

## HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO POLITICS?? -- JULY 19, 2020

**PRAY: Heavenly Father, help us to understand through your word the believer's relationship with government and its leaders.**

All of us are aware that our nation is in the midst of an election season! Like it or not, we are bombarded on all sides with voices of debate, discussion, and division. There are 435 seats up for election in Congress, 34 seats in the US Senate, the office of President, as well as numerous state and local elections scheduled to take place. We are overrun with ads, signs, and slogans. Our nation and states are deeply divided over important issues. Everyone is convinced that he is right and that her candidate is the best. Emotions run high on issues and candidates, and civil communication seems to have gone out the window. While Christians may not like certain politicians or ideologies, we are called by God to respond based not on emotion, but with actions that honor government, as well as its leaders. The Apostle Paul gives us direction as we deal with these issues on a personal level.

### **WHAT IS OUR FOCUS IN TODAY'S LESSON?**

**Reflect Christ in how you interact with politics and government.**

### **TODAY'S SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: ROMANS 13: 1-10**

Some background to increase our understanding of the focal passage:

In Romans 1-8, Paul had explained the theology of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In chapters 9-11, he had addressed Israel's rejection of that gospel. In the following chapters 12-15, Paul wrote of the practical suggestions for believers to live out the gospel message. In particular in Chapter 13, his message addressed how believers should view and relate to governing authorities. This topic was very appropriate for the believers in Rome, who were living under the rule of the Roman Empire. It is equally applicable to our relationship as Christians to our government.

Listen for Paul's guidance to the Roman Christians:

#### **Romans 13: 1-4**

**13** Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but too bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. <sup>4</sup> For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.

## HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO POLITICS?? -- JULY 19, 2020

It would be so easy to say “Oh, our society is so much more complex than in biblical times. Our politicians are corrupt, and we just don’t know who to believe anymore.” But life in the time of Paul was difficult too. Interference by foreign powers, violence, bribery, corruption, injustice, cruelty, racism.....sound familiar?? All were aspects of everyday life that early Christians grappled with on a daily basis, even as we do today. Therefore, these verses from Paul apply not just to ancient Christians, but to us today.

Paul made two statements to outline the discussion of why Christ-followers should live in submission to governing authorities.

- There is no authority except from God.
- All existing authorities are instituted by God.

As the almighty creator and ruler of the universe, God has the right to govern people. He has established governments to bring order to the chaos of the world. A person cannot say that faithfulness to God surpasses his responsibility to the earthly authorities. Our loyalty to God should be reflected in our respect for those in authority and obedience to the established laws of the community. Even though we might object to that submission based on the various parts of political programs with which we don’t agree, total disregard for the government is not in God’s plan.

So what happens if we resist authorities and oppose God’s command?? Paul says we bring judgment on ourselves. Our relationship to government is a complex one, and one that most of us struggle with. God’s command to respond to government with obedience does not mean that we cannot protest policies and actions of the government that dishonor God or that when doing so would be sin against God. Our obedience is centered on the confidence that governing bodies will operate within the boundaries of God’s will.

Paul tells that we should not view authorities as a terror to good behavior. Our good conduct (work) in obeying laws, keeping the peace in the community, and minding our own business, should guarantee no government action or hostility against us in most cases. The opposite is true if we show bad conduct and failure to respect the established law. We should expect a harsh response for those entrusted by God to govern our society. Paul asked the rhetorical question, “Do

# HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO POLITICS?? -- JULY 19, 2020

you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval.”

Note that twice in verse 4, Paul referred to the government as God’s servant. Government as instituted by God is not intended to be totally sovereign, all knowing, all powerful. Those attributes are only God’s! The government and its leaders exist without regard to a particular belief in God or lack of such belief, but always with God’s authority.

## Question to think about:

How has your government been beneficial to you??

- Public education
- Public safety
- Health care assistance
- Services to the needy
- Highways
- Environmental control
- Child protection

**What is the “rule of law?”** This phrase is a reminder that every civilized society must have some form of government that guides the people and processes so that we can live in peace. The idea of the rule of law was not invented recently. It is an ancient concept dating back to creation.

Listen to Paul’s advice to the Romans (and to us) regarding responsibilities toward government:

## Romans 13: 3-7

5 Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. <sup>6</sup> And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God’s servants, continually attending to these tasks.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>7</sup> Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.

Paul points out two characteristics of our submission to government:

- Submit to God-ordained government to avoid the wrath imposed to lawbreakers.
- Paul appealed to the conscience of believers. Obey the authorities because it is the right thing to do!!

## HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO POLITICS?? -- JULY 19, 2020

Paul addressed real-world applications of obedience to the government. Pay your taxes....because the authorities depend on them to carry out their God-given responsibilities as His servants. And not just to the authorities.... Pay your obligations that are due to all....taxes, tolls, respect, and honor.

“It is easy to criticize, demean, curse, criminalize and dismiss our political leaders. This is especially true in this era of social medial proliferation. Where is our conscience? Christians are responsible for our speech, even if it is typed on our Facebook status or tweeted out. One of the ways we can honor our leaders is by praying for them. In fact, in another passage, Paul commands us to do so (1Timothy 1:1-2). Perhaps if we spend more time praying for those who lead us that we do demeaning them things might change for the better. After all, the Bible declares a king’s heart is like the channel of a stream in the hands of God. (Proverbs 21:1)” [Taken from commentary posted on [baptiststandard.com](http://baptiststandard.com) written by Dennis Wiles]

In our final verses, Paul addresses why love is a fulfillment of the law.

### Romans 13: 8-10

<sup>8</sup> Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> The commandments, **Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal;**<sup>[a]</sup> **do not covet;**<sup>[b]</sup> and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: **Love your neighbor as yourself.**<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.

This passage focuses on loving others in general, yet the biblical principle applies to the situation of how we relate to government authorities and politics. In the political setting, just as in our daily lives, we must show a love for Christ and a love for others, allowing that love to be at the forefront when we engage and express ourselves. In political discussions, we must honor Christ in how we talk and express our views. We are called to display common courtesy and the ability to disagree civilly.

To highlight the importance of loving others, Paul cited four of the Ten Commandments, addressing adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting. Each of these protects people from the ungodly conduct of others. Paul was not trying to

## HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO POLITICS?? -- JULY 19, 2020

single these commandments out, but was using select commands to illustrate his point.....the ultimate command.....*Love your neighbor as yourself*. Certainly, this love ethic applies to us today too. Love provides the answer to the question raised in the title of this lesson – How should I respond to politics??? Our love should become such a way of life that it spills over into our civil discussions. We must place a higher value on being a good example of the change Jesus works in our lives. As Christ-followers, we should stay out of the verbal bitterness and degrading conversations often generated by politics. We must look to Jesus as our example and reflect His love in our lives. We must respect those in authority over us and pray for the success in their God-given responsibilities. Our Baptist Faith and Message gives a summary of our responsibility to government: “Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God.”

### How do we live out this lesson in our life??

- Practice love. Politics is a common topic of discussion in this season of elections. You may find yourself on opposite sides on issues or candidates, even with your fellow Christians. Maintain love for others in your discussions.
- Seek answers and enlightenment in God’s Word. The issues we face are not easy. Scripture holds the key to all issues. Seek to be aligned with God, in love and humility.
- Participate in the process. Don’t just complain on the sidelines. It is important that Christians make their voices heard in the political process. Let your love for Christ be an influence.