

## Christian, Do Not Withdraw from Politics—Blog

Today is Victims of Communism Day. It is both a day for honoring those who have died under the godless system of Communism, and a reminder of the evil they experienced. Over 100 million people have died because of this false theology around the world; by war, murder, and starvation. Today, because of Communistic policies and practices, approximately 300 million people face starvation in the upcoming winter (or as they call it, “acute food insecurity”). And so, this is to the Christians who are willing to listen: Do not give up the world; do not disobey God and let this world plunge into a thousand years of darkness.

Today, there are many Christians arguing that we should do this very thing. Though I agree with their emphasis that salvation is only found in Christ and must not be sought from any government, I resist the notion that we should give up and withdraw from the realm of politics and law. This is not what God commands Christians to do. Christians should not only follow the maxim “Obey unless the government commands us to do what God forbids, or forbids us to do what God demands.” God commands us to do more than that.

In Romans 13, Paul gives instructions about the relationship between church and government. Today, this passage is largely misunderstood. In this short article, I’d like to help remedy that. Here are a few succinct observations from the Text to think through:

- In verse 3, the “good conduct” that the government is supposed to “approve” and not be a “terror” to is defined by God, not the government. In fact, the entire twelfth chapter defines what “good conduct” is.
- The word translated “submission” in verse 1 (*Hypotassō*) does not mean obedience. Nowhere else in Scripture is the word *Hypotassō* used to simply mean obedience. Furthermore, the three other occasions where Paul uses it in Romans (8:7, 20; 10:3) he uses it to describe submission.
- When Peter uses this word *Hypotassō* in 1 Peter, he clearly intends that there are limits to submission under authority. There are limits, for example, in 1 Peter 3 when he uses *Hypotassō* in reference to wives submitting to their husbands.
- The word *Hypotassō* implies in it that there are lesser and greater civil authorities that need to be considered. Without diving into a word study, let me just give you the example of Paul in Acts 22:22-29: Paul appeals to Roman law (higher authority) about the lawfulness of the Centurion (lower authority) whipping him.
- In the Old Testament, there are limits to civil authority (God calls some authority good, and some bad). For example, the unjust theft of property is evil: Micah 2:1-2; Hosea 5:10. Unjust wars are evil and unreserved cruelty: Amos 1:3, 11, 2:1. Inhuman slavery is evil: Amos 1:6, 9; 2 Kings 12:1-15. Abortion and/or child murder: Amos 1:13; 2 Kings 16:2-3; 2 Chronicles 33:6. The rejection of God’s ultimate authority: Daniel 4; Psalm 2. There is a limit to submission beyond the maxim: “If they command to do what God has forbidden, or they command us not to do what God has commanded, then and only then do we disobey.”

- What Paul gives in verses 3-7 are the legitimate exercise of civil authority as opposed to illegitimate. They are not a terror to good conduct, but give approval to good. A terror to bad conduct, punishing evil. In this way, both conscience and submission align (verse 5). They exercise authority for the good of their citizens, not to terrorize them.
- Therefore, taxes are proper if they are for the good of the citizenry within the bounds of governments limited authority over their citizens. Notice what Paul says in verse 7. Revenue is not owed to everyone who asks, but only to those who it is properly owed. Just so, there is proper taxation and improper taxation. Verses 8-10 also apply to human beings in civil authority, and verse 7 should be interpreted in light of that fact.
- The universal truth that God establishes all civil authority ought not to override reason when it comes to the rest of the passage. It is certain that Paul had in his mind not only the passages about God's sovereignty over civil authority when he was writing this, but also those OT passages about evil civil authority. If there is any doubt on this, harmonize verse 2 "whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement" with the qualifying verse 6 "the authorities are ministers of God" attending to your good and the punishing of evil, and verse 4 government should "carry out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."

These were just a few reflections from the Text. I hope that you will continue to think and read on this issue. It is my hope that we can gradually overturn the wrong interpretations that have unfortunately dominated the reading of this passage.

As one last thought, consider researching sphere sovereignty. I believe it is a Biblical doctrine about the relationship between church and state. We desperately need a greater acceptance of this forgotten doctrine today. If you would like to hear more of what I have to say on this issue, do not hesitate to contact me, and I will be happy to talk with you more about this.

We have dark and terrifying days ahead of us as Christians and as a culture. Remember God. He will judge rightly (Psalm 98). He will keep His own, and come for them to bring them to Himself. For now, He gives us the message of the Gospel to carry out into the world to sinners without hope; and He gives us instruction on how to live worthy of the calling to which we have been called. Do not forsake either the Gospel or the walk. Look to Christ the Savior of the church, even under an increasingly communistic system. For these reasons we have need of endurance and dependance on God.