

Spheres of Authority

The Authority and Responsibility of the Civil Government

Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-20

1. The _____ of Civil Government

Directly following their deliverance from Egypt, God gave the nation of Israel a series of laws to govern their nation (e.g. Ex 20-23). These laws were to be the standard for legality and morality in the nation under the judges and the kings (cf. Deut. 17:14ff). The law delegated authority local elders for the adjudication of disputes, investigation of crimes, and for the carrying out of punishments (cf. Deut. 22:13ff). Even before God provided His Law as the basis for the nation of Israel, men had gathered themselves into nations and established rulers and laws for their collected governance. Whether speaking about the government of Israel under Moses or of any of the nations and governments which have existed either before or after it, the apostle Paul described civil government as a minister of God (Rom. 13:4).

2. The _____ of the Civil Government

Apart from the Law given for the theocratic nation of Israel, the Bible does not provide a detailed description for how a different form of civil government is to be organized, nor does it provide detailed duties that it is to carry out. Civil government is given the authority to take human life (Rom. 13:4), to punish those who do evil (Rom. 13:4; cf. Rom. 12:17-21), and to extract taxes and customs from its citizens for the carrying out of its divinely ordained ministry (Rom. 13:6-7; cf. Matt. 22:15ff).

3. The _____ to Civil Government

Christians are to have the primary disposition of intentional submission to any form of government under which they may live (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). It is God's command that we pray for those who are in authority over us so that we can live peaceful lives of faithfulness to God (1 Tim 2:1-2). Christians are not to be insurrectionists or terrorists, but we are to submit to the government wherever possible as an act of submitting directly to God (1 Pet. 2:13). The only time when a Christian is to refuse to obey the civil authorities is when they command us to do what God has forbidden (Ex. 1:15-22; Dan. 3:4-7, 16-18; 6:1-15) or when they forbid us to do what God has commanded (Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29; cf. Matt 28:18-20). In all other ways and opportunities, we are to strive to maintain a clear conscience by submitting even when the laws may harsh or unreasonable (cf. 1 Pet. 2:18).