

# Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

## CIVIL RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIANS

Guy N. Woods

Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same: for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For for this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this very thing. Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfilment of the law (Rom. 13:1-10).

Our lesson text for today is an extremely important one, because it sets out the relation between Christians and the government under which they live, and their duties and responsibilities to it. Taught, with great emphasis here, is the fact that civil law is ordained of God, Christians are expected to be law-abiding citizens; to rebel against civil law (when that law is not in conflict with the law of God), amounts to rebellion against God.

Our lesson text may more fully be outlined as follows: (1)

Government is ordained of God (Rom. 13:1-7). (a) Those who violate civil law, disobey God. (b) Civil law is for the good of the people. (c) The civil power is an agency of God against evil doers. (d) Submission to the law of the land is both safe and proper. (e) Paying taxes is a matter of conscience. (f) Love fulfils the law. (g) Love prompts one to keep the commandments. (h) Love works no ill to ones neighbor, and thus fulfils the law.

God does not determine the kind of civil government under which His people are to live; He does designate the disposition that must characterize His people toward the government, regardless of its kind. Civil law is necessary to the existence of peaceful society; and children of God must live in submission thereto. The only exception is when the government bids one do that which violates the law of God. Peter and John stated that principle which must then motivate us, when they said: **“Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard”** (Acts 4:19, 20). **“We must obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29).

### “THE POWERS THAT BE ARE ORDAINED OF GOD”

The context clearly shows that the phrase **“higher powers”** (to which **“every soul”** is to be in subjection) simply designates the civil government under which we live. To be in subjection, is to be in *submission*) to be *obedient* to the **“powers”** to which we are subject. How *far* we are to submit is not here indicated; we have seen, in the introduction, that the principle is set out, by inspired apostles, in Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29. Where that exception does not exist, Christians are required, by divine edict, to live in harmony with the laws of the land where they reside. The reason assigned is: **“There is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God.”** When it is said that there is **“no power but of God,”** it is meant that all power is exercised by the will of God, who permits it, and who

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**Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder  
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can (and sometimes does) withdraw it at will. Examples of God setting up men as rulers, and demoting them are numerous in the sacred writing (Dan. 2:21; 4:17-35). See 1 Samuel 8:1-33. All who exercise authority do so by the will of God, because government itself is **“ordained of God.”** The word *ordain* means to set in order; God thus provides men with civil government; because, in the nature of the case, man in this life, must have it to survive. God does not designate the *kind* of government (whether dictatorial, monarchal, or republican); He leaves it to man to determine the kind of government under which he prefers to live; neither does God always approve of the conduct of the governments which He ordains. Often, He uses wicked men to further His plans, because they possess the character suited to the work to be done. For example, God has used wicked men to punish His own people when they became wicked, examples of which are Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. Since God is the author of human governments, it follows that those who resist them, are in rebellion to God and shall suffer punishment (both by the government and by God) for their disobedience.

## **“HE BEARETH NOT THE SWORD IN VAIN”**

To be in “terror” is to be afraid; those who are engaged in a good work have nothing to fear; only those engaged in evil are terrified by the civil power. If, therefore, children of God wish to be in a position of confidence respecting their government, let them do that which is good and they not only will not have occasion for fear, they will enjoy the approval of the government which looks with favor on law-abiding citizens. Why is this so? The civil ruler is **“a minister of God”** (he performs his duties by the will of God), and he operates for the good of the Lord’s people. Those who do evil are the ones who have reason to be afraid, because the officer of the law does not bear his sword in vain, he will use it to execute vengeance on the evildoer. This shows us that the civil power is an agent of God for the execution of punishment upon those who violate the laws of society, and of God in the world. The sword is a symbol of power and is a lethal weapon. When it is said that the officer bears the sword **“not in vain,”** it means that he can, and will, use it, for the purpose for which it is designed. This teaches us that the state (civil government) has divine authority for restraining the wicked, and the use of **“the sword”** (deadly weapons) in so doing. The words **“avenger for wrath,”** means an avenger to execute wrath upon evil doers. The officer is the “minister” (servant) of God to this end. We should carefully distinguish between the legitimate activities of the officer ordained of God for this purpose, and the effort of an individual (or the Christian) to seize such power and execute it on his own behalf. The former is acceptable to God; the latter is sinful.

In verse 5, of our lesson text, two reasons for subjection to the civil authorities are assigned: (1) fear of punishment; (2) the exercise of a good conscience, (the realization we are carrying out the will of God). We have seen that (a) God ordains civil government; (b) rulers exercise their powers by

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# COMPARING THE POLICIES: CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## TAXPAYER FUNDING OF ABORTION

**Kamala Harris** supports using tax dollars to pay for abortions. As a Senator, Harris voted against the *No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act* which would limit federal funding for abortion on a government-wide basis. The Biden-Harris Administration directed Title X funding to facilities that perform or refer for abortions.

**Donald Trump** opposes using tax dollars to pay for abortions. He pledged to sign the *No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act* which would limit federal funding for abortion on a government-wide basis. President Trump's Administration issued a rule to ensure Title X funding did not go to facilities that perform or refer for abortions.

## UNLIMITED ABORTION UNTIL BIRTH

**Kamala Harris** voted for the *Women's Health Protection Act*, a bill that would enshrine unlimited abortion until birth in federal law and policies and eliminate existing state-level protections for unborn children and their mothers such as parental involvement measures for minors.

**Donald Trump** opposes the *Women's Health Protection Act*, a bill that would enshrine unlimited abortion until birth in federal law and policies and eliminate existing state-level protections for unborn children and their mothers such as parental involvement measures for minors.

## FUNDING ABORTION PROVIDERS ABROAD

**Kamala Harris** supports President Biden's reversal of the "Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance" policy which limited federal funding for organizations that provide or promote elective abortions in other countries.

**Donald Trump** issued the "Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance" policy which limited federal funding for organizations that provide or promote elective abortions in other countries.

## BORN-ALIVE ABORTION SURVIVORS

**Kamala Harris** voted against the *Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act*, which would ensure that infants born alive during attempted abortions are afforded the same degree of medical care as any other newborn of the same gestational age.

**Donald Trump** supports the *Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act*, which would ensure that infants born alive during attempted abortions are afforded the same degree of medical care as any other newborn of the same gestational age.

## THE U.S. SUPREME COURT & ABORTIONS

**Kamala Harris** pledges to nominate only individuals who share her view that unlimited abortion should be a constitutionally protected right. She applauded the appointment of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson and voted against the confirmations of Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett.

**Donald Trump** pledges to nominate qualified individuals to the Supreme Court who will interpret the U.S. Constitution as written and not legislate from the bench. He appointed Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett.

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divine decree; (c) children of God are to be in subjection to them. *What of those governments which have persecuted Christians, and have sought to exterminate Christianity?* We must conclude that such governments do not act in harmony with the divine will; they are not pleasing to Him, and may, therefore, be resisted in their ungodly demands. All that is required of us is to be in subjection in those areas not involving violation of God's law. It is obvious, from the context, that these matters were not involved in the apostle's view; discussed is the proper attitude toward *civil government* operating in its legitimate sphere.

**“RENDER TO ALL THEIR DUES”**

That is, because of fear of punishment and for conscience sake, Christians pay tribute (taxes). The employees of the government engaged in the collection of taxes are functioning by divine authority, and are, therefore, **“ministers of God's service.”** Inasmuch as civil government is divinely authorized, and since governments must collect taxes to exist, God ordains the tax collection system. To resist the system, or those

operating it, is to be in rebellion to God. This shows us it is a sin for one to withhold taxes lawfully owed. Jesus said, **“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's”** (Mat. 22:21).

**“Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”** The first clause, **“render to all their dues,”** is a general statement setting out the obligation of Christians to recognize the rights of others, and to yield in all such matters. Particularly intended here are the duties owed the government: **“tribute”** was personal taxes; **“custom”** was taxes on land or real estate-property taxes; the **“fear”** indicated was a proper attitude toward the officers of the law; and the **“honor”** owed was the respect they were to entertain for the rulers who sat in places of authority. Thus, Paul taught that children of God are to respect their obligation in the area of civil government; they are to pay their taxes, and show proper respect for those in authority. ...

—Deceased

## ADDENDUM TO THE PREVIOUS ARTICLE

The apostle Paul never lived under a constitutional republic as Americans do. Thus, he never had the constitutional rights American Christians have. However, because Paul was a Roman citizen he possessed rights that many in the Roman Empire did not have. Furthermore, the scriptures reveal that he used those rights to protect himself from unscrupulous adversaries who hated him because he lived, preached, and defended the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16; Phi. 1:17b; Acts 16:35-39; 23:11-35; 25:7-12, 25). In exercising his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to Caesar, Paul expedited his work for the Lord to people and in places that prior to his appeal were closed to him (Phi. 1:12, 13).

As the years have past in the United States from every facet of society have come attacks on biblical morality. They grow more bold and ferocious by the day, seeking to silence anyone who believes and teaches contrary to their hedonistic, materialistic, and secular conduct. Are we so naïve as to think that if such devilish people thought they could do so, they would imprison, and even kill us if they thought they could do so legally?

A Christian (as that term is defined and used in the New Testament) in the United States has constitutional rights—as

much as any other American citizen. Thus, we ought to follow the apostle Paul's example and use our citizenship rights as he did his. Indeed, we have more rights under our constitutional civil government than Paul ever had. And, all such rights ought to be employed in the propagation and defense of God's truth (Jude 3). Of course, the exercise of our civil rights is only one of the ways and means available for us to propagate and defend the gospel.

Morality as taught in the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular is at present under a scathing attack in the U.S. by a ruthless crowd. It is evident that it will continue to grow in its hostility to what the Bible teaches on anything. It is, therefore, past time for American Christians to use all our powers, especially our civil rights to oppose all who seek to destroy the absolute objective truth of God's Word and the universal code of ethics it sets out for all humankind. In the light of the truths of John 12:48 and Colossians 3:17, Christians ought to cast their votes for candidates for government offices who are favorable to Godliness as it is revealed on the pages of the New Testament. **No matter what you may think of the candidates personally, vote for the policies!**

—Editor