

Obedience to Civil Authorities in Romans 13:1-7 as a Panacea for Good Governance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper which focuses on “Obedience to Civil Authorities in Romans 13: 1-7 As a Panacea for Good Governance in Nigeria” stresses the need for all citizens (Christians and non-Christians) to show loyalty and commitment to the course of promoting peace and harmony in the society. Governance is a serious business because it requires the collaboration and support of all the various segments of the society, irrespective of their social and economic status (the rich in the upper class, those in the middle class, as well as the poor) to be successful. Today, in Nigeria, like in the days of Paul, most persons who occupy top leadership positions in government are unbelievers; hence, there is always a controversy and debate about whether or not Christians are duty-bound to respect them, especially considering their manner of performing the required administrative duties. From the reviewed literature, it becomes clear that in the contemporary times, as was in Paul’s day, there is a heated debate on whether or not Christians should be actively involved in partisan politics because they are citizens of two kingdoms – earthly and heavenly. The matter becomes complicated for Baptists who canvass for strict adherence to the principle of separation of Church and State. This principle has a long history because the founding fathers of the denomination (Baptist) were seeking for religious freedom in a country where most government officials were Christians, but they were still accused of pursuing policies that contravenes the ideals of Christian faith, beliefs, and practices. The legal resolution of the that slogan was responsible for inclusion of Article of Faith and Religious Freedom (Bill of Rights) popularly known as Fundamental Human Rights in the American Constitution. Today, experiences in some African countries, particularly in

Nigeria reveal lack of respect for the dignity and sanctity of human rights to guarantee their freedom to pursue religious convictions; hence, the continuous debate about whether or not to submit to civil authorities.

However, to gain appreciable insights into the mind of Apostle Paul regarding his counsel that all citizens, including Christians should obey all civil authorities, attempts was made by this writer to embark on the exegetical study of Romans 13: 1-7. From that exercise, it was discovered that a major reason for the debate is lack of proper understanding about the source and nature of the human governments. The study revealed that all officials of human governments are representatives of God, and that they derived their authorities from God who ordained them. As such, failure to submit to their leadership is indirectly a rebellion against God's plans. Besides, good governance will be a mirage in any society where the citizens failed to obey civil authorities or refused to make financial contributions for the upkeep of their State. Therefore, the paper suggests that it is proper for Christians, especially in Nigeria, to heed the counsel of Apostle Paul by: showing loyalty to civil authorities; actively participate in the political affairs of their society; and contribute (morally and financially) to support the operations of the State.

1. Introduction

In most African countries, especially in Nigeria, governance is a complex enterprise because it is fraught with multi-dimensional challenges that are very difficult to solve. Apart from the challenge of corruption which has become endemic and had eaten deeper into the fabrics of the society, there is the religious factor which makes all decisions by any government in power to be evaluated with suspicion; hence, there is always an allegation of marginalisation by adherents of different religious bodies. In some instances, the citizens are not even willing to support the programmes of the political party in power due to their perceived lack of transparency and accountability by officials of government. The scenario has caused rifts and disconnection between the ideal of what governance should be in the twenty-first century society and the reality of what takes place in the contemporary societies. Unfortunately, Christians are among the groups of people who are worst hit by such experiences of inconsistencies between the ideals and realities of governance. On one hand, they have the privilege of being exposed to higher educational opportunities and training in both

secular and religious spheres which often gives them an edge above people of other religious faiths. On the other hand, they are being taught on the need to be less passionate about comfort which earthly wealth and riches can provide. These challenges of matching beliefs with reality often result into unending and unresolved tension.

Christians are citizens of two kingdoms - earthly and heavenly. Like other normal human beings, they have emotions, feelings, dreams and aspirations which sometimes can pitch them against the natural courses of life; hence, they are often in a confused state of mind. As the 'salt' and 'light' of the world (Matt. 5:13-16) in their various communities, they are expected to model godliness and righteousness. However, their commitment to pursue this laudable goal is often hindered by their human limitations which tend to place them on a very 'tight corner' in the course of matching their convictions with the expected standards of uprightness in a world full of corruption and moral decadence.

Paradoxically, as ambassadors of the heavenly kingdom, more often, Christians have the greatest opportunities to enjoy good respect and be highly esteemed in their societies. However, their confusion ensued because that status and privileges also demand from them the need to demonstrate stricter sense of ethical responsibilities more than their non-believing counterparts. That scenario calls for greater caution in the discharge of their daily responsibilities as citizens of this world. In essence, there is the need for better understanding of values placed upon them in a bid to pursue justice, equity and fair-play in their societies. Thus, this paper emphasizes the need for Christians to pursue the goal of patterning their lifestyles after those biblical injunctions given by Jesus Christ and his early disciples, as well as the accepted ethical and moral standards of their various communities as citizens of this world. However, this must be carried out in line with the revealed biblical standards of expected godly behaviour which ought to be based upon the dictates of the Holy Spirit.

To achieve the goal of this paper, this writer will review some literature in order to contribute to the ongoing debate on whether or not Christians should participate in active politics, especially considering the Baptist's principle of separation of Church and State. Also, to clearly understand the likely dilemma experienced by the early Church on the subject of showing

obedience to all civil authorities by Christians, attempt will be made to provide exegetical study on the text of Romans 13: 1-7. It is believed that doing so will help the writer and readers to gain appreciable insights into Paul's view on the subject. The goal is that implications of such exegetical study will be drawn to properly counsel the contemporary Christians about the appropriate relationship that should exist between them and the officials of secular government in their pursuit of achieving good governance, especially in Nigeria. However, the paper begins by providing definitions to key terms.

Definition of Key Terms

Obedience: this can be described as showing respect to all the stated rules, instructions or regulations given by those in leadership position. According to the *Encarta Dictionary of English Language*, obedience can be described as the act or practice of following instructions, complying with rules and regulations or submitting to somebody's authority.¹⁵⁷ In this paper, the term is used as a reference to attitudes or behaviours that are expected from Christians to the authority of legally constituted leaders.

Civil: The *Encarta Dictionary of English Language* defines "civil" as happenings between individuals; involving people or groups in legal actions other than criminal proceedings.¹⁵⁸ In this paper, the word is used as a reference to those duties expected to be carried out by all citizens (as individuals) in relation to government agencies or their approved representatives as prescribed by the law of the land.

Authorities: The *Encarta Dictionary of English Language* defines "authority" as an official body that is set up by a government to administer an area of activity (often used in the plural).¹⁵⁹ The word "authorities" is used in this paper as a reference to those bodies of persons who have the legal backing to make laws and have them obeyed.

¹⁵⁷"Obedience," in *Encarta Dictionary of English Language: Microsoft Electronic Database*. Accessed on 8th October, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ "Civil," in *Encarta Dictionary of English Language*, Accessed on 8th October, 2018.

¹⁵⁹"Authorities," in *Encarta Dictionary of English Language*, Accessed on 8th October, 2018.

Governance: This word is coined from its noun form “government”, which refers to a body saddled with the responsibilities of carrying out political and administrative duties. According to the *Encarta Dictionary of English Language*, government can be defined as “process of making rules by a group of people who have the power to make or enforce laws for a country or an area; while governance is a system or manner of government.”¹⁶⁰ In this paper, the word “governance” is used as a reference to having legal authorities to make laws and have them obeyed.

2. Christians’ Participation in Active Politics

Politics can be described as the process of administration of the affairs of a particular society or country by democratically elected candidates. It can also refer to how democratic leaders provide responsible governance for nations and countries. As such, it is expected that all such elected individuals would be true representatives of the people and have legitimate authority to perform administrative (legislative, executive and judicial) functions. These leaders are expected to make and execute only laws that would protect the citizens’ rights and improve upon the entire welfare of the society. Therefore, it can be considered reasonable to suggest that all citizens of a country or nation have the moral right to participate actively in the socio-economic and political affairs of their societies.

Christians have been variously described as the followers of Jesus Christ. According to Aboagye-Mensah and Kudadjie, a Christian is one who has accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord, and who accordingly lives (or endeavours to live) by God’s grace, a life that is in keeping with biblical teaching. Such a person has received a new life, and his interests, desires, values and outlook in life have been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in him.¹⁶¹ The implication of that definition is that though Christians are like all other citizens of their country or nation, but they are a special class of people because of their dual

¹⁶⁰“Governance,” in *Encarta Dictionary of English Language*, Accessed on 8th October, 2018.

¹⁶¹R. K. Aboagye-Mensah, & J. N Kudadjie, *The Christian and National Politics: Christian Social Ethics for Everyone*, Vol. 3 (Accra: Asempra Publishers,1991), 1.

citizenship. Thus, according to Michael William in an article titled: “How does the Bible defines a Christian?”, he maintains that a Christian must have the following unique characteristic features: he must be someone who is saved (Acts 11:19-26); someone who exhibits a changed life, walks in faith and shares the gospel; and someone who helps and teaches others how to live like Christ.¹⁶² By that submission, it can be affirmed that Christianity requires a unique experience of spiritual and moral transformation upon which the conclusion is being drawn that Christians are a unique and special breed of persons. However, like other well-meaning and responsible citizens of their countries, they have the mandate to contribute positively to the growth and sustenance of their societies through political participation.

Christians are much more valuable than just being responsible citizens of their countries because they are also members of the spiritual communities – the church; hence, they have the mandate to fulfill dual obligations - moral and spiritual. The word “church” is derived from the Greek word *ekklesia* which is a reference to the community of believers in Jesus Christ, the called out saints. According to David Watson, *ekklesia* like congregation refers to both *particular gatherings* of God’s people and to the *continuing community* of believers in one area. Further, he explained that the church is the body of Christ; she has an organic unity in which Christians not only belong to Christ and to one another within his body, but they also abide in him and find life in him.¹⁶³ In actual sense, the church is made up of baptized believers whose faith and loyalty are focused on Jesus Christ, their head.

The above description on the composition of church provides the ground to affirm that the word “church” is a reference to the unique people of God in Christ; the community of the Holy Spirit with the gift of the resurrected Christ actively operational in them. According to Everett Ferguson, the church as the body is the family of God with Jesus Christ as the head, the

¹⁶²Michael L. William, “How Does the Bible Define a Christian?,” in <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2014/10/19/how-does-the-bible-define-a-christian/>. Accessed on 8th October, 2018.

¹⁶³David Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 71.

“elder brother”, the Son over the household.¹⁶⁴ He submitted further that members of the church are God’s chosen people as his own possession (1Pet. 2:9; Psa. 135: 4). The unique nature of composition of the church’s membership (as local and universal) requires proper understanding of the doctrine of election which is derived from the Old Testament ideas but culminating to the New Testament affirmation. All who are in Christ are included in this election. Just as all who were “in” Abraham, Israel or David were included in that election, so it is with Christ. The election of Christians entails the election of those who are in him; hence, the plan of God for Christians is spoken of in the same way as for Christ: they are fore-known (1Pet.20; Rom. 8:29); predestined (Acts 4: 28; Eph. 1:5); and loved before the foundation of the world (Jn. 17: 24; Eph. 1:4). They are elect because they have been called by God through the act of mercy.¹⁶⁵ Thus, Christians are in Christ just as the Jews are in Abraham and humanity in Adam (Eph. 1: 10). Therefore, the church of God was saved, sanctified and obtained with the blood of God’s own Son, Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 20: 28).

The church has a major responsibility of engaging in the tasks of proclamation and propagation of the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a divine mandate, popularly known as the Great Commission through which the entire human race is to be reached with the salvific plan of God’s grace as mediated through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:11). However, as noted by Harold Brokke, the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified is not a product of religious genius: not an invention of a chosen people; not a contribution or originated by the Church; not conceived by man’s mind, nor could it be. Instead, it is heaven’s implantation, nurtured by God’s love and holiness, exhibited by His Church, for the redemption of all who will believe it and partake of its fruits.¹⁶⁶

Based on the nature of their privileged status in the society, as well as their expected duties to their communities, it could be deduced that Christians should be actively involved in the political processes of

¹⁶⁴Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 72.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 82-84.

¹⁶⁶Harold J. Brokke, *A Guide to Understanding Romans* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship Inc. 1964), 3.

democratically electing or selecting those who will be saddled with responsibilities of administration of their respective societies, as well as engaging in meaningful participation in the day to day running affairs of their States. Albeit, considering the ungodly processes through which leaders emerge in some nations or countries, especially in Africa, there are continuous debates and controversies about whether or not Christians should participate in active politics. Whereas some will counsel that heavenly-minded Christians should dread any active involvement in politics for them to maintain their daily consecration and fellowship with God, but some others will encourage their effective participation as the only means of influencing and contributing positively to growth and development of the contemporary society.

Some people have counselled against Christian participation in politics on the ground that it is a “dirty game”¹⁶⁷ or that “politics and religion do not mix”¹⁶⁸. However, it must be understood that like all other human institutions, politics itself is not dirty, but often, it is the people who engages in it whose lifestyles and conducts are. Thus, Abogunrin opined that Christianity and politics are two inseparable institutions in the human social psyche and structure; that earthly governments are mere agents of God’s theocratic governance of the physical and spiritual worlds; and though, the ideals of Christianity is a good guide to enhancing better political conducts, but the practices of such ideals are usually being influenced by the socio-cultural institutions in the society, including politics.¹⁶⁹ The truth is that though the view expressed by Abogunrin is very common, and might represent an example of opinions that aims dissuading committed Christians from participating in active politics, but the church has always been at the receiving end. In fact, it accounts for the reason why in most cases, those who have been actively involved in active politics in Nigeria are Muslims. The situation explains the reason for expression of constant fears (and counter denials) over allegations of hidden agenda by the political class to

¹⁶⁷R. K. Aboagye-Mensah, & J. N Kudadjie, *The Christian and National Politics: Christian Social Ethics for Everyone*, Vol. 3; 54.

¹⁶⁸Daniel R. Grant, *The Christian and Politics* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1968), 20.

¹⁶⁹ S. O. Abogunrin, “Towards a Unifying Political Ideology and Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria: A Christian View,” in *Religion, Peace, and Unity in Nigeria*, Onaiyekan J. O, Ed. (Ibadan: NACS, 1984),118.

Islamize the country. Besides, there have been occasions where utter fanaticism was demonstrated by Islamic fundamentalists which have led to violent protests, riots, killing of innocent citizens, especially Christians coupled with destruction of church buildings, especially in the northern parts of Nigeria beginning from 1980s.

Also, in some instances, the statement of Jesus Christ on the need to “give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what is God’s” (Matt. 22:21) are being quoted as suggesting that Christians should never engage in active participation in politics. However, Matthew Kukah has consistently disagreed with this school of thought, especially when he stated thus:

What Jesus really meant was not that Christianity and politics do not mix, nor did he mean that Christians should not participate in politics; the coin was a representation of power of Caesar and that was why the coin had Caesar’s sign. In the case of God, His authority is over and above the realm of Caesar’s empire. In that sense, both Caesar and his coin are under the aegis of God; and the issue of separation or that Christians should not participate in politics is alien to the scripture, and even an aberration.¹⁷⁰

That opinion as expressed above by Matthew Kukah who is currently a Bishop of Catholic Diocese of Sokoto State in the northern part of Nigeria has been supported by some Christian scholars and church leaders, especially in the face of blatant disregard for the rule of law and dignity of human worth being witnessed during the current political dispensation in Nigeria. Even, the Christian Association of Nigeria, an umbrella body for the Evangelicals, has been very outspoken in the efforts at sensitizing Christians about the dangers of abandoning politics and its social structure for only the unbelievers. Hence, in all quarters, Christians are being mobilized to participate in active politics, not only to vote during elections, but also to seek elective positions. In the next section of this paper, attempts will be made to review literature on the principle of separation of Church and State as being canvassed by some Christian denominations like the Baptists.

¹⁷⁰Matthew Hassan Kukah, “Religion and Civil Society,” in *Dokor, Philosophy and Politics: Discourse on Values and Power in Africa* (Lagos: Obaroh and Ogbiriaka Publishers, 1998), 16.

3. Baptists and the Principle of Separation of Church and State

The principle of separation of Church and State has a long history which is traceable to historical experience of the United State of America as a nation. According to an internet source, the phrase "separation between Church and State" is generally traced to a letter by Thomas Jefferson and dated 1st January 1802, which was addressed to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut, and was published in a Massachusetts newspaper. In that letter, Jefferson had written: "I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof', thus building a wall of separation between Church and State."¹⁷¹ However, it must be stressed at this point that Jefferson was only echoing the language of Roger William, the founder of the first Baptist church in America, who, in 1644, had written about the fact that there is a hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world. As such, William believes that for the State to guarantee the rights of her citizens, then, religious freedom should never be allowed to be tampered with.

Further, the internet source had stated that Jefferson's concept of the term "separation of church and state" first became a part of Establishment Clause jurisprudence in a suit filed by Reynolds versus the United States of America in 1798. The source submitted thus:

In that case, the court examined the history of religious liberty in the US, determining that while the constitution guarantees religious freedom, "the word 'religion' is not defined in the Constitution. We must go elsewhere, therefore, to ascertain its meaning, and nowhere more appropriately, we think, than to the history of the times in the midst of which the provision was adopted." The court found that the leaders in advocating and formulating the constitutional guarantee of religious liberty were James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Quoting the "separation" paragraph from Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists, the court concluded that, "coming as this does from an acknowledged leader

¹⁷¹(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_church_and_state_in_the_United_States), accessed on 8th October, 2018.

of the advocates of the measure, it may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment thus secured."¹⁷²

Based on the above submission, it is very instructive to note that the Baptist as a denomination has been heavily influenced by the historical antecedent of the efforts by its founding founders in the pursuit of the struggle for religious freedom and emancipation in their country. The uniqueness of this principle of separation of Church and State to the Baptists was well noted and stated by Rone Wendell, thus:

Baptists believe that the State and the Church, seeking to fulfill their respective ideal purposes and ends in the world, can be of immeasurable benefit to each other. It has been definitely proved that the fundamental virtues of Christianity – respect for the dignity and value of human personality in self and others, sincerity, a deep devotion to high aims and ideals in life – are those which make for excellent citizenship.¹⁷³

The view as stated above is no doubt, very relevant and must be pursued by all sensible persons, especially by contemporary churches and governments in every society. The goal of all human institutions should be an intentional effort of striving to accomplish the divine objectives for which they have been set up.

All human governments derived their power and authorities from God who has given the leaders the mandate and trust to rule as his agents or representatives. Thus, it is reasonable to submit that all human leaders are God's physical representatives on earth who have been vested with delegated authorities of executing divine assignments of maintaining law and order in the societies for the continuing survival of the human race; else, anarchy will prevail.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Rone Holmes Wendell, *The Baptist Faith and Roman Catholicism* (USA: Kingsport Press, 1952), 173.

Unfortunately, in some instances, human leaders fail to understand the true nature and source of their leadership position as a call to responsible service for which certain powers and authorities were accruable to their offices. Experiences in some countries by democratically elected governments in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, is a clear manifestation of the lack of understanding about the reason for, as well as the source of their political powers. Thus, some leaders are guilty of manipulation of the social system, thereby leading to experiences of harassment of opponents, especially those belonging to other (opposition) political parties. In such instances, there is always the tendency to display all forms of humanistic /cannibalistic tendencies in a bid to suppress people with opposing views, including those with different religious affiliations. Expectedly, the result is the experiences of discord, lack of harmony and mutual respect for the sanctity of human lives; thereby leading to suspicion between members of the ruling class and those in the opposing camps.

The scenario as described above, though absurd, but is very real; it clearly explains the reasons for debates and controversies over whether or not Christians should readily show loyalty and obedience to all civil authorities. Whereas some have consistently argued for unconditional obedience to civil authorities, some others have postulated that respect can only be earned, not to be demanded; hence, obedience to civil leadership is to be dictated by the nature of authority being exercised by officials of a particular government, as well as the voluntary desire of the citizens. As noted by Graham Shaw, the oppressive use of authority derives from the determination to perpetuate a position of power being threatened by an experience of instability that cannot be ultimately evaded. In most cases, such a determination to perpetuate leadership position easily involves further accumulation of power without their push towards self-destruction.¹⁷⁴ The submission is an example of reasons why some Christians may decide not to show loyalty or obedience to civil authorities in their countries.

In the context of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, the affirmation of the practice of principle of separation of Church and State is hinged on a confused interpretation of the principle; hence, there is the assumption that

¹⁷⁴Graham Shaw, *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 17.

to ensure proper practice of the principle, then, Christians should never participate in active politics. That misunderstanding has led this writer to embark on a research about proper interpretation of the principle.¹⁷⁵ To obtain correct information on their understanding and proper interpretation of the principle, some denomination leaders were interviewed through a structured interview-guide. It was then discovered that in reality, what the principle states is that there should be a clear demarcation between the authority to be exercised by leadership of the State and by those of the Church, which should never be allowed to run conflict to each other. Thus, whereas the State can legislate over secular matters, it should never infringe on the rights and freedom of church members. Also, to avoid undue pressure from the State, the leadership of the churches should never receive salary or grant from the purse of the State nor be made accountable to the State; and, in the same vein, they (pastors) should never be partisan in their operations. This was to enable each church member have freedom to associate with different political parties without undue interference from the church leadership.

According to Francis Schaeffer, our present material-energy, chance-oriented generation has no reason to obey the State except if the State has the guns and patronage. In his own view, God has ordained the State as a delegated authority; hence, it is not autonomous. The State is expected to be an agent of justice, to restrain evil by punishing the evil-doers and protect the law-abiding citizens in the society. However, whenever it fails to measure up to this ideal or does the reverse, then, it has no proper authority (1Pet. 2: 13-17).¹⁷⁶ That submission is very apt and succinct at describing the reason for continuous debate over whether or not to obey civil authorities in the contemporary society. In the next section, this paper will

¹⁷⁵This writer had earlier written a degree essay for which a structured interview guide was used to solicit for opinions of denominational leaders (Nigerian Baptist Convention) on their understanding and suggestions on how best to interpret and practice the principle. The document was titled: Samuel Olugbenga Akintola, "Christians in Politics: An Evaluation of Baptist Principle of Separation of Church and State." Degree Essay submitted to the Faculty of Theology at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso in partial fulfillment for requirements for the degree of Master of Divinity, June, 2004.

¹⁷⁶Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1982), 91.

present an exegetical study of Romans 13: 1-7 with a view to gaining proper understanding to the text; thereafter, some implications shall be drawn from the passage for the contemporary Church and good governance in Nigeria.

4. Exegetical Study of Romans 13: 1-7

In this section of the paper, attempt is made to provide exegetical analysis to the focal passage of Romans 13: 1-7 in its Greek transliteration while the English translation is culled from the New American Standard Bible (NAS).

1 P'asa psuchee exousias huperechousais hupotaseesthoo. Ou gar estin exousia ei-mee hupo Theou hai de ousai hupo Theou tetagmenai eisin.

1 Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

2 hooste ho antitassomenos tee exousia tee tou Theou diaatage antheteesken, hoi de antheteeskotes heautois krima leempontai.

2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

3 Hoi gar archontes ouk esteen fobos too agathoo alla too kakoo. Telei de mee fobeisthai teen exousian? To agathon poiei kai hexeeis epainon ex autees.

3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same;

4 Theou gar diakonos esteen soi eeis to agathon. Ean to kakon poiees fobou ou gar eike ten machairan fobei Theou gar diakonos estin ekdikos eis orgeen too to kakon.

4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.

5 Dio anangkee hupotassesthai ou monon dia ten orgeen alla kai dis teen suneideesin.

5 Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

6 Dia touto gar kai forous teleeite leitourgoi gar Theou eisin eis auto touto.

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

7 Apodote pasin tas ofeilas too ton foron ton foron, too to telos to telos, too ton fobon ton fobon, too ten timen ten timen.

7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

The Epistle to the Romans which is traditionally believed to have been written by Apostle Paul is generally regarded as one of the classics among the Pauline literature, especially considering its contents, literary style, as well as the testimonies about its various positive impacts upon the faith of many Christian leaders of several generations till date. According to Leon Morris, the Epistle has demonstrated its being a source of eternal power at several critical points in the history of the Christian church based on its testimonies to having impacted more positively on the lives and ministries of several personalities such as Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and in not too distant period, Karl Barth.¹⁷⁷

Corroborating the above submission, Byrne Brendan has noted that the letter to the Romans has retained a legacy of great worth throughout the Christian history. Thus, though this Epistle is widely acknowledged as the single most influential document in Christian history, it has also been the most controversial. It stands on the head of Paul's writings in the New Testament and contains so large an unfolding of his gospel which has served to present Paul to generation of readers - from Augustine in the fifth century, through

¹⁷⁷Leon Morris, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 1.

the Reformation era, down to the present day.¹⁷⁸ However, Morris has maintained that the letter claims to have been written by Apostle Paul (1:1), and that there has not been any serious objection against that claim. He further maintained that even the arguments by the few who have raised some objections have not been able to present any weighty issue regarding the style or contents on which to deny the traditional beliefs of the early Church Fathers who have maintained its Pauline authorship.¹⁷⁹ Further, Morris stated that the Epistle was written when Paul was at Corinth where he commends Phoebe, a lady from Cenchrea, a leading port of that city while Gaius was his host (16:23).¹⁸⁰ But, earlier, Vincent Taylor had submitted that the Epistle was written by Paul while he was at Corinth in AD 56 or 57; that the occasion was when he was on the point of going to Jerusalem in order to minister to the saints there; and that Paul had written to restate the leading principles of his Gospel in the light of his experiences with a view to promoting his missionary endeavours.¹⁸¹

In his own assessment, Byrne Brendan submits that a consideration of Epistle to the Romans from a rhetorical point of view allows a reader to be more precise about understanding Paul's purpose for its writing. He noted that in "the Thanksgiving section" of the epistle (1:15), Paul speaks of his "eagerness to preach the gospel to you also in Rome." Grammatically, the statement has no time-marker in the Greek, thereby allowing the primary reference to be a long standing determination on the part of Paul to pursue his apostolic mission to the gentiles in Rome.¹⁸²

Actually, this section of the epistle is very distinct as it contains Paul's explanations on how best to relate with those in leadership positions, thus: **1** P'asa psuchee exousias huperechousais hupotaseesthoo. Ou gar estin exousia ei-mee hupo Theou hai de ousai hupo Theou tetagmenai eisin (**1** Let

¹⁷⁸Byrne Brendan S. J., *Romans: Sacra Pagina Series*, Vol. 6, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J, Ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1996), 1.

¹⁷⁹Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2.

¹⁸⁰Ibid, 5-6.

¹⁸¹Vincent Taylor, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: The Epworth Press, 1955), 11.

¹⁸²Brendan, *Romans: Sacra Pagina Series*, 18.

every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God). Commenting on the opening sentence of chapter thirteen, Vincent Taylor submitted that in this section of the Epistle (vs. 1-7), Paul discusses the issue about obedience to civil authorities, love as the fulfillment of the Law, and the moral urgency of the End Time. Also, it is noted that Paul is far more interested in the ethical demands of the Ends in relation to the present rather than in its details; and here, there is no trace about mentioning the issue of Parousia or second coming of Christ.¹⁸³ In essence, Paul is declaring that Christianity should never be seen as encouraging lawlessness; instead, Christians should always strive to present themselves as models of godliness in their respective societies.

On the view expressed by Paul that: *Ou gar estin exousia ei-mee hupo Theou hai de ousai hupo Theou tetagmenai eisin* (“there is no authority but as an act of God, and the existing authorities are instituted by him,”) (v.1b), Graham Shaw opined that the statement is in line with Paul’s maxim: ‘Call down blessings on your persecutors – blessings, not curses’ (12:14). Here, the tone is astonishingly optimistic as it is easy to forget that Jesus who was Paul’s Lord was put to death by those authorities who are acting in their judicial capacities. However, it is instructive to note that in this letter, as in that to Philemon, Paul is anxious in dissociating himself from any suspicion of being accused of conniving with others to raise civil disorder. In a sense, Paul might be looking for opportunity of preparing a way for the eventual triumph of Christendom. Thus, like it happened in the Book of Acts when Paul appealed to Rome against Jewish opposition to his ministry, so here, too, there is an effort at creating the same awareness that civil power might be profitably used to protect the new community. The same God who could delight in creating vessels which were objects of retributions due for destruction might also use gentile rulers such as Nero or Caligula to serve his own ends and purposes.¹⁸⁴ Hence, while God has the prerogative to do all things as Creator and sustainer of the universe, the individuals only holds authority in trust for God and fellow humans. To the believers, authority is seen as something purely external, a force which has to be lived with and

¹⁸³Taylor, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 84.

¹⁸⁴ Shaw, *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament*, 173-174.

accepted because to canvass for autonomy in civil life might have dangerous religious implications.

Brendan stated that at this point, the reader is confronted by the strangest and most controversial passage in the entire letter. Indeed, abruptly, Paul enjoins his audience to “be subject to the powers placed over them (v.1), and in support, he embarks on the line of reasoning which is uncharacteristic of his thought elsewhere. Thus, in this section, there is no appeal to Christology nor is there anything distinctly Christian about the theological argument deployed, with its very conventional stress upon rewards and punishment.¹⁸⁵

Also, Morris submitted that though the statement of Paul in this section of the epistle has generated divergent views, contemporary Christians must take this passage seriously in its present context because it is part of what Paul is saying to the Romans, and it has abiding significance for Christian readers of all ages. Thus, in this section, Paul’s view on civil leadership is very distinctive as he has a firm conviction that God is in full control of the human affairs, and that nobody can secure a position of rulership unless with permission from God. Therefore, he (Paul) is of the opinion that human government is not man-made but of divine origin; hence, servants of God must respect and submit to its laws accordingly.¹⁸⁶

Charles Brock opined that this section of the epistle affirms that the Christian has responsibilities, not only to the church or within the fellowship of believers but also to individuals outside, especially those in government. For Brock, to have a clearer understanding of Romans 13: 1-7, it is helpful to note that while Jesus recognized the value of government as an institution ordained by God, he however criticized the traits of abuse of leadership as demonstrated by those in authority in his days. Hence, Jesus called Herod a “fox” (Lk. 13:32) and spoke of the leaven of Herod (Mk. 8: 15). This shows that Jesus condemned the wrong use of power, though he makes it clear that the authority of a ruler comes from God (see Mk. 10: 42-43; Jn. 19: 11).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵Brendan, *Romans: Sacra Pagina Series*, 385.

¹⁸⁶Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 458.

¹⁸⁷Charles Brock, *Romans: The Road to Righteousness* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International Inc. 1996), 92.

Commenting on verse 1, Morris argues that there is no connecting particle but the paragraph follows naturally from Rom. 12: 19-21 where Paul admonishes that Christians should not seek private vengeance. However, in this case, he emphasizes the need for every soul (Christians and non-Christians) to pursue universal duty of submission to human government in the society. He (Paul) believes that there is nothing servile about obedience to civil leadership because rulers are only representatives of God to whom Christians should show deference.¹⁸⁸

Also, commenting on the opening statement (v.1) of this chapter, P'asa psuchee exousias huperechousais hupotaseesthoo ... (Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God ...), Brock had submitted that here, Paul recognized the human government as a God-given institution which is working to protect good citizens as well as to restrain evil-doers. He (Paul) believes that human government should act as God's servant and as the instrument of God's wrath against evil-doers. Hence, it is the duty of all citizens to support it in a bid to promote peace and order in the society.¹⁸⁹

In verses 2-4, Paul gives explanation on the rationale for canvassing submission to civil authorities by stating that doing so will show genuine recognition and obedience to God's (divine) ordinance. As submitted by Brendan, in these verses, the text reinforces the logic that resistance to divine arrangement (establishment of secular authorities) will entail wrong disposition to God's plans which will invariably attract divine condemnation (though this might be inflicted through human agents) against the evil doers, thus: Theou gar diakonos esteen soi eeis to agathon. Ean to kakon poiees fobou ou gar eike ten machairan fobei Theou gar diakonos estin ekdikos eis orgeen too to kakon ... (for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; ... (v.4). However, an ambiguity hovers around the likely meaning of the verses when stating the source of sanction as both divine and human, with the fear which it inspires - fear both of human rulers and of the deity who stands behind the authority they wield. Hence, the "sword" which the ruler

¹⁸⁸ Morris, 460-461.

¹⁸⁹ Charles Brock, *Romans: The Road to Righteousness*, 93.

bears as a sign of power to inflict penalty is no mere decoration, but a symbol of power to inflict punishment on the offenders.¹⁹⁰

Also, commenting on verses 4-7, Barrett argued that here Paul uses the pronoun 'it' for authority which is neuter in Greek instead of feminine 'him' which is appropriate in English translation, though what he meant by the statement 'what is good' is not explicit. It can be assumed that abstention from evil is certainly included; it cannot be certainly deduced that the doing of what is socially good is positively intended, but there is no reason why 'good' should be understood in a purely negative and individualistic sense. Further, Barrett stated that historically, in most cases, praises (in the form of statues or inscriptions) was publicly bestowed on those who had made notable contributions to the welfare of the State.¹⁹¹ Such an action is usually carried out with a view to encouraging the benefactors and others to contribute more to the common benefit, growth and interest of the State.

In verses 5-7, Paul expatiates on his reasons for encouraging believers to perform civic responsibilities as good citizens of their countries, thus: Dio anangkee hupotassethai ou monon dia ten orgeen alla kai dis teen suneideein (Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath ... (v.5). It is instructive to realize that Christians are people of active consciences who act, not because they are being coerced to behave responsibly but as people whose consciences are being under-girded by the Holy Spirit. As noted by Cranfield, whereas the pagan fulfills his obligations to the State (if he does) for fear of punishment, and maybe because he realizes that he derives some benefits from the State; the reason is not the same with the Christian who fulfills his obligation to it, namely, because of his knowledge of the secret relationship he has to God and to Christ. Therefore, Christians in Rome, as a matter of fact, pay taxes on the ground of their knowledge of the place of civil authority in the divine purpose.¹⁹² It is clear from this submission that it was on the basis of need to participate in civic obligation that Paul admonishes Christians to accordingly render taxes and tributes to the State.

¹⁹⁰Brendan, 387-388.

¹⁹¹C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 245-246.

¹⁹²C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1985), 324.

Also, commenting on verses 5-7, Barrett opined that in these verses Paul expatiates on reasons why citizens (believers and non-believers alike) should perform their civic obligations to the State. In Paul's view, rulers in the State requires, not merely the good will but active support of all citizens because their duties include promoting the welfare of good citizens as well as restraining the evil-doers. Paul uses the phrase, *lei tourgoi gar Theou eisin* (rulers are servants of God) to describe public officials, especially those who carry out public works in the services of the State.¹⁹³ It is reasonable to conclude that for Paul, the Roman magistrates, though they may lack knowledge were public servants, not of Rome but of God who installs them.

In the view of Brendan, Paul's statement that all citizens, including Christians should pay dues and taxes is very instructive. His use of the word *apodidonai* has the sense of giving back something owed as a debt. The same verb in precisely the form *apodote* (render), features in the Synoptic logion concerning the payment of tax (Mk. 12: 7; Matt.22:21; Lk. 20:25). In Luke's account, the introductory question refers to the tax as *foros* as in Romans 13: 6-7. Moreover, the sequence in Romans from the "tax" issue (of Rom. 13: 6-7) to the passage about the primacy of the "debt" of love (Rom. 13: 8-10) has an interesting parallel in Mark's gospel because the question about payment of tax is followed closely by the question about the "first commandment (*entole*) of all" and Jesus' response in the term of primacy of love (Mk. 12:28-34). Also, the distinction in the statement (tribute to whom it is due) is that between direct and indirect taxes, Roman citizens were exempt from paying the former while the latter involved mainly the taxes on commercial transactions, revenues from rent, etc.¹⁹⁴ In the next section, this paper shall present the implications of the exegetical study of Romans 13: 1-7.

5. Implications of the Study for Good Governance in Nigeria

This section of the paper discusses some implications of the exegetical study of Romans 13: 1-7 for good governance in Nigeria. It is instructive to note

¹⁹³ Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 147.

¹⁹⁴Brendan, 392.

that in view of experiences of bad governance, occasioned by high-handedness and dictatorial tendencies exhibited by those occupying political offices in Nigeria, there is continuous debates and controversies on the reasonableness or otherwise for Christians to show loyalty and obedience to civil authorities. However, it is realized that the basis for the age-old argument on the matter is hinged on the need to promote peace and harmony as the likely reason why Paul counselled the early Church on such a volatile issue such as the appropriate responses to the laws made by the State, especially on the relationship that should exist between members of the church (new community) and the gentile rulers (emperors, kings, etc.) in the Roman Empire of their day. Therefore, in this section, the writer of this paper presents some implications of the study to the contemporary Christians in Nigeria.

First, good governance requires active participation of all the citizens in politics, including the Christians. Both the leaders and followers have responsibility to pursue the task of achieving good governance. The maxim that 'politics is a dirty game' should be debunked because it has the tendency to negatively impact on the overall process of how good leaders will emerge. As such, failure of Christians to participate in the electoral processes will, no doubt, affect their dream of having God-fearing persons occupy the leadership positions. Invariably, good governance will be hampered and both Christians and non-Christians will suffer.

Second, Christians should model godliness and righteousness through responsible citizenship. Obedience to civil authority is a sign of showing true respect and loyalty to God who has ordained the institution of secular government, and any act of disobedience to secular government is a rebellion to God which is likely to attract punishment from those in leadership position. Therefore, it will be difficult for Christians to easily persuade other citizens to listen to their preaching of gospel message while being branded as a sect that encourages civil unrest in their communities. Besides, as people with dual citizenship, Christians can positively influence the political affairs of their countries by serving as 'salt' and 'light' of the world through their chosen professions (Matt. 5:13-16). According to Wilbur O'Donovan, the only exceptions to the rule that Christians should obey the governments of their countries are when the governments forbid Christians to speak about Christ, or order them to do something which

breaks the law of God.¹⁹⁵ Thus, Christian leaders should always use their privileges to encourage their churches to pray the secular leaders in their State.

Third, all leaders, both religious and secular (political), are God's representative, and they must perform their assigned tasks with that mindset. Today, the experiences of corruption, injustice, etc. that are prevalent in most countries clearly reveals the lack of understanding or orientation about the nature of human government. Human governments are ordained by God as agents or representatives to maintain law and order by punishing the offenders, as well as helping to protect the welfare of the righteous, and working to provide and maintain facilities to enhance social infrastructures. Failure to carry out all those stated functions will always engender strife leading to agitation as well as creating a dichotomy between secular and religious. Therefore, efforts should always be made by all citizens to contribute their quotas to the maintenance of peace and pursuit of development projects in the societies.

Fourth, good governance cannot be realized in a vacuum; it requires the cooperation of all the citizens – the leaders and followers. Payment of taxes and tributes are the major sources of financing government functionaries as well as to embark on developmental projects. Regardless of religious affiliations, lack of cooperation and support for the process of making contribution towards financing social infrastructure will affect good governance. It will also jeopardise all efforts towards maintenance of law and order (such as through the provision of arms and ammunition for the security apparatus in the State) in the society.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined and discussed the need for Christians, especially in Nigeria, to contribute their quotas to the overall growth and development of their societies through responsible living by showing loyalty and obedience to the civil authorities of their respective societies. Though there is a continuous debate and controversy over whether or not Christians should participate actively in politics, especially through emphasis on the principle

¹⁹⁵Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* (Carlisle, U.K: The Paternoster Press, 1996), 261.

of separation of Church and State; albeit, the review of literature have given credence to the need to disagree with such a stance in the contemporary society. Through the exegetical study of Romans 13: 1-7, it was discovered that yielding to Paul's counsel on the need for all souls, including Christians to obey all civil authorities. Therefore, it is recommended that as citizens of two kingdoms, earthly and heavenly, Christians should understand that they have the responsibility to cooperate with the legally constituted human governments on the efforts at promoting peace and harmony in their societies through payment of taxes and tributes. Equally, all human leaders should see themselves as agents and representatives of God through whom the divine plans can be easily sustained. As such, they should be conscious of their delegated responsibilities by striving to maintain laws and order in their societies. Also, public officials should shun all acts of corruption, greed and all other social vices because they shall later give account of their stewardships to God.