THE CHRISTIAN’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOVERNMENT

The Christian’s relationship with the civil government is complicated. On the one hand, we understand that God established the authorities that exist, and we should be subject to them (Romans 13:1). On the other hand, the Roman government treated Christians in Rome like sheep for the slaughter (Romans 8:35, 36). Paul had to remind the early believers to seek their persecutors’ good despite their persecution (Romans 12:18). Rather than inciting rebellion and vengeance, they were to trust in the future judgment of God and, in the meantime, seek to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19, 21).

The Christian’s relationship with the civil government is complicated because we hold competing beliefs in tension. For example, our theology is rooted in the legal tradition of the Old Testament. Thus we believe in the rule of law. We also believe in a God who superintends history (Job 12:19; Psalm 75:6, 7; Daniel 2:21). Additionally, Christians are familiar with the prophets who were critics of corrupt rulers throughout the Old Testament (Micah 3:9). So how should we synchronize these principles and relate to civil governments? We should be as submissive to civil government as we possibly can without compromising our loyalty to God. This means that we should pay our taxes and customs and communicate respect and honor to our officials (Romans 13:7). Nothing in Scripture prevents us from fulfilling these minimum responsibilities. More than that, we should far exceed the minimums by generous acts of love (Romans 13:8).
Write out Romans 13 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you are pressed for time, write out Romans 13:8–14. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw Arrows to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse in Romans 13. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

In what ways has religion been embedded in our culture? Does this help or hurt the Christian witness?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/rom11-3
After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?

What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

How does an emphasis on love elevate or lower morality?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/rom11-4
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Exodus 20:1–17
Proverbs 21:1
Matthew 22:35–40
1 Peter 2:13–17

What other verses come to mind about civil and spiritual obedience?

Review your memorized verse from Romans 13.
Where is Jesus in Romans 13?

What kinds of things do you find lull you into a spiritual sleep?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?
Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the chapter, what applications are you convicted of in your personal life?

What are applications you can make in your social, public, and/or civic life?

Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inversebible.org/rom11-7
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How should we honor our government officials when we disagree with their policies?

What have you found helps wake you up when you find yourself falling into a spiritual sleep?

When are there circumstances when we should reject the government’s authority?

What does it mean to you to make no provision for the lust of the flesh?

What would happen to the Christian witness if we made a serious commitment to doing good in the world?

In what ways do you see religious liberty under attack in your country?

How can you be an advocate for religious liberty?