

Read also Daniel 2:12-23. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Let's just get the resistance to the government out in the open. How many of you have gotten a traffic ticket? What about those traffic light cameras where you can get a ticket for just about anything? And, how do you like those new flashing yellow left turn signals? You don't know when it's safe to go! There ought to be a law!

How many have gotten your tax return audited? Don't you naturally shore up your "case" of why you don't owe any more taxes? The government made a mistake on a family member's taxes. They informed her, adding on penalties and interest. Her tax man was able to get it all straightened out, and the government removed the error. But the government did not remove the penalties and interest. There ought to be a law!

You might agree: you just can't trust the government! We have our own ideas about what is reasonable and right.

Frank Sinatra made famous the song, "I Did it My Way." It's a popular song. Two people even asked that it be sung for their relative's funerals. Frank Sinatra later said he grew to hate the song because it was self-indulgent and yet was so popular it stuck to him like glue.

Today's passage brings a host of difficult questions about submitting to governmental authorities. There's "our way" and then there's the government's way. But I know the Bible is a valuable loving guide. So let's explore a difficult question. Is it our obligation to support whatever policies our governing authorities set forth? READ: Romans 13:1-7

Is this passage saying we must support the policies of our government whether or not the policies are good for people? What if a government expelled Christians for attending church or sharing their faith? That happens in some places. Would it be wrong to disobey such a government?

Great questions. We should always be willing to confront Scriptures that seem to NOT make sense. So let's see what clearly comes to the surface here.

Romans 13 does say that

- we may not frivolously disregard civil authority.

Paul points out that the purpose of civil law is to keep order. God is into order. (That's why he made Presbyterians, who do everything "decently and in order!" After all, our Constitution is called *The Book of Order*. ☺)

God overcame the disorder of the universe, light and dark, the sea and land, and made a wonderful world for us to live in. And, God even gave authority to humans to run things—to create cities and civil order. Thus, God has established governmental order or authority to make life happy and livable.

Therefore, Christians, along with everyone else, have to obey the traffic laws.

Now let's couple that idea with what Paul said to Titus. He said, "Believers must be subject to authorities and rulers, obedient and ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, and be gentle and show every courtesy to everyone." (Titus 3:2)

Paul was so specific about courteous behavior because the people in the church in Crete were rather unruly—they needed to grow spiritually to become mature Christians.

The point is, disharmony results from speaking evil about those with whom we disagree. When we fail to use decorum, when we insist on our own agenda and speak badly of governmental authority, division escalates. Order is dismantled. We talked earlier about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was committed to Paul's method to promote change. He said "Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal." Paul advises "speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling; be gentle and show courtesy."

You might consider this prayer that works wonders around my house, "God make my words tender and sweet today so tomorrow I do not have to eat them!"

Paul makes a second point.

- Obeying the governing authorities is not conditional on the government being Christian. They may not know that God has chosen them to keep down civil chaos. They may not necessarily be Christian.

This passage simply opposes chaotic civil life. The goal is a good and decent society.

At the same time, a government cannot put itself in God's place and demand divine allegiance, that is, you cannot be expected to serve the government like it is "god." That is not the type of government that Paul speaks of in this passage. For example, sometimes people around the world are denied the right to worship their God. They have to defy the government to go to church and they very likely will be punished for it.

Sometimes Christians are called on to stand up to a government. But here, Paul is talking about governments as agents of good which are to promote civil good and punish evil. He's talking about Christians being known for a good word, a positive attitude, a willing and helpful influence—all of which promotes unity and diminishes chaos.

You can try this in your own home to see if it works. Ask yourself, am I reacting to and resisting everything my spouse, parent, housemate says? This is not going to bring a more civil atmosphere. Unless the other person in your household is expecting you to worship him or her as a god, *you can do something to promote a harmonious atmosphere*. I will leave the rest for you to discover for yourself!

In regard to the government and its citizens, though, when a government promotes evil and punishes people who do good—when tyrannies rise up which demand that people give them the devotion only God can demand, then they step outside the discussion in this passage. Paul is not discussing evil governments here. Christians had not yet been persecuted by any government, although that would happen later under Nero. Here, though, Paul is discussing how to be a good citizen in a relatively good government.

So let's look at Daniel's story. His own nation was actually captured by an aggressor nation. He and others were exiled to Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel and several other educated Israelites to his palace to serve in his government. It was an extremely difficult time.

Daniel is an excellent example of how to do good to governmental people and where to draw the line.

King Nebuchadnezzar was a hothead. He was demanding and flew into a rage the minute he did not get the service he wanted. He commanded the execution of all his wise men. But Daniel responded with prudence and discretion to the executioner. He did not rail against the king. He asked questions. He promised to help.

And then he went back to his home, informed his church friends, and all of them got down on their knees and asked God for help. **They did not think this was a futile effort.**

They knew they had a greater authority to which to turn. They knew they had a God whose authority superseded that of the Babylon government. Daniel knew that, even though not visible, the kingdom of God overlays the activities in the world. They were members of a much greater Kingdom, whose leader, GOD, had a great interest in their difficult circumstance and in their nation's survival. So Daniel and his friends prayed and God answered. Daniel learned some amazing things. Hear his prayer: (Daniel 2:20-23)

Praise the name of God forever and ever, for he has all wisdom and power.

He controls the course of world events; he removes kings and sets up other kings.

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the scholars.

He reveals deep and mysterious things and knows what lies hidden in darkness, though he is surrounded by light.

I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors, *for you have given me wisdom and strength.*

You have told me what we asked of you and revealed to us what the king demanded."

Do you trust God to hear your prayers? Do you trust him enough you can keep your integrity?

God knew exactly how to help. When Daniel went to the king, again he was respectful and truthful as he said, "I cannot tell you—no one can show you the mystery that you want—but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and he has disclosed it . . . so that you may understand it." (Dan 2:25-30)

That's amazing.

This king would be unreasonable again and again but each time, Daniel and his friends remembered that they belonged to a greater kingdom and a greater God who is deeply interested in your welfare and the welfare of this nation and who knows just what to do to bring justice.

This is our God who has asked us to submit to the government with an attitude of respect and good citizenship. Are you praying to God when you are upset with our government? There should not be one Christian railing against our government with disrespect, name-calling, hatred,

or chaos. Rather, respectfully raise your concerns, with prayer, being certain that God will reveal to you the wisdom you need and open the door for you to lead others to do good.

In these divided times, respectful, responsible citizens are sorely needed. Let us be Christians who influence for goodness. Are you willing? We might be amazed at the power of the unifying presence we can be.

AMEN