

The Civil Government *Is* Subject to God

An Introduction to the Limits of Civil Authority

Romans 13:1-7

Intro: The nature of the conflict over Judge Moore. Is he being foolish, or is this a critical battle at a crucial juncture? Does he have a constitutional basis for what he is doing?

- I. The only authority that the state has is a religious authority that comes from God Almighty
 - A. The nature of authority and subjection to authority (v. 1a)
 - B. Authority that God has not delegated is not true authority (v. 1b)
 - C. Civil authority is religious authority. The word for “minister” in verse 4 is *diakonos* (or servant) whereas the word for “ministers” in verse 6 is *leitourgoi* (from which we get liturgy) and refers to a religious servant.
 - D. Might does not make right: power must be wielded with Biblical ethics, and God alone is Lord of the conscience (v. 5)
- II. Magistrates must serve God (v. 4 – “minister” = servant), are appointed by Him (v. 1) and are accountable to Him. Keep in mind that Romans 12-16 must be read in light of Romans 12:1-2. All men, women and children must present themselves to God (12:1) and be yielded to His will (12:3) whether they are citizens or magistrates.
- III. Magistrates are responsible for implementing God’s laws
 - A. Delegated authority necessitates delegated law since law is the expression of authority. If the source of authority is God (v. 1), the source of law must also be God.
 - B. Disobedience to true authority is resistance to “the ordinance of God.” (v. 2) This means that God’s ordinances define authority.
 - C. To be a terror to evil and not to good (v. 3), the magistrate must have some standard of definition. Paul indicates that this standard is God, for “he is God’s minister to you for good... [and] he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.” (v. 4)
 - D. The obedience reaches to the conscience (v. 5), but since God alone is Lord of the conscience, this obedience must be lawful obedience.
 - E. Not all taxes are lawful (“to all their due” v. 7), but only those where they serve as “God’s ministers” (v. 6). We only “owe” what the law says we owe (v. 8).
- IV. Magistrates have very limited roles
 - A. Acting as God’s servant of vengeance by terrorizing evil-doers (vv. 2-4)
 - B. Serving citizens (“God’s minister to you”) by protecting the life, property and liberty of the law abiding (vv. 3,4)
 - C. Enforcing Biblical law (v. 4)
 - D. Praising the law abiding (v. 3) and condemning evil (v. 2)
- V. Magistrates have limited powers
 - A. The most they can do to promote good is to “praise” it and protect it from attack. This is not a call for a paternal state.
 - B. The most they can do to prevent evil is to punish evil after it has been done (vv. 3-4 “if you do evil”). This is not a call for a police state.
 - C. They may collect taxes to cover the cost of praising good and punishing evil (vv. 6-7)
- VI. Citizens owe no man anything except what the law says that we owe (v. 8)