

Read Romans 13

Now Paul has established that we are God's people living in a world with people who are not so inclined. First, he addresses our public or national life. That theoretically should create a clash of values. Does this mean that there is an explosion or eruption as these two world views compete for the same space? God has built us like engineers build gear boxes, with one hardened steel and one soft steel component. Anything else will explode.

More generally, this is called **dissimilar-material gearing** or a **hard-and-soft gear pair**. The principle is to combine:

- a hard, wear-resistant driving part, often hardened steel;
- a softer, more conformable driven part, often bronze, brass, or an unhardened steel;
- proper lubrication and load limits.

In ordinary parallel-shaft transmissions, gears may instead use **case-hardened steel**: a hard outer case for wear resistance with a tougher, softer core to resist cracking. Making every component extremely hard would increase brittleness and could cause tooth fracture rather than prevent failure.

All said, believers are asked to *fit in and function well*, and not resist every imposition. We should be ok with getting a little pinched now and then. It's not so much about our rights as it is about helping others. We are told to play our roles quietly, without damaging those around us. Living circumspectly is loving and considerate of all parties who we encounter. We want to live lives of emulation from others.

Paul begins by essentially telling us that we have to be good citizens, living according to the laws of the land. We are to pay our share of taxes, and protect our neighbor's rights. We can be positive elements of change. We are to be attractive and civic-minded souls, so that our lives can be a functional platform for the gospel. We do not want our politics or business views or anything else to drive people away from getting to know God. We are to be goodwill ambassadors. Governmental issues are secondary to our platform to reach the world with God's love.

Another reason this is the best course of action is that God places our rulers in place. One does not have to be a Christian President to be the right tool for the job. It also does not mean that this person is the best at what they do. What matters is their effect on the people relative to their faith. Paul wrote this as he was wrongfully imprisoned for his faith under the wicked Cesar. Our view in many cases should be that God has allowed it; and we need to make the most of it.

We are not to justify how the government spends our money in determining if we should pay taxes. We can get involved in politics and make helpful changes that make sense.

The way that we respect the government and our bosses at work is correlated to our view of our own family. Do we respect our parents' wishes?

As individuals, we are to be the best of neighbors and be known for helping others. As a believer, I can make reasons to not help others. We need to be careful that we do not create our own rules for living that make it impossible to help a man in need.

We are not to be freeloaders, lazy, pushy, self-righteous, overly critical, or any other way that diminishes whoever is before us. We need to help our neighbor protect what is rightfully theirs. We should be seeking opportunities to do good and help our neighbors.

We also need to live above reproach, so that no one can successfully carry our character assassination.