

Week 4
Discussion Guide

Romans 13:1-7

Government's have been established for a reason and they have prescriptive directives in Scripture.

Because of the *commission* of magistrates, we owe them obedience.

Moreover although there are different classes and types of superior, they are the same in this respect, that we must accept them all as ministers ordained by God (Institutes, 761).

What happens when governments don't function as they are designed to?

Theodore Beza in Rights of the Magistrates says, "three axioms clarify conditions warranting armed resistance, '(1) That the tyranny must be undisguised and notorious; (2) That the recourse should not be had to arms before all other remedies have been tried; (3) Nor yet before the question has been thoroughly examined, not only as to what is permissible but also as to what is expedient, lest the remedies prove more hazardous than the very disease."

Individuals are called to obedience and suffering to the utmost.

Unfortunately it happens more often than not that most rulers forsake the proper path. Some who are heedless of their duty slumber in their pleasures and delights; others who are bent on greed auction off all laws, privileges, rights and legal judgements; others tear from the wretched populace to fund their lavish excesses; others resort to downright banditry by looting houses, raping girls and married women and murdering the innocent. Thus many cannot easily be convinced that such men should be recognized as rulers who must be obeyed as much as possible. Amid vices so hideous and unnatural not only in the office of a magistrate but on humankind itself, they see in their superior no sign of God's image which should shine forth in a magistrate, and they discern in him nothing of a minister of God appointed to praise the good and punish the bad. There is no doubt that deep in men's hearts there has always been the inclination to hate and curse tyrants as much as to love and revere just kings. However, if we set our sights on the word of God, it will lead us further. For it will make us obedient not only to the authority of rulers who do their work honestly and who faithfully discharge their duties but also to all who are in any way of superior rank, however far they may be from doing all that their position requires...whatever they are like and however they behave, they have power to rule only from him (Institutes, 777).

What to do when you're not sure about the validity of a decision of government? "How is it, when the subjects do not know whether the prince is in the right or not? I answer, As long as they cannot know, nor find out by any possible means, they may obey without peril to their souls. (John Dillingberger, Selections from Luther's writings, 399)

Proper forms of rebuke are a necessary starting place.

Rebellion is a grievous sin, since it is disobedience to God, and since it necessarily works such permanent physical ruin and social demoralization among our fellow-men. The limit of this obligation to obedience will be found only when we are commanded to do something contrary to the superior authority of God (Acts iv. 19; v. 29); or when the civil government has become so radically and incurably corrupt that it has ceased to accomplish the ends for which it was established. When that point has unquestionably been reached, when all means of redress have been exhausted without avail, when there appears no prospect of securing reform in the government, itself, and some good prospect of securing it by revolution, then it is the privilege and duty of a Christian people to change their government — peacefully if they may, forcibly if they must. (A.A. HODGE, Commentary on the Westminster Confession, 23)

For if he chooses to set up kings over kingdoms and other sorts of authority over free peoples, our duty is to be submissive and obedient to whatever powers prevail in the place where we live. (Institutes, 762)

When the magistrates command or require the Christian to do or say anything contrary to God, the Christian is absolved of any requirement of obedience and required to disobey civil authorities.

“Even evil rulers kept God’s law to some degree, and disobedience was justified only in response to actions contrary to God’s law.” (Lilback and Hall, Guide to the Institutes, 416)

“The state, as he (Peter) defines it, is to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right...But what is to be done when the state does that which violates its legitimate function? The early Christians died because they would not obey the state in a civil matter. People often say to us that the early church did not show any civil disobedience. They do not know church history...The bottom line is that at a certain point there is not only the right, but the duty, to disobey the state. (Shaeffer, Christian Manifesto, 92).”

Magistrates may not interfere with the church in matters of faith and may not assume the responsibility of administering the sacraments or oversight of the preaching.

“It pleases His divine will that we call His hangmen gracious lords, fall at their feet and be subject to them in all humility, so long as they do not ply their trade too far and desire to become shepherds instead of hangmen.” (Dillenger on Luther, 389)

Westminster Confession 23:1 *And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof (of church government, Authentic Modern Version makes clear), among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief.*