

Title: Together for Good: Church and “State” // **Scripture:** Romans 13

ARRIVAL / SOCIAL TIME *15-20 minutes*

Spend the first 15 minutes or so of your time together catching up and socializing with one another. Also find time to catch up together on how the assignments from last week turned out.

SERMON REVIEW *5-10 minutes*

Romans 13 contains perhaps the Apostle Paul’s clearest (and most-cited) instruction about the relationship between God’s people and government, Church and “State.” This passage is the first Scripture most people quote when defining (or debating) a particular political stance. But what did Paul mean when he wrote it? And what does it mean for us today? Paul sets out a biblical framework for us to understand the source for earthly authority. He guides us in our understanding of the command to “be subject” to that authority in light of the values and issues that may arise at any given moment. The bottom line is that God institutes the governmental authorities we find ourselves under. This implies not just our responsibility to the authorities, but also serves as a warning to those governments of the high responsibility they carry.

The authorities are responsible to serve God by rewarding right actions and punishing wrong actions. Government exists under the authority of God to protect the God-given rights of its citizens while being limited by those very rights. As we fulfill our responsibility to governmental authorities, we are to be engaged, but not caught up in that engagement. Our framework, as Paul states, is to demonstrate love to our neighbors and respect to all, while wisely knowing the times we are in. We are settled and clear in our God-given identity as ambassadors of Christ, and are marked by the fact that we know the times, and that those with whom we interact know that they are loved.

THE MAIN THOUGHT *keep this in mind as you facilitate discussion*

Walk in love, not fear; in engagement, not withdrawal, as you subject yourself to governmental authority.

SEE IT – Questions *10-15 minutes*

Picture (What is the story saying?): What is the source of authority for all governmental powers? What is the main role and responsibility of those authorities? What does Paul mean when he commands us to “be subject” to those authorities? What is the framework Paul gives us for our response to governmental authority?

Mirror (Where am I in the story?): Given Paul’s framework for evaluating and engaging with governmental authority: What aspects of Paul’s instruction feel like an invitation that inspires relationship? What aspects challenge and disturb your sense of responsibility to “be subject?”

Window (How does the story change how I see those around me?): As you think of the people in your sphere of influence at home, at work, and at play, how would applying Paul’s framework change or color your future conversations about government and authority? What impact would that have? Why?

BE IT – Practice

Change UP – Exercise

Read Romans 13 out loud. As you read, remember that “be subject” means: voluntary submission for the sake of conscience based on ongoing thoughtful evaluation. Pray together for specific aspects of “subjection” where you sense a need to grow.

Change IN – Group Activity

Consider the biblical framework Paul outlines in Romans 13. Define what loving your neighbor and knowing your times looks like for your group. Practice applying that framework to a “hot-button” topic your group enjoys discussing.

Change OUT – Life Application Assignment

What are the key issues or points of contention related to our current political situation that most impact your neighborhood or profession? This week, what is one practical way you can engage in loving your neighbor and knowing the times?

CLOSING PRAYER *5 minutes*

May you see God clearly, hear His calling clearly, and may He help you fulfill that calling in faithfulness, trusting no matter how bleak things may appear, we trust the God who raises the dead.