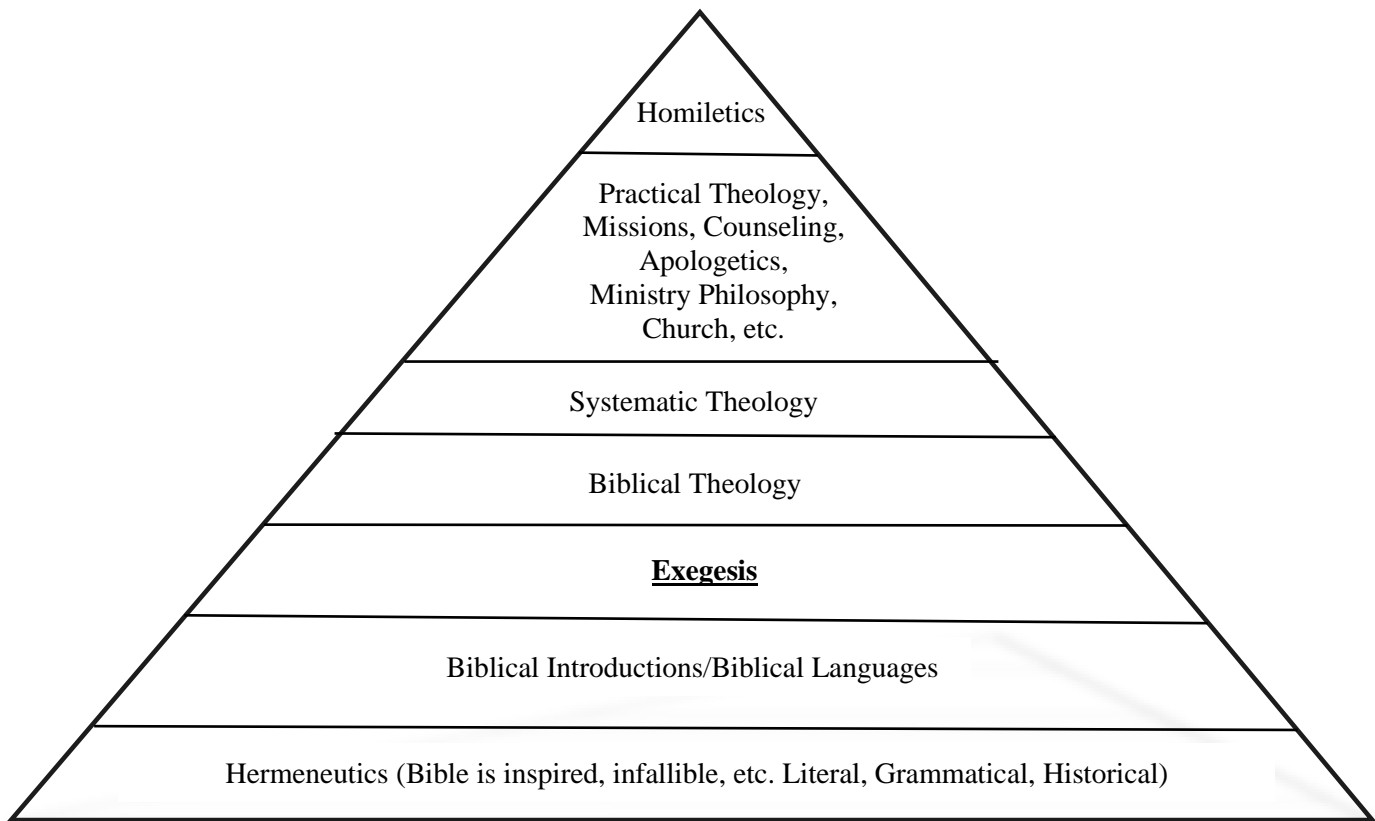


GOVERNMENT, GOD AND THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION

- Like everything we do in church, we need to make sure that we are developing our practices from what the Bible has to say.
- How are we to Biblically find out how we are supposed to act towards our government?



- This is the same process that any Bible teacher uses to come to a Biblical conclusion on anything. We must be willing to submit what we do (Practical Theology and Ministry Philosophy) to what we “mine” out of the depths of Scripture by our exegesis.
- *Exegesis* means “exposition or explanation.” Biblical exegesis involves the examination of a particular text of scripture in order to properly interpret it. Exegesis is a part of the process of hermeneutics, the science of interpretation.¹ We are mining the text to get something *out* (ex-) of it.
- We believe in a literal, historical and grammatical hermeneutic (the science of interpretation).
 - There are many “hermeneutics” but only one that seeks to find the author’s original intent.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Biblical-exegesis.html>

- A literal method seeks to understand the words of the passage in their normal, natural, and customary meaning within the context. This method searches for the intended meaning of the Biblical author. According to Rolland McCune, “In this method, interpretation consists in finding the meaning of words according to grammar, syntax, and cultural setting and in correlation with the rest of Scripture. In this normal or plain interpretation, the Bible is best allowed to speak for itself.”²
- Before diving in and saying that a church must act one way or that a believer must do something, we must set the rules that are governing our interpretation and application of various commands in the Bible.
- We are not allowed to simply apply some mystical or personal meaning but must strive for what the author intended when he wrote it and then we can apply it in our own context within those bounds. The text cannot mean something today that it did not mean when it was written.

Why is it important to start with this?

- Throughout the years Romans 13 has been used as *the* Scripture for “godly” governments to enforce any rule, command or law they have deemed.
- In fact, it is said that Romans 13 has “caused more unhappiness and misery...than any other seven verses in the New Testament by the license they have given to tyrants...”³
- The Kings of the past said they had sovereign control over the whole land and could do as they wanted with people and property.
- Slavery in the United States was promoted using Romans 13 even within the evangelical community.
- The Apartheid in South Africa and Holocaust in 1930’s Germany was built around Romans 13 as well.
- On and on throughout the history of world governments, this chapter (and far too many more) has been exploited for the selfish purposes of sinful man. We need to be able to read, study and properly comprehend what the Scriptures are saying so that we can prevent such atrocities from happening again.

THREE AREAS OF GOD GIVEN AUTHORITY

- God has given the family, the church and government limited authority. This means that each sphere has a ruling body that has been setup by God. For the most part these three entities act independently of each other. Here is a brief overview of what God has ordained and expects from His Word.
- The authority in the family has been given to the husband.
 - **Ephesians 5:22–23** “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”
 - While the husband is the authority, his authority is limited.

² Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (Allen Park, MI.: DBTS, 2009), 1:61.

³ Tim Cantrell, *When to Disobey*, <https://www.gracechurch.org/cantrell/posts/2127>

- He cannot force his wife to sin as she is ultimately accountable to God, not her husband.
- The authority in the church has been given to the elders.
 - **1 Timothy 5:17** “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”
 - **Ephesians 5:24a** “But as the church is subject to Christ...”
 - Even though the elders have authority in the church, it is a limited authority. The ultimate authority comes from Christ.
- The authority in the government is given to whomever is ruling over the people.
 - As we will read from **Romans 13**, the authority that the government has is limited and the ultimate authority comes from God.

What happens when one authority oversteps into another’s sphere?

- Because each sphere has limited authority, each sphere must stay in its own area of authority.
- When the government says that homosexual marriage can take place in a church, they are overstepping their authority as they start to dictate what happens in the church.
- The same is true with the family. We are not to follow what society, or the government deems appropriate regarding discipline. God has given commands on how we are to faithfully shepherd our children and that is our highest authority.
- God has given our government the rod to make sure the people stay in line. This means that as citizens we are not to be vigilantes but allow the government to take the appropriate actions.

Do these three authorities overlap?

- They absolutely do, but it is limited as well.
- For example, if there are people breaking the law in church, then the government is called in to deal with the problem. This would be a time that the elders would submit their authority to the government so that they can bear the sword as God has ordained.
- The government has safety precautions for our church building; i.e., building codes.
- The same is true with the family unit. If there is abuse or something else illegal happening in the family unity, the government steps in and uses its authority.
- When the government acts illegally, there are avenues that one can take to try and make things right. This is not always the case as some countries are ruled by dictators.
- While these three are certainly independent with their own structure, they all are accountable to God.

WHAT IS OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOVERNMENT?

- When we talk about government, *we need to make sure that ultimately, we understand that we are talking about people*. These people have been made in the image of God, just like us, and could be walking in darkness, just like we once did as well. These people have eternal souls and need Christ.
- When we separate the institution of government from the people who are in it, we are acting no different than the people who are treating their citizens inhumanely.
- If the people who make up government are not saved, then they are under the sway of Satan and are more than happy to do the work that he has for them.
 - **1 John 5:19** “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” The battles that we are up against are not against people but powerful evil forces.
- **Romans 13:1** “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”
- Our first relationship is one of submission. We should be the best citizens that our country has. Why is that? The authority that our government has, was given to them by God.
- Since God is the one that gave our government authority, any rebellion against them is a rebellion against God. Anytime we grumble and complain against government, it is going against God.
 - We are effectively telling God we do not agree with his decision of who He has placed in over us.
- **Romans 13:2** “Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”
- The *therefore* is referring back to the point that God has given governments authority. Why do we have a submission relationship with the government? It is because God has given them authority.
- It is because their authority comes from God that whoever resists that authority has put themselves against the ordinances of God. The word *ordinances* mean “an arrangement.” What God has arranged; you oppose.
- By doing so, as Paul states, you will receive condemnation upon yourself.
 - This is characteristic of unbelievers, to oppose God and His ways (**2 Peter 2:9–10**).
- **Romans 13:3** “For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same...”
- Now we read another reason for our submission to government. The purpose for God ordaining our government (perhaps the main purpose) is for restraining and punishing evil and rewarding good.
- Here is why every Christian should have good Biblical hermeneutics. If all we do is read the first two verses of Romans 13, we are led to believe that our submission to the government is without question or hesitation.

- This is why atrocities in the past were able to happen, people did not know their Bibles. Perhaps the same reason should be stated for today's issues. We are not coming to our Bibles with the proper interpretational techniques but simply jumping right to *how does this apply to me...* (the top of the pyramid)
- Regarding **verse 3**, it gives us the divinely intended purpose for government. In other words, no government operates under its own absolute authority because it had its authority given to it.
 - Therefore, the government has limited authority; the limitations been placed upon them by God. The government itself is in a place of submission to God.
 - We will discuss this further in a separate section but suffice to say there is only one absolute authority and He is God.
- “It is, therefore, wrong for human governments to misuse and abuse their authority by turning the divine purpose on its head.”⁴
- Now, **verse 3** is challenging. Firstly, how can Paul write that the government was for doing good and restraining evil when Nero was over Rome when he wrote this? Among many other horrors, Nero was known for his brutal torture of Christians.
 - Everything from lighting them on fire to during his dinner parties to sewing them in animal stomachs and allowing lions and other beasts to eat them out. It would be Nero who would order the execution of both Paul and Peter. He was one of the brutalist men in Rome's history.
 - We have to find out if Paul was talking *specifically* about the Roman government in his day, or was he alluding to something else?
- So, if Paul was not talking about his current government, what was he talking about? “The answer is that verse 3 is not talking about how things *were*, but how they *should be*. It is speaking about the divinely ordained *purpose* of every government, not the *actions* of every government.”⁵
- Therefore, we should not take what Paul said as an endorsement of what the Roman government was doing but rather what God had divinely tasked them to do with the authority they had been given.
 - It is no different then when we read in Scripture about how a Christian is to act, but then we do not always act that way. Scripture gives us what we *should* be doing, not what we *are always* doing.
- Whether it is in Paul's day in Rome or in our own day in the United States, all governments are made up of sinful men who desire to do the exact opposite of what God has commanded them to do. Instead of restraining evil, they are, at times, promoting it, facilitating it and persecuting those who do good.

⁴ Brett Laird, *Family, Government and Church* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherds Press, 2021), 25.

⁵ Ibid

SUBMISSION AND DISOBEDIENCE

- While this is certainly not exhaustive, we need to look at some of the areas that we must submit to our government because God has appointed them. Also, when are times that civil disobedience are required?
- It is important to point out “A Christian worldview opposes both *tyranny* and *anarchy*, and instead supports the Biblical principle of *limited government*.”⁶
- With that being said, there are times when believers are called upon to intentionally disobey what the government commands. It is important to remember, even if you disobey the government for Godly reasons and principles, it does not bear the sword in vain and there may be heavy consequences.

What is the church’s ultimate purpose?

- When we talk about compliance or disobedience in the life of the Christian, we must *always* remember that our primary goal as a Christian and as a church is to glorify God (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:23; Matt 5:16).
- The church *is not* a political movement. We understand that injustice, inequality, unfairness, racism, etc. are all alive and well on the earth. We know that there is no place someone can go to get away from sin. We know that there are no perfect people that are in government or anywhere else.
- Knowing all that is wrong in the world should motivate us to two very distinct actions: preach the gospel and long for heaven.
 - By preaching the gospel, we are giving people the only thing that can bring real change. We know that the world’s systems are faulty and there is nothing the world can do to fix it.
 - By longing for heaven, we are placing our final hope, not on the world and its systems, but in the fact that one day all these wrongs will be righted. We are acknowledging that our citizenship and our final destination is not this place but one in the heavens.
- If we lose the purpose of the church or our purpose for being Christians, we have lost the mission of God and will not look distinct but simply another worldly ideology that will fail.

What is the Christian’s normal disposition towards the government?

- This is probably the question that will continue to tear apart believers and churches from now until the Lord calls us home. When is civil disobedience permitted and/or expected?
- Starting with obedience, the Christian is called to *always obey the government*. That is the normal disposition of any believer.⁷ We should not be known as those who are constantly kicking against the government, constantly complaining about what they are doing or known as rebels against their rule.

⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁷ Benjamin Edwards, *COVID, Churches, and Government Regulations*, (Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 8.

- Paul told Timothy in **1 Timothy 2:1–2** “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”
 - This is what we should *normally* look like in the church. Praying for our rulers at all levels.
 - *The purpose?* So that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life. By doing this we are displaying godliness and dignity to the onlooking world. Instead of joining in with others who hate our government, we know that they are spiritually blind and need our prayers and cooperation.
- Again in **1 Peter 2:13–14** “Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.”
 - The believer’s normal disposition is submission to any human institution that has authority over us.
 - Why? So that we are not put under the punishment of our government here nor are we put under the punishment of God in heaven.
- As Paul wrote to Titus, he was the pastor of a church in Crete and oversaw many churches there. Paul said in **Titus 3:1–2** “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.”
 - Titus was to remind his people, those in the church, that they were to subject themselves to those who were placed over them. They were to be obedient to them. Also, instead of working against the government, they were to be ready for good works and not act like the unbelieving world.
- The normal disposition of any believer towards the government should be submission, good works, a quiet lifestyle, praying for their leaders, paying taxes and seeking to be obedient.
- We may be asked to do things we do not like, but that is not a reason not to do them. We may not agree with various laws and mandates, but we have an opportunity to show our submissiveness to God by being submissive to the government.
- “All Christians should seek the welfare of the country where God has sovereignly placed them, and pray to the Lord on its behalf. Christians should *love* their country, and they should be *model citizens* in all respects – including in the way they honor, respect, and submit to their governing authorities.”⁸
- The centrality of our obedience to what the government tells us to do does not come from our own heart, thoughts or emotions. *It comes from God’s Word and His standard.*
- The government is not our highest authority but one that has limited authority from God.

⁸ Brett Laird, *Family, Government and Church* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherds Press, 2021), 35.

When is a Christian *obligated* to civil disobedience?

- I chose to say *obligated* and not *permitted* because permission implies a choice.
 - There are places where Christians have a choice to obey or not⁹, but there are also places where our allegiance to Christ or the government will be called into practice.
- “How can we distinguish between situations when God wants us to submit to government, and when He wants us to follow the example of the apostles in obeying God rather than man? What are the limits God has placed on human authority? And how can we know when those lines have been crossed and we must therefore obey God rather than men?”¹⁰
- Firstly, when the government mandates to do something that is against God’s Word.
 - Doing something that the government says is okay but against God’s Word is a sin of *commission*.
- Secondly, when the government prohibits something that is mandated in God’s Word.
 - If we stop doing something that God’s Word commands, we have committed the sin of *omission*.
- Thirdly, when the government oversteps its authority and starts dictating to the church.
 - The government, because of its limitations from God, cannot tell the church how they are to operate.
 - “It is a sad day when the body of Christ is paying more attention to Caesar’s fallible regulations than to Christ’s infallible Book and loving the counsel of their spiritual leaders who...care for them.”¹¹
- Why are these three areas of *mandatory* civil disobedience important?
- **Mark 12:16–17** “They brought [a denarius]. And He said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ And they said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they were amazed at Him.”
 - Jesus is telling this group that the government can tax you, legally, but they cannot demand your worship. Furthermore, they cannot stand between the Christian and their worship. Just as the money bore the image of Caesar, so you and I bear the image of God.¹²
 - We may have the right in our country to assemble as a church, but even if those rights are taken away, we have an *obligation* to assemble from Christ Himself. Therefore, worship is not optional for the believers.
 - “In one brilliant statement, our Lord both legitimizes and limits the role of the State.”¹³
- We must *always* obey God, regardless of what the government says to do. Christ is the head of the church and those in the church, not the government.

⁹ The “to obey or not to obey” questions that rise up are best handled under our May 6th class when dealing with areas of obedience that are not clearly laid out in the Scriptures.

¹⁰ Brett Laird, *Family, Government and Church* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherds Press, 2021), 37.

¹¹ Tim Cantrell, *When to Disobey*, <https://www.gracechurch.org/cantrell/posts/2127>

¹² Brett Laird, *Family, Government and Church* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherds Press, 2021), 45.

¹³ Tim Cantrell, *When to Disobey*, <https://www.gracechurch.org/cantrell/posts/2127>

- **Matthew 28:20** “...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
 - Because Jesus has all authority (v. 18), it is not limited, like the governments.
 - His command is to teach *all* that He has commanded. The believer is to obey everything that Christ has commanded, regardless of the outcome.
 - If we are not following all that Christ has commanded us we are declaring our allegiance to other ruling bodies is greater than our allegiance to Christ.

What does civil disobedience look like? How can we put this into practice?

- This question is one that has not been so easy to answer throughout the years.
- The Hebrew midwives chose not to obey Pharaoh’s orders to kill the newborn boys but rather set them free so that they would live.
- We have Daniel and his stand against eating the king’s food. He then did not stop praying to God and start prying towards the statue of the king. His friends also found themselves in a furnace for their disobedience.
- Peter in **Acts 5:29** “We must obey God rather than man.” He said this to the high council of the day.
- Luther inadvertently started the Reformation in the 16th century by nailing his 95 Theses to the castle door.
- John Knox was arrested when preaching in St. Andrews castle in Scotland in the 1600’s. Because he refused to bow to the Roman Catholic government, he was made a galley slave for 19 months.
 - He wrote *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women. This was not against women in general, but against not less than 4 queens who ruled England/Scotland.*¹⁴
 - Mary of Guise (1515-1560), M. Tudor (1516-1558), M. Stuart (1542-1587), E. Tudor (1533-1603).
 - Once he had become a public figure, his life had been mainly one of ceaseless activity and unremitting toil. He died an exhausted man, but he had proved himself to be a great Christian leader and a statesman who became ‘the reformer of his Church’s faith and the assertor of his country’s liberty’. He had exhausted himself in his battle for the political, social and, above all, the religious freedom of his people and his country.¹⁵
- Ulrich Zwingli, pastor of a protestant church in Zurich led the Swiss army into battle in 1531 to fight against the RCC and their tyrannical reign. He would die that day at the hands of Catholic soldiers.
- The Scottish Covenanters (Presbyterians) in the 17th century “Simply stated, the Covenanters were those people in Scotland who signed the National Covenant in 1638.
 - They signed this Covenant to confirm their opposition to the interference by the Stuart kings in the affairs of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.”¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://www.history.pcusa.org/blog/2014/10/john-knox-and-monstrous-regiment-women>

¹⁵ https://www.rcpe.ac.uk/sites/default/files/vol28_1.1_9.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.covenanter.org.uk/whowere.html>

- It is interesting to note that “The Stuart kings harboured the belief of the Divine Right of the monarch. Not only did they believe that God wished them to be the infallible rulers of their kingdom - they also believed that they were the spiritual heads of the Church of Scotland.”¹⁷
- The Covenanters were opposing the monarch because the king had said that the Book of Common Prayer was to be used in all the churches.
- In our day, there are attacks on the family through the LGBTQ movement, feminism, abortions, transgenderism, etc. The government abuses its powers and has a complete disdain for ruling with integrity. It has overstepped its boundaries and has begun, in some areas, to dictate to the church how to operate.
- Is there anything we are obligated to do against these attacks? Should we simply allow God to do what He wants, and we sit silently by and watch?

TAKEAWAYS FOR US TODAY

- Discernment is not optional for Christians. We should have an understanding of what is going on around us and how we should be responding.
 - **Proverbs 15:14** “The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly.” We want to know the truth. It is not wise to simply take everything at face value and make decisions and actions based upon one side of any given narrative.
 - One who is spiritually mature has “their senses trained to discern good and evil.” (Heb 5:14)
- We should have our minds made up that when it comes to Biblical issues, we are *always* going to stand with the commands of Christ regardless of the outcome.
 - **John 21:19** “Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me!’”
 - **Acts 20:24** “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.”
- Our desires should be to ultimately glorify God, regardless of what is happening to us or around us.
 - **1 Peter 2:19** “For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.”
 - God looks favorably upon those standing up to a wicked government and following His commands.
- We must always stand for the truth and not allow lies to dictate the narrative.
 - **1 Timothy 3:15** “...but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

¹⁷ Ibid.