the State has the sword by which to punish evildoers. Neither the Family nor the Church may punish wrongdoers in such a manner. The sword here represents the divinely ordained authority-sphere of the State, including the authority to inflict punishment for civil offenses, especially capital punishment, a right that neither the State or the Family possesses.

4e **“revenger”** The magistrate is thus called, for he is to avenge the wrongs and injustices committed upon the victim, the weak, the poor, the widow, the orphan, anyone. Instead of the victim playing vigilante and taking justice into his own hands, he is supposed to turn his case over to the magistrate, who would exact justice for him.

4f **“to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”** The duty of a faithful magistrate- to punish evil and to serve as a deterrent to evildoers. A magistrate becomes unfaithful and unbiblical when good men and law-abiding men are afraid of him or when he persecutes such men.

13:5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject,^{present passive infinitive} **not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.**^{a-b-c}

5a We are to obey government not just to stay out of trouble but also to preserve a clear conscience. It’s a bad testimony for Christians to be opposing the government every time it tries to do something. The Jehovah Witnesses are a perfect example as they refuse to give allegiance to any government, good or bad. They got so bad and annoying at one point that Kenya expelled them for their anti-government activities. The Jews were terrible citizens, using Deuteronomy 17:14,15 as proof texts. This soured the Romans concerning the testimony of the Jews.

The Authorized Version may be the one translation that is the least clear here, since they did not expand on the “wrath”. The other translations correctly bring out the idea that one reason why we obey the governmental authorities for fear of punishment if we do not.

5b **“for conscience sake”** The Jews knew of no other motivation for submission to the Roman government other than fear of punishment. Christians were told submit because it was the right thing to do. Most of the time, we obey our governments out of fear of arrest and imprisonment. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a government we could obey because we actually respected it?

5c Subjection to magistrates to be made a matter of conscience:

1. As subjection to God's institution and His own command
2. As enjoined and exemplified by Christ Himself- Matthew 22:21; 26:63,64
3. As a due return for benefits received
4. As an example to others and for the benefit of society
5. As a testimony in favor of Christianity (Thomas Robinson, *Studies in Romans: Expository and Homiletical Commentary*, 2:206).

13:6 For for this cause pay^{present} ye tribute^a also: for they are^{present} God's ministers,^b attending continually^{present active participle} upon this very thing.^c

6a **“pay ye tribute”** Taxation was such a hot topic in Paul's day that he devotes two verses to it- must a Christian pay taxes to support a pagan government that is not fulfilling its God-appointed duties by persecuting Christians? Paul says "Yes", as does the Lord (Matthew 17:24-27; 22:17-21). Christ recognized Caesar's authority in collecting taxes despite his ungodly government and He paid them. Taxation is due to government because they are God's ministers, even if they are ungodly and are unaware of their “deacon” status before God. We may have to render unto Caesar but the Bible is very clear about how Caesar is to behave and fulfill his office.

The Christians in the Roman Empire had a good reputation in this context in that they did pay their taxes.

“tribute” Strong's #5411 phoros; tribute, the annual tax levied upon houses, lands, and persons, property taxes

6b **“ministers”** Strong's #3011 from laos (Strong's #2992) people and ergon (Strong's #2041) work; public minister, a servant of the state, a minister, servant, one who works for the people. This is a different word for “minister” as used in 13:4, as this has more of a governmental/public servant meaning and not so much religious.

If they are God's ministers, why do so few even acknowledge God at all? They obey the dictates of their political party and government with an eye to their re-election. They may invoke God to try to justify their policies, but most will say they rule through “the will of the people”. They do not acknowledge that God allowed them to come into that position because they must them acknowledge that they are accountable to God for how they rule. If God put them in that place of authority, they must also realize that God can remove them just as easily as He placed them there. Look at the rapid fall of Belshazzar in Daniel 5 and Zimri's short reign of seven days in 1 Kings 16:15-20.

6c The taxation and tribute are used to support the magistrate in the administration of his duties. Unfortunately, the State today uses taxes as a form of social engineering to affect behavior and economic and social activity.

13:7 Render^{a-b} *aorist imperative* therefore to all their dues:^{c-d} tribute^d to whom tribute^d *is due*; custom^d to whom custom;^d fear^d to whom fear;^d honor^d to whom honor.^{d-e-f}

7a "**Render**" has the thought of paying taxes out of public obligation as a citizen and not as a show of support for the government. Taxes are something we pay because we have to, not because we want to.

7b Not only taxes but we are also to render:

1. Tribute, your standard tax.
2. Custom, which is tax on merchandise, commerce and business transactions
3. Fear, reverence and respect to those in positions of authority
4. Honor. You may not necessarily honor the man but you must honor the office.

7c Unfortunately, Paul doesn't directly deal with the thorny issues about government, such as:

1. What should the Christian do in times of revolution?
2. Must a Christian submit to the State if the State commands activities that go contrary to the Word of God?

We certainly wish that Paul would have expounded more on these matters!

7d As Christian citizens of whatever nation we find ourselves, we are liable by the apostle to render the following to the civil rulers:

"dues" Strong's #3782 *opheilê*; that which is owed, a debt. Not found in Classical Greek. The older traditional translations render this as "duty".

"tribute" Strong's #5411 *phoros*; tribute, the annual tax levied upon houses, lands, and persons, property taxes

"custom" Strong's #5056 *telos*; from "*teleô*", meaning "to pay"; end, termination, the limit at which a thing ceases to be (always of the end of some act or state, but not of the end of a period of time), the last in any succession or series, toll, custom, indirect tax on goods and merchandise that is used for public ends.

"fear" or respect for the office.

"honor" for those in the office. We do not honor them personally or individually, for they may be moral reprobates, but they are still entitled to the honor due their office.

7e Summary of the Christian's duty to the State:

1. Be subject to civil government
2. Fear and respect the civil rulers
3. Do good
4. Pay your taxes
5. Render dues to all men
6. Honor the civil rulers
7. Pray for civil rulers
8. Obey the laws
9. Do not curse the rulers (Ecclesiastes 10:20)
10. Work for peace

7f Daniel is the best Biblical example of how to conduct oneself under a heathen and anti-Christian government as he fulfilled these commands very well in a difficult situation under several ungodly administrations.