



St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Minot, ND  
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# The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Romans 13:1-7

Perhaps one of the most critical sections of Romans is in these seven verses. In verses 1-7, the apostle Paul discusses the Christian's worship concerning submitting to governing authorities. That is to say; the Apostle Paul shifts from the Estate of the Church to the Estate of the Government.

Before moving on, it is important to understand that we Christians live our lives within three very distinct spheres. We can also call these spheres 'estates.' The first sphere is the Church, the second is the State, and the third is the Family. We not only see these three estates throughout the Scriptures but especially in the Small Catechism in what is called the Table of Duties. We all relate to every person in society through one of these estates.

For the purpose of our study from verses 1-7, though, we will be looking at the spheres of the Church and State. For easy reference, we can call these two estates, the left and right-hand kingdoms.

As already established, the right-hand kingdom functions by the power of the Gospel (Remember the opening theses in Romans 1:16?) However, the left-hand kingdom

functions by the power of the sword (see v. 4).

More specifically, what is meant by the left-hand kingdom? The left-hand kingdom is an authority that is given by God for the sake of creating social order of relationships. The left-hand kingdom pertains only to human and civic affairs, not the spiritual. When it comes to the Word and Sacraments, we should not expect the applause of the left-hand kingdom. But instead, the left-hand kingdom functions to chastise and punish those who do evil. The left-hand kingdom is like a curb to mankind's rebellious old Adam.

And so it must be correctly understood that just as the Family and Church are submissive to God, the State is as well. The Church does not play second fiddle to the State, nor the State to the Church. They are distinctly different spheres with different purposes.

But what happens when these estates come into conflict or infringe on each other's spheres?

One does not have to think back to far of the disastrous consequences of the Catholic Church in the time of Luther. During that time the Catholic Church

owned more than half of the real estate and gathered an income of about 18 times larger than the State. To the point, when the Church overextends itself into the realm of the State, the ministry of the Word and Sacrament are forgotten, blurred, neglected, or manipulated.

And the State can easily forget that political podiums are not pulpits, and voting booths are not altars. The State is not about forgiveness and salvation, but vengeance and the sword. The State provides an orderly society so that Churches and families may be able to function within an atmosphere of peace.

But, as previously mentioned, what happens when the estates come into conflict? For the Christian, we are to hold Romans 13:1-7 in tension with Act 5:29. We are to obey the Government in all ways possible without sin. But as soon as the State uses its force to legislate the Christian to sin, well... At this point, it is better to obey God than man. When the State uses its authority to legislate sin, it is no longer acting within its proper authority underneath God and must be resisted. Keep in mind though that Christians shall not break further commandments in their resistance of the State. The Church shall not leave the Word and Sacraments to pick up the sword against the State. But instead, the Church and Family peacefully advocate for change while peacefully resisting legislation of sin.

There is another aspect to this that we must understand. And that is the Family. When the Family breaks apart, history has, unfortunately, shown us that either the estate of the Church or Government step in to compensate. While it is commendable for the Church and State to help within the realm of the Family, it must be understood that the Church and State are different from the Family and not the best means to fulfill the needs of a Family. Things such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, education, healthcare, children, etc. have historically fallen underneath the Estate of the Family. Again, while this commendable that the Church and State do help out within the realm of broken families, the proper role of the Church is the Word, and the sword for the State. If the Church and State are doing the work of the Family, tragically, the Word and Sword may be neglected.

Give Contemporary Examples to the Following Questions:

- 1) Is there harmony with the roles of Church, State, & Family?
- 2) What happens when one estate fails?
- 3) What happens when the estates are confused?

