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CIVIL AUTHORITY

STUDY GUIDE



CIVIL AUTHORITY

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 13:1-7

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the 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 the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

THEME

Civil authorities are of vital significance to every nation. Too often positions of authority are abused and misused; however, civil authorities are crucial to the foundation of every nation and government. The most overlooked aspect of civil authorities is the role of God in government. It is imperative that we understand the role of God in civil authority and our responsibility, both to God and the society which we serve. We must come to realize that God is the Head of all authorities. Consequently, we should refer to God in all our decision-making, both major and minor.

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Civil authorities include authorities at every level of government, whether federal, state, or local.
- B. Presidents, governors, mayors, councilmen, sheriffs, chiefs of police, etc., are all civil authorities. When properly executed, each of these positions of authority should represent God to the people.
- C. Law enforcement officers are actually representatives of God who have the responsibility of executing their duties in such a way that pleases God and benefits society.

- D. Law enforcement officers represent the law; they do not make the laws.
 - 1. Law enforcement officers are not the law; consequently, they are subject to the law. Their duties must be carried out according to the law.
 - 2. The conduct of the law enforcement officers will have either a positive or negative effect on the public's view and respect of the law.
 - 3. Civil authorities live their lives in a "fish bowl" -- they are constantly under surveillance from those outside.
- E. Although this truth is not generally realized, civil authorities are ordained or appointed by God.
 - 1. The position of authority must be distinguished from the person filling the position.
 - 2. Too often positions of authority are filled by men who are not fit for the positions.
 - 3. God-ordained positions of authority should be filled by God-ordained people.
- D. We must respect all God-ordained positions of authority.

II. GOD-ORDAINED AUTHORITY

- A. It is imperative that God-ordained authority be submissive to God.
 - 1. All authorities must give an account unto God for the way they execute their authority.
 - 2. God's will must supersede the will of any and all authorities.
 - a. God has a divine order of authority which will serve as an excellent guideline for us.
 - b. God's divine order of authority is as follows: scriptural authority; spiritual authority; and apostolic authority.
- B. The source of all authority is God; consequently, the Head of all authority is God.

- C. God ordains the positions of authority for the benefit of mankind.
 - 1. Positions of authority can be, and too often are, abused.
 - 2. Those who appoint, hire, or elect people to positions of authority will be accountable to God for the choices they have made.
- D. God calls people to positions of authority.
 - 1. Moses, Saul, David, Solomon, Samuel, and Elisha serve as biblical examples of this truth.
 - 2. Not only does God call men to preach, but He also calls men to fill positions of authority outside the organized church setting.
- E. According to Romans 12:8, ruling is a gift.
 - 1. We must realize that not all gifts given by God are confined to an organized church setting.
 - 2. People are gifted to fill positions and offices of authority in all aspects of government.
 - 3. Many of the Old Testament characters, such as Daniel and the three Hebrew children, were gifted men filling civil or political positions.

III. THE CONSEQUENCE OF AUTHORITY

- A. Authority is an asset and protection to those who do right.
- B. Authority is a threat and an avenger to those who do wrong.
- C. One who resists God-ordained authority must suffer the consequences.
- D. Authorities must always be mindful of their role and responsibility, realizing that accountability accompanies responsibility.
 - 1. Positions of authority are not for the purpose of intimidation.
 - 2. The general public seems to have more fear of the law than respect for the law.

3. Always remember that civil authorities are servants, not lords.

E. Those who obey the law should never feel threatened or intimidated by those who enforce the law.

IV. CIVIL AUTHORITIES ARE MINISTERS OF GOD

A. All civil authorities must carry out their duties as representatives of God.

B. Obviously, violations and violators must be dealt with, but justice must never lose sight of mercy.

C. The "golden rule" must be realized and practiced without compromise.

D. Criminals must be punished! The punishment must be more severe than the crime so that others will be deterred from committing similar crimes.

V. SUMMARY

A. Civil authorities are ordained by God.

B. Civil authorities are representatives of God.

C. God-ordained authority must be submissive to God.

D. God-ordained authority is accountable to God.

E. The will of God must always supersede the will of men.

F. God ordains the positions of authority, but these positions can be filled with the wrong people.

G. The execution of authority is not without consequence to both the authority and the violator of authority.

H. Authority should be respected by all and feared by the violator.

I. Civil authorities are ministers of God, appointed by God to execute judgment upon those who disobey the law.

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. Authority is mandatory; otherwise, chaos will reign, as men do their own "thing," living unrestrained and unaccountable to any higher authority than their own will.
- B. Authorities should seek to be respected, not feared. Respect must be earned.
- C. Authorities have an awesome responsibility. They must serve and obey God as they serve society.
- D. Authorities are accountable both to God and the society in which they serve.
- E. We must always remember Who we represent, and we must carry out our duties with the fear of God in our hearts.
- F. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are responsible for praying for those who are in positions of authority. (I Timothy 2:1-3)
- G. Prayer accomplishes much more than criticism. If those in positions of authority are misrepresenting their position, we must earnestly pray that their eyes be opened, or that they be removed from these positions so that Jesus can truly be Lord over our land.