

Good Christian Citizens!
Romans 13:1-7
26th April 2026
PREACHER: Pastor Roy Summers

Introduction

I'm going to put some statements on the screen and I'd like you to assess them, True / False / I Don't know. Here's the first, *"Driving at 31 mph down the Oldbury / Yates Hay Road is an offence against God."* The second one: *"Driving a car without vehicle tax is an offence against God."* Third one, *"Taking your child out of school (that's assuming your child goes to school) without permission is an offence against God."*

By the end of this sermon, I hope we'll be able to see that ALL these statements are true, because the Governments who laid down, The Road traffic regulation Act 1984, & The Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 & The Education Act 1996 were appointed by God. So to disobey the laws they made is to disobey what God has appointed.

We're making our way through Paul's letter to the Romans; we've arrived at chapter 13 where Paul explains how believers are to worship God in their relationships with the civil authorities over us, we're thinking, the police, local authorities, the tax man, central government, now run by Labour's Keir Starmer, in fact every government authority / power over us.

Someone might object: why do these secular things matter: paying my taxes, sticking to the speed limit, seeking permission to take my kids out of school! They don't sound like spiritual activities! Shouldn't sermons be about eternal and exalted matters such as hope and faith and love? A whole sermon about obeying the state? I think we should answer this objection:

On the one hand, it's true, yes, our earthly lives are temporary and transient: this world is not our final home, we're just passing through, our citizenship is in heaven; but that doesn't make this part of the journey unimportant to God.

Second, the Scriptures, not only here, but elsewhere, make obedience to the state, part of a Christian's duty. What is a Christian? Many things, of which one is, "A Christian is someone who obeys the governing authorities." Here's the apostle Peter: *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men; whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right."* (1 Peter 2:13-14)

And thirdly, and supremely, Paul places obedience to the state as one way we joyfully respond to the Gospel. Remember chapter 12:1, "Therefore I urge you in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." How do I offer my embodied life to God in gratitude for his mercies, his salvation? Well, one way, is to obey the state!! So paying our taxes, obeying the laws

of the land, honouring our secular leaders, brothers and sisters, is one way of saying, "Thank you Lord for saving my soul!" A Sunday singing, which then fiddles the tax man on Monday, intentionally speeds on Tuesday and dishonours the authorities on Wednesday less than it should be!

Brothers and sisters, today is a teaching sermon, it's broccoli and carrots rather than roast beef or spicy halloumi!

**(1) A Word for everyone:
God appoints all human leaders**

"There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God (verse 1), they are, (verse 2), "what God has instituted."

This teaching may be new to you: God in heaven appoints all human governments; not just the ones we like, but all the ones that exist. *"God sets up kings and disposes them."* (Dan. 2:21)

Someone says "no, surely the people voted for Keir Starmer, the people appoint governments, not God." Democracy is one of the human means by which a government is installed, but ultimately it was God determined Sir Keir Starmer would be Prime Minister. God appointed Donald Trump, he appointed Vladimir Putin and God appointed Xi Jinping!

When Paul first wrote these words, the Roman Empire was in power. Indeed one of the most ruthless Emperors of them all, Nero, was on the throne! God appointed Nero. God is the supreme ruler.

Aren't you & I glad that ultimately, God is in charge? Could we sleep at night if we thought that the affairs of nations were, in the final analysis, in the hands of human rulers? However good they might be:

*The Lord is King! lift up your voice,
O earth, and all you heavens, rejoice;
from world to world the joy shall ring,
'The Lord omnipotent is King!'*

**(2) A Word for those in authority:
God has given you a double mandate**

If you are a Christian MP, policeman, local counsellor, civil servant, Paul calls you "God's Servant" three times and tells you what your double mandate is:

"For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."

(1) Do the people good. It is a noble profession to be a Christian MP or counsellor or policeman,

and your role, is not to advance your personal standing or promote your family, but to do the people good. Make sure the roads are maintained and safe, ensure the bins are collected and the sick are cared for, work out what “good” means.

(2) Punish wrongdoers. Secondly, God has given the state the mandate to punish wrongdoers. You and I as individuals are forbidden to take revenge (we saw that a couple weeks ago, chapter 12), but God has given the state the authority to take revenge, to punish wrongdoers, to fine them, and if necessary imprison. (Many commentators believe that when Paul says “rulers do not bear **the sword** for no reason.” (verse 4) he means the state has the power of capital punishment in line with Genesis 9, and the authority to wage war if evil men threaten the nation. A sword is used only to kill. Paul could have used “baton” or “stick” or “whip” or “rod” but instead he uses the word sword, implying the state even has the right to take life.)

Whichever line you or I might take on war or capital punishment, Paul is unarguably saying that the state has the right to punish citizens who do wrong.

Those in authority: you have a double mandate—do good for the people & punish law breakers.

Now, some Christians believe that if a government is not fulfilling its mandate, let’s say it is rewarding evil people and doing good people harm, perhaps it is legitimate for a Christian to be involved in a non-violent revolution which leads to a better government.

Human government is one of what Christians call a “common-grace” blessing, which like the blessing of marriage, which God has given to all mankind, to believers and unbelievers. Societies fall into chaos without it:

“The Road” is one of those post-apocalyptic film which attempts to portray what life would be like, after a global catastrophe, with no governing authorities, with each man or group or family thinking only for themselves. It paints a picture of how terrifying it is to live without government, as a father and son trying to survive and hide from armed gangs roaming the streets.

Isn’t this a moment in Romans to thank God for good governance? In spite of all the problems, out of the 195 countries in the world, the UK consistently ranks high. The Blavatnik School of Public Administration at Oxford University, which uses 82 metrics drawn from 17 sources ranks the UK 6th in the world for good governance. British people whinge and moan about their political leaders, but we ought to be thankful for those in government, whatever stripe they happen, be. Political leaders: do the people good and punish wrongdoers, that’s your mandate!

A word for Christian citizens: obey the law

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who

do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honor"

Paul urges upon every Christian citizen three duties

(1) Obey the authorities, which means obey the laws of the land.

The only exceptions are when the state asks us to do something God forbids, or when it forbids us to do what Christ commands. Jesus told his apostles to make disciples of all nations, for example. One day the religious leaders in Jerusalem told the apostles not to preach, this is Acts chapter 4: *"no longer speak to anyone in this name."* (Acts 4:17) The apostles had to obey their higher authority, which meant disobeying the lower authority: *"Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."* (4:19)

Obey the law, not only to avoid punishment, but because of conscience sake. If for example you continually go to fast on the roads, you'll develop a guilty conscience whenever we see a cop car. You don't want to feel guilty every time you see a police car in the rear mirror!

(2) Pay our taxes—because that's how our government is funded. Jesus paid the temple tax, Mathew 17 & Caesar's tax, Mark 12.

(3) Respect our governing authorities. I wonder if this is where a Christian will differ from the world who so often speak evil of their government: *"Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour"*

Conclusion

"Preacher, this morning I need medicine for my aching soul," says someone. Perhaps regrets from the past, fears about the future, anxieties about the present. Let me end like this: Who is it, ultimately, we are called to honour, respect and obey? Who IS this world's King? When Jesus, our Good Shepherd, rose triumphantly from the dead, he was "exalted to the highest place and given the name that is above every name.." (Philippians 2) Jesus Christ is King!

What a great comfort to know, as we sit here, in uncertain times, that Jesus Christ, the Man of Love, the crucified, is this world's Supreme King & not only out there in the big wide world, but He is ruler over our individual circumstances and lives, working out everything for our good and his glory.