

Study in Romans

Application > Disposition of the Christian > Submission to Government

Romans 13:1-7

Having just finished his admonition that we as Christians are not to take justice into our own hands (i.e., vengeance, cf. 12:17-21), Paul turns to the other side of this equation, namely, how justice is to be given to those who deserve it. He just told us to not be overcome by evil in 12:21. Obviously, it is a problem if we allow ourselves to be overcome by evil through inaction, such as standing still while a would-be rapist and murderer has his way with our family or friends. Are we not to reflect God's hatred of sin and its results? (Cf. Ps. 82:2-4; 139:21-22) How can we resolve this?

God's answer is the government and what we today call the justice system. While this system is far from perfect, it is nevertheless to be respected and supported by the Christian. Paul recalls the language of chapter one by reminding us of God's temporal wrath. Here in this passage he brings home another consequence of the sin of the hedonist: trouble with the law. Instead of taking personal vengeance, we are to allow room for God's wrath specifically through the authorities. Oh, and by the way, Christians are to pay their taxes to support this system. We don't have to like it or completely agree with it. We just have to obey.

1. Source of authority: God (v. 1)
2. Source of condemnation of disobedience to authority: God (v. 2)
3. God's job description for government (vv. 3-4)
 - a. Punishment of disobedience
 - b. Praise of obedience
4. The Christian's rationale for subjection to government (v. 5)
 - a. Cooperation with God's wrath
 - b. Cleansing of the conscience
5. "Render unto Caesar": Pay what is due to the government (vv. 6-7; cf. Matt. 22:15-21)