



The Role of the Public Authority:

As a Christian should I be suspicious or supportive of government?

Discussion Questions 1:

Is government necessary? If so, why?

What are the most important things government does?

Is there anything government shouldn't do?

Discussion Questions 2:

Read Romans 13:1-7.

What does it mean to submit to an authority? Does it mean unquestioning obedience?

Do you think that Paul means that we have to submit to whatever government we happen to have or does he mean something else?

What do you think Paul sees as the purpose of government?

What is Paul's message about how Christians are to respond when government is not fulfilling that purpose?

Now read Romans 12:9-21. What does Paul say Christians must not do? What does that imply is the role of the government?

Now read Romans 13:8-14. Does anything in that passage change your understanding of

Romans 13:1-7?

What do you know about Paul's experience of how he was treated by the ruling authorities? How does that affect your understanding of Romans 13:1-7?

Discussion Questions 3:

Read Jeremiah 22:1-17. On what basis does Jeremiah draw a contrast between King Josiah and his sons? What is Jeremiah saying in this passage about the purpose of government?

Read John 18:33-38. What does this passage show us about the realities of government?

What did Jesus mean when he said his kingdom was not of this world?

SPOILER ALERT: DO NOT READ THE MATERIAL ON THE OTHER SIDE UNTIL AFTER YOU HAVE ANSWERED THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Authority is necessary in order for any human community to function.

The most important things government does include:

- Providing and enforcing common standards e.g. weights and measures, food safety, and common goods, e.g. roads and street lights are key functions of government
- Providing protection and safety, through police and other armed forces
- Protecting the vulnerable

Government is given as an instrument of God's common grace, to restrain the effects of the Fall and to provide space within which the good news of Jesus Christ can be communicated.

Government is the servant of God when it conscientiously seeks to punish wrong and to commend good (Rom. 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

The effective punishment of wrongdoing, in both the criminal and civil courts, prevents vendetta. Gary Haugen's *The Locust Effect* shows how the poor are trapped in poverty if the legal system does not protect them from violence, oppression and exploitation.

Paul was well aware, because of the cross and from his own experience, that governments do not always conscientiously seek to punish wrong and to commend good.

There are not two spheres: one which belongs to God and one which belongs to government. Everything belongs to God but God has given government authority over some things (see Matthew 22:15-22: everything is God's, some things are Caesar's).

Note the distinction: government *punishes* wrong; government *commends* good. A government which attempts to do everything itself is acting idolatrously and tyrannously.

Justice is a key quality God wants to see in everyone involved in wielding power (Jeremiah 22:16) whatever role they are playing within a legal system.

BUT governments overstep the mark if they try to impose beliefs on people or if they demand perfection of their subjects (e.g. prohibition and divorce).

Law on its own does not make people just. What is required instead is a radical change of heart which comes through conversion to Christ and the empowerment of the Spirit (Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:27; Romans 8:3-4).



To act justly is to reflect the heart of God; to advocate on another's behalf is to emulate Jesus; to provide certainty and stability is to enhance the possibilities for human flourishing.

Christians are called to fulfil the Great Commission, which includes sharing what it means to love our neighbour as well as to love God.