

Church and State: Biblical View on Their Relationship

Annemercy Wanjiku Kimani
Email: akimani71@gmail.com

Abstract

The relationship between church and state has been a contentious issue historically. The greatest challenge for the church has been its response to the governing authorities, especially when they do not subscribe to godly values. Should the church encourage or dissuade its members from submitting to such powers? Romans 13 highlights some guidelines on the relationship between church and state, showing what God expected the believers in the first century to do when relating to governing authorities. The paper draws some principles from the religious and governance system of the Old Testament Israel. Through library research, this study shows that God mandates authorities to govern on his behalf and that rulers should not be a terror to the upright but are to serve as God's servants to punish the evil doer, maintain justice, and collect taxes for public service. God, in his sovereignty, desires to establish order in the world through governments. In this imperfect world, the believer is a dual citizen of heaven and earth with first allegiance to God. The only exception of the Romans 13:1 imperative is when the government opposes the law of God; in such a case, the believer must uncompromisingly obey God.

Keywords: Church-State; Romans 13; Power; Governing Authorities

Introduction

Scripture presents a balanced view of the relationship between the church and state.¹ For instance, Romans 13:1–7 offers guidelines to Christians on the nature of relationships and duties toward the state. Jones warns that to determine the guidelines for church-state relationships, one should not rely on one text but must compare several texts so that the interpretation does not contradict Scripture.² Gombis looks at this text as situational, meant to help the Christians navigate life as a “vulnerable community” so that they could beat the

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, Repr., The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 341–342.

² Kirk M Wellum, “Martyn Lloyd -Jones on Church and State in Romans 13:1-7,” 2023, 3.



temptation to revolt against paying taxes. Paul did not endorse the Roman injustices but asked them to regard them because they were under God.³ This paper argues that the church and state derive their mandates from God and have different but complementary roles to serve the same people. It also recognizes the conditions under which believers or the church are not obligated to submit to the state when they demand what goes against the law of God. The section below surveys religion and governance in the Old Testament period.

Religion and State in the OT Pre-Monarchial Period

God's rule is seen during and after the creation. In Eden, Adam and Eve lived in harmony and were in charge of everything God had made (Gen 1:26). However, sin entered the world after the fall, followed by its consequences (Gen 3). However, there is hope and continuation of God's power and control over all events.⁴ The fall brought about the corruption of the human heart that resulted in wickedness, for example, Cain killing his brother Abel. As human populations increased, cultures diversified, and the need for order became even more essential. Mbewe notes that a state system started developing "law and order." People organized themselves under kings to defend themselves from enemies as they moved further away from God's rulership. (Gen 12,13,14).⁵

Moses and Joshua led the Israelites to the promised land in a leadership that often consulted God in any decision-making (Exod 17:4; Num 11:11; 20:1–8). God expected obedience from Moses. However, when he disobeyed, God declared that he would not enter the promised land, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Num 20:12, ESV). God still expected people to honor him above all others, and this act could perhaps have made the people exalt Moses with the honor that belongs only to God. Thus, all leaders are answerable to God on the mandate he has given them.

In Genesis 2, God gave the first man the first law, the command not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. The man was expected to obey to safeguard his enjoyment of life. Later, God gave Israel the law on which many universal legal systems are based. God wrote the law on two tablets, which he gave to Moses, which were placed in the Ark (Exod 31:18). Moses wrote the exact words in a book that he gave the Levites. He commanded them

³ George Kalantzis and Gregory W. Lee, eds., *Christian Political Witness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 83–85.

⁴ David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentaries-Genesis* (Enduring Word, 2012).

⁵ Conrad Mbewe, *God's Design for the Church: A Guide for African Pastors and Ministry Leaders* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 242–244.

to read these laws to the children of Israelites every seven years and when Israel gathers before the Lord (Deut 31:9-13). Ryken states, “The law expresses God’s expectations for the moral and spiritual conduct of Israel, the guidelines God has given to Israel to enable them to live life as he created it to be lived.”⁶ Psalm 119 espouses the beauty of the law of God; the law comes from God and is intended for man’s benefit. It guides him in life and shows him how to live among others.⁷ Governing laws constituted by governments help to keep law order and establish justice among its people. When governments enforce just laws, they do it after the order of God, and the citizens are bound to obey them.

Religion and State During the Era of Kings

Before the Israelites asked for a king, God was their King. Gideon told the people he would not rule over them, nor would his son, hinting at a theocratic form of government (Judges 8:22-23). Israelites asked Samuel, the prophet and judge, for a king to rule over them, and when he inquired of God, he told him to anoint a king for them because they had rejected him as King (1 Sam 8).⁸ Even then, God appointed the first kings, Saul, David, and Solomon. Judges and kings in Israel were under God’s rule, stewards of God’s power and authority. Leithart notes that political history submits to redemptive history. God orders all history, and political history is part of the plot of God’s master plan of redemption. It is subordinate to God’s plans, “He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings” (Dan 2:21a, ESV). God is Sovereign over all earthly kings and powers.

Daniel’s story clearly shows the sovereignty of God over rulers and governments. He allowed foreign kings to exile Judah and Israel, disciplined Nebuchadnezzar, and raised King Cyrus to deliver his people from exile (Dan 2:21; 4:34-35; 5:18-28; 7:14).⁹ The three Hebrew boys in Babylon refused to worship the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, risking their life because God was still their King in exile (Dan 3). Daniel refused to obey earthly rulers and was loyal to the God of Israel despite the threat of being thrown into a lion’s den (Dan 6).¹⁰ The Babylonians experienced God’s sovereignty as he judged its rulers using his laws as a standard (Dan 4:28-33; 5). God punished the prideful, restored the

⁶ Leland Ryken et al., eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 489.

⁷ Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 490.

⁸ Peter J. Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power: Rediscovering the Centrality of the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publications, 1993).

⁹ Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Hippo Books, 2008).

¹⁰ David Alexander and Pat Alexander, *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*, Revised and expanded edition, third edition paperback. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 474.

repentant, and is sovereign over heaven and earth.¹¹ God is sovereign over all governments and rulers and can be trusted to deal with rulers who oppress his people (Ps 72:1–4; Jer 21:12, Mic 3:9–12; Amos 1). God’s people were expected to submit to them if they were not going against God’s law to live peacefully. He asked the exiles to seek the peace of Babylon and pray for it because when it prospered, they would benefit (Jer 29:7). Daniel and his defiant Hebrew colleagues are projected as biblical examples of dealing with errant rulers.

Church and State in the New Testament

Israel was under Roman Rule in the New Testament. The Jews challenged Jesus to respond to issues concerning Jew’s submission to the authorities who were pagans. He responded with the famous quote, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Matt 22:21, ESV). In this reply, Jesus indicates that believers are responsible to God and the State. Kunhiyop notes that though Jesus said this, it did not indicate they would enjoy a harmonious relationship. Believers were to submit because of their relationship with God.¹² Focussing on the context, Osborne remarks that Jesus was addressing the Zealots who were opposed to the poll tax by the Roman government. He explains that Jesus taught that it was suitable to submit to the authorities because God established it according to Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13–15. He adds that “there is no conflict for the relationship to the government is part of the relationship to God.”¹³ Jesus also paid temple tax (Matt 17:24–27).

Osborne agrees with Hare that when Jesus talked about the image of the coin, he was pointing to God’s sovereignty over Caesar. Caesar was a man who was made in the image of God and was, therefore, subject to God. MacArthur also states that Caesar’s image was on the coin, but God’s image was on every man. Though Caesar had authority over tax and governance matters, God was the one who had authority over all the earth.¹⁴ Similarly, Wiersbe reiterates that the believer is a dual citizen of heaven and earth and has responsibilities to both realms, though his first allegiance is to God in whose image he is made. According to him, the believer should submit to the government and be involved, just

¹¹ Ronald W. Pierce, Kevin Harney, and Sherry Harney, *Daniel*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2015), 82.

¹² Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*.

¹³ Grant R. Osborne, *Mark*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2014), 213

¹⁴ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1776; Osborne, *Mark*, 213; Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew; Interpretation- A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press, 1993).

as Joseph and Daniel were. Believers may not agree with everything a government does, but they must acknowledge that God establishes governments for the citizens' good.¹⁵

Peter and John were arrested, and the authorities commanded them not to talk about the resurrection of Jesus. However, they prioritized submitting to God and his commands (Matt 28:18–20). Peter and the Apostles said, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, ESV). A believer's first allegiance is to God and then to the government. God was superior to the Jewish Sanhedrin; however, when these human authorities contradicted God, the apostles were to express their allegiance to God.¹⁶ In his first epistle, Peter issued an imperative for believers to subject themselves to emperors or governors (1 Pet 2:13–17), showing that he esteemed governing authorities and was only opposed to their contravention of God's superior commands. Keener says that God vindicated their stance by giving them the Holy Spirit due to their obedience to him.¹⁷ Peter qualifies that they do it for the Lord's sake. Keener says believers must follow the world's demands if they do not contradict their faith. They are submitting not because the systems are just but for the Lord's sake to "silence critics of faith."¹⁸ It addressed a Jewish thought that they could not submit to someone who was not their own. Having been liberated from their bondage by Christ, the believers may have thought they did not need to submit to earthly authority. The Petrine text, therefore, instructs that it honors God for them to submit to authorities because God gives them the mandate to govern. The order of governance is supposed to mirror heaven, and that earthly king is supposed to be a copy of the King of Kings and deliver a "heavenly pattern" on earth.¹⁹

A Christian's Duties Toward the State

The Bible teaches that God institutes rulers and governments to enforce justice, law, and order (Rom 13:1–5; 1 Pet 2:13–14). Because of these duties, the believer should support the state's running by paying taxes and obeying the authority. Paul tells the believers that they must also pray for the governments and rulers because when there is peace, they will enjoy it. Peace in the first century before the persecution enabled the apostles to move to many corners of the world with the Gospel of Christ (1 Tim 2:1–2). Neufeld notes that the Roman state

¹⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), 124.

¹⁶ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Minn.: Kregel Publications, 2001).

¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 212.

¹⁸ Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2021), 162–3.

¹⁹ Peter J. Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power: Rediscovering the Centrality of the Church* (Phillipsburg, N. J: P&R, 1993).

provided safety that enabled travelers to move. The apostles could travel and take the gospel amid many challenges.

The believers have civic duties toward the state to get involved in governance by participating in elections to choose their leaders. They should hold the government to account through constructive criticism and cooperate with the state to improve the welfare of all citizens; believers who are called into leadership in these offices must not shy away but go and represent the Kingdom of God in those spaces as did Joseph, Daniel, Meshack Shadrack, and Abednego.²⁰ Kunhiyop adds that governments come from God, act on behalf of God, and are fashioned ideally on the everlasting Kingdom that Jesus is coming to rule. Its purpose is to serve the people, and the church is the salt and light of the world, bearing impact.²¹ Apart from their moral responsibilities, Christians are supposed to exercise their civil rights in a transformed way, unlike non-believers. According to The Oxford Conference of 1937, the church owed the state prayers, loyalty, obedience, partnership for the common good, criticism when the state goes against God's laws, being the salt and light, and being the moral conscience of society.²²

Church and State Roles

The church and state have God-given roles. Mbewe classifies these as vertical and horizontal. The church takes the vertical position and ensures that man's relationship with God is right. He sees the state as having a horizontal relationship to ensure that all human beings enjoy amicable relationships with one another. Though their roles in this imagery look very distinct, they interact harmoniously or in conflict at some point. Specifically, the church's role and mandate derive from the Great Commission and is in evangelism, salvation, and sanctification by remaining faithful to biblical teachings. Those efforts are supposed to bear fruit in the lives of believers, and the result is a people whose moral standards make it easier for the state to govern.²³

According to Stott, there are four models on the relations between church and state, namely, "Erastianism (the state controls the church), Theocracy (the church controls the state), Constantinianism (the compromise in which the state favors the church, and the church

²⁰ Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Hippo Books, 2008), 99–100; Solomon Andria, *Romans*, Africa Bible Commentary Series (Nairobi, Kenya; Grand Rapids, Mich: Hippo Books, 2011), 243; Kalantzis and Lee, *Christian Political Witness*, 215–230.

²¹ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*.

²² Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 101.

²³ Mbewe, *God's Design for the Church*.

accommodates the state to retain its favor), and partnership (the church and state recognize and encourage each other's distinct God-given responsibilities in a spirit of constructive collaboration)."²⁴ Theocracy derived from the Greek words "theos," (God) and "kratein," (rule), means the rule of God. Josephus came up with the term in AD 165, though the idea came from the Old Testament (Exod 19:4-9; Deut 33:4-5), where God controlled the nation of Israel. This thought is well captioned during the reign of King David.²⁵ Erastinianism is derived after the theologian Thomas Erastus (1524-83), who advocated that the state had a right to intervene in church matters. He held that since God had given the state the mandate to rule, there could not be two powers in a state, and therefore, the church was to be subservient to the state. The church could, consequently, not excommunicate its members or withhold sacraments. The Erastinianism model was practiced by the Roman Catholic Church when the emperors became Christians.²⁶

Constatianism was named after Emperor Constantine (AD 325), who took over the church and state. After him, the Roman Catholic Church, through its Pope, claimed control over the state through the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). They controlled states, kings, and rulers. In the 11th Century, King Henry II resisted this rule in England. Partnership is an ideal situation where the state and church work together though distinctly. Martin Luther, trying to define the workings of this model, assigned the spiritual part of man to the church and the physical man to the state.²⁷

The biblical mandate of the state is not to control or impose morality but to establish justice and balance freedoms with obligations that enhance a good life for its citizens. People created by God were given rights for their survival by God, which the government is mandated to provide (Right to life, means of livelihood, right of association, access to resources, freedom of movement, and many more). A government cannot control morality because it is a heart matter. It can stop a man from killing through legislation but cannot stop him from hating his brother.²⁸

It was not Christ's idea for Christians to segregate themselves from non-Christians and govern themselves. The church should not attempt to control the state to make their lives

²⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 339.

²⁵ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2. [rev.] ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2001), 1184.

²⁶ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 384.

²⁷ Kirk M Wellum, "Martyn Lloyd -Jones on Church and State in Romans 13:1-7."

²⁸ Richard John Neuhaus and Georgetown University, eds., *Piety, and Politics: Evangelicals and Fundamentalists Confront the World* (Washington, DC, 1987), 219-228.

more manageable. They should advocate for policies that benefit everyone. Neuhaus posits that though there is a strong position for the separation of church and state, it is wishful thinking to imagine that if Christian principles do not influence the state, it will be neutral. He says that no system accommodates a vacuum. If Christianity is pushed out of the state by politicians, another belief system will govern the state because human beings are religious by nature. He, therefore, challenges Christians not to shy away from politics but to get their influence felt as they serve in the state arena through advocacy, election, or appointment.²⁹

The church is mandated to be the salt and light of the world (Matt 5:13–14). That, according to Colson, is its high calling in the world. When it is effective in this realm, it will resolve many of the crises that the state needs to handle through law and order. It will indirectly enhance justice in the land and help all see Christ's invisible Kingdom. He believes faith must be publicly relevant; otherwise, it is useless. He notes that Jesus taught that those who seek to be leaders must be servants (Matt 20:25–28). He refers to William Wilberforce as one who modeled leadership.³⁰

Romans 13:1–7 on Church and State Relations

Romans 13 addresses the Christian response and obligations to the state. Over time, this Scripture has been used by the state to try and whip the church and its followers into submission.³¹ Whereas the Scripture shows that submission should benefit the believers, the authorities use this text to suppress the church. They use it for selfish motives without considering the context in which it was written. Mattson, writing during the reign of President Trump, said that he was using this verse to whip allegiance from the people and that his supporters, who were believers, believed that since God had placed him in power, he should not be questioned as he had divine authority to rule. Mattson queries using this text to shut down any criticism from the people, arguing that the citizens are responsible for voting in leaders and are, therefore, supposed to hold the leaders to account. He argues that if the leaders claim to have been ordained by God, they must follow the whole law of God.³² Paul wrote this text as a practical application of his teachings. The Jewish believers in Rome had to live with a non-theocratic government. He did not want them to rebel but to live peacefully

²⁹ Neuhaus and Georgetown University, *Piety, and Politics*, 164–167.

³⁰ Neuhaus and Georgetown University, *Piety, and Politics*.

³¹ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 341–342.

³² Stephen Mattson, "Misusing Romans 13 to Embrace Theocracy," *Sojourners*, December 10, 2019, <https://sojo.net/articles/misusing-romans-13-embrace-theocracy>.

with everyone. Every doctrine must be based on the whole Scripture, not philosophy, because Scripture interprets Scripture.³³

The submission in this text was not understood as an absolute by the Christians in that era. While the believers should be submissive to authorities, they could not submit to orders for emperor worship. However, the state generally practiced justice, so Paul told the Christians not to fear, “For Christians, freedom meant freedom to be God’s slaves rather than slaves of sin; it meant freedom from the tyranny of the state and the freedom to uphold the state’s laws as God’s servants.”³⁴ A Christian’s first submission was to God before every other authority, and this may sometimes conflict with submission to the earthly powers.

Wright argues that this text is general and that it did not in any way give accolades to the Roman rulers. He notes it extends Romans 12:14–21, which talks about how believers should live with others when aggrieved. Paul drew his teaching from Jewish beliefs that authorities are creations of God for order in the world (Isa 10:5–11, 46:11, Jer 29:4–9, Dan 1:2).³⁵ Paul lowered the status of the Roman rulers who were worshipped. He says they are indeed servants of God, who mandated them to rule, and that they owe allegiance to him. This text could be read with Colossians 1:16, which states that God created all authorities and all things for him; therefore, submission was appropriate.³⁶ Agang argues against the state’s absolute power and the Christian’s duty to adhere to it. Therefore, Christians are dual citizens, first accountable to God and then to the earthly state. He refers to the Accra Charter, which clarified that public theology demanded more from the believer than submission to the state. The believer should right the wrongs done by the state by pointing them out. Public theology must then render its prophetic voice to the state in line with the times of social injustice and poverty. Being the salt and light, they must also offer solutions that will make a difference for the people.³⁷

Paul taught about the attitude Christians should have when dealing with the state and their identity and witness. His primary citizenship is in God’s Kingdom, and he is also a citizen of the earthly Kingdom, but his allegiance is to God first. He is to model the ideals of his primary citizenship by submitting to the authorities because he knows they are under God.

³³ Kirk M Wellum, “Martyn Lloyd -Jones on Church and State in Romans 13:1-7,” 3.

³⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2014), 691.

³⁵ N T. Wright, *The New Interpreter’s Bible. 10: The Acts of the Apostles, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, the Letter to the Romans, the First Letter to the Corinthians*, Nachdr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 380.

³⁶ N T. Wright, *The New Interpreter’s Bible. 10*, 381.

³⁷ Sunday Bobai Agang, H. J. Hendriks, and Dion Angus Forster, eds., *African Public Theology* (Bukuru Carlisle: Hippo Books, 2020), 274-278.

A Christian's mandate is to be involved in their community by loving and honoring others and representing God's Kingdom and its Gospel as prophets. Finally, they must be priests and pray for their country and leaders to thrive.³⁸

Moo opines that Paul wrote this text to stop a tendency where people thought they were heaven-bound and that any earthly influences had no consequence for them. They may have felt that Christ was returning soon, which is all that mattered. He could also have corrected a misunderstanding of his earlier teaching about not conforming to the present world (Rom 12:2). Submission to the governing authority (then became part of the 'good' that God approves in a Christian's life.) Jesus, Paul, and Peter followed this tradition (Mark 12:13-17; 1 Pet 2:13-17). Moo notes that there is a difference between what Paul asked them to do (submit) and obey. He directed them to recognize and acknowledge that these people had authority over them. Paul meant that even in submission when the government requires the people to do what contradicts God's Law, the believers must prioritize obeying God's Law. Their role is to maintain law and order and deliver justice to the people by punishing the wrongdoers. The government needs resources to do these things, so they collect taxes, which is every citizen's responsibility. To bring a balance and conclusion to the debate on this text, Moo submits that "Christians may continue to submit to a particular government (acknowledging their subordination to it generally) even as they, in obedience to a higher authority, refuse to do, in a given instance what the government requires...examining their demands in the light of the Gospel."³⁹

Jones, too, differentiates the use of the words 'submit' and 'obey.' He says that if Paul wanted to use the word obey, he would have, but he did not. Instead, he uses submit/ be subject, which has a military aspect of order and commands. The role is to recognize that God institutes authority. He says this authority refers to the office, not the office holder.⁴⁰ The believer should submit to the authorities to minimize the persecutions they were prone to. Their leader (Jesus Christ) had been murdered on false claims of sedition and kingship. The Roman authorities had sent away some from Rome earlier, like Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2). For this reason, Christians needed to be cautious and not give the state a reason against them since Jesus had already given them a pattern to follow (Mark 12:17). Paul, however, did

³⁸ Solomon Andria, *Romans*, Africa Bible Commentary Series (Nairobi, Kenya; Grand Rapids, Mich: Hippo Books, 2011), 242.

³⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 790-810.

⁴⁰ Kirk M Wellum, "Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Church and State in Romans 13:1-7," 3.

not address the issue of whether the Christian was supposed to submit when the state went against God's Law. In Acts 5:29, Peter addresses this issue when he says he would rather obey God than man. These texts give the principle to follow when there is a conflict between paying allegiance to God and the authorities. Bruce adds that the state can only demand obedience within the boundaries of its mandate. It must be resisted if it demands allegiance to itself rather than God.⁴¹

Dunn argues differently from Bruce and refutes the peaceful experience stand. He says Paul drew from ages-long Jewish principles of living peacefully in an orderly government. Prophet Jeremiah encouraged the exiles to pray and seek the good of the city they were living in because they would benefit when the city was peaceful and prosperous. Paul echoed this, too (Jer 29:7; 1 Tim 2:1–2). Dunn calls Paul's exhortation "a policy of political prudence." The believer needed to be empowered to deal with the authorities' opposition of the day. He says that Paul drew from the Wisdom of Solomon (6:3–4), which advocates for political silence. Paul also drew from Daniel that God was sovereign and that all leaders and governments were accountable to God and would also face his judgment, and this was a relief for the Christians. Paul also alludes to the fact that good governance will benefit them when they submit. They would also escape God's judgment. Refusal to pay taxes would draw the attention of the authorities to their fellowships. Dunn concludes by saying that the Roman passage contributes significantly to the theology of political power. It assumes that the state is definite without dualism and that its members are servants of God.⁴² The subsection below samples a few cases of how the church and state have related in Africa.

Church and State Relations in South Africa

In South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church supported the apartheid system of discrimination against Black South Africans. They failed in their prophetic voice to warn the state against the wrongs they were doing to the citizens. The church got involved in state matters, and the state interfered in church matters, leaving it in a state of compromise, rendering it ineffective. The church leaders used theology to justify the injustices. Some protests led to the killing of people, and the church leaders condemned the protestors instead of fighting for them.⁴³

⁴¹ F. F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 232.

⁴² James D. G. Dunn, *World Biblical Commentary- Romans 9-16* (Zondervan Academic, 2017) , 759-773.

⁴³ Madise, Mokhele Singleton, "Church and State Relations" (PhD Thesis, 2009).

A World Conference of Churches meeting held in Cottesloe to resolve the issues only advocated for unity but did not give the church any biblical or theological guidance. However, it condemned the state for the injustices. The mainline churches rejected the resolutions and withdrew from the organization. At the time, a prime minister, Verwoerd, felt that if the church had stood its ground, it could have won over the government. The international community pressed for reforms by condemning Apartheid and putting in sanctions. The World Council of Churches and the South African Council of Churches approved protests. Theologians like David Bosch and William Nicol called for the white church to reform and unite with the Black Church.⁴⁴

Finally, De Klerk brought in many reforms and released Mandela from prison, and there was an end to the apartheid rule after negotiations. Only after the state had acted did the Dutch Reformed Church condemn Apartheid, but they did not apologize for their earlier position. They also declined to sign a resolution at the Rustenburg Conference that declared Apartheid as evil. They justified it by saying that they had good intentions.⁴⁵ David Bosch condemned the Dutch Reformed Church for misinterpreting the Bible passages. The church could, therefore, not guide its faithful post-apartheid because of its compromise. The first Black South African President, Mandela, embraced the indigenous church, believing it had a role in shaping the nation's moral fabric.⁴⁶

Church and State Relations in East Africa

Bishop Okullu, adding his voice to the Romans 13 passage, said it is a principle, not a prescription for the Christian response. The church in East Africa faced a Constantine-like time of peace and comfort and neglected its duty to serve as the nation's conscience. The African states practiced authoritarian rule and suppressed press freedoms in the past; Idi Amin persecuted Christians in Uganda, including Luxum, the Anglican Archbishop, because Christians shunned politics.⁴⁷ In the East African post-colonial era, churches cooperated with the state in health and education by building schools and hospitals. The relationship between the church and the state leans between the Erastian position by Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin (the church and state are sides of the same coin) and the contemporary view that the church must retain its separation from the state. He says that their roles are different, with the state

⁴⁴ Tracy Kuperus, *State, Civil Society, and Apartheid in South Africa: An Examination of Dutch Reformed Church-State Relations*, [New ed.]. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

⁴⁵ Kuperus, *State, Civil Society, and Apartheid in South Africa*.

⁴⁶ Kuperus, *State, Civil Society, and Apartheid in South Africa*, Madise, Mokhele Singleton, "Church and State Relations."

⁴⁷ Kalantzis and Lee, *Christian Political Witness*, 217.

keeping law and order while the church bears the witness of Christ to the world. It should retain its independence to maintain its authority to uphold biblical principles.⁴⁸

The Kenyan church was represented by church ministers like Njoya, the Late Bishop Muga Archbishop Mwana Nzeki, Bishop Gitari, and the Late Okullu, who advocated for multiparty democracy in Kenya. Some, like Njoya, faced beatings alongside other protestors. They joined many to advocate for a shift from the one-party rule that was oppressive to many people. Gitari held the government to account for ills in society, like the political assassinations of Tom Mboya, J. M. Kariuki, and Robert Ouko.⁴⁹

In Kenya, Christians, alongside lobby groups, fight against societal evils against government legislation on issues like LGBTQ, abortion, and other ills that go against the Law of God (Lev 18:22; 20:13, Romans 1:18–32; Jude 7). The education system adopted some of the values about gender and freedom of association from the UN charter, which has been of concern to many citizens in Kenya.⁵⁰ The desire for funding has pushed the government to support these agendas, and they end up signing the imposed agreements that contradict the people's faith and culture. Positively, there has been some success where lobbying by different social and faith groups has resulted in the withdrawal of the legislation, movies on LGBTQ are banned, and there are bills against abortion that have been passed.⁵¹ However, even with these efforts, there are still alarming figures on abortion and the rise of same-sex relationships, especially in our boarding schools. The church should work on spiritual matters and balance it with civil work. Its principal duty is that of evangelizing the world. Morals and heart issues can only be addressed effectively through the gospel.

Principles to Govern Church and State Relationships

The body of Christ can adopt some principles that will guide their relationship through the generations. Kunhiyop advocates for three principles.

1. Separation: The church must be distinct in its morals and values so the world does not compromise them (Rom 12:2; John 17:16).

⁴⁸ Henry Okullu, *The Church and State in Nation Building and Human Development* (Nairobi, Kenya: Uzima Press, 2001), 7–20.

⁴⁹ Kalantzis and Lee, *Christian Political Witness*, 226–227.

⁵⁰ Serfine Achieng, "Religious Leaders Petition Parliament Over LGBTQ Agenda in Kenya," *Citizen Digital*, February 1, 2024, accessed April 9, 2024, <https://www.citizen.digital/news/religious-leaders-petition-parliament-over-lgbtq-agenda-in-kenya-n335952>.

⁵¹ Peter Muiruri, "Kenya Bans LGBTQ +documentary for Promoting Same Sex Marriage.," *The Guardian*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/sep/29/kenya-bans-lgbtq-documentary-for-promoting-same-sex-marriage>.

2. Transformation: The church should affect society as a leaven. Transformed Christians who follow Christ will influence the environment they live in. Quoting Taylor, “The church can serve the state best by illustrating in its own life the kind of life which is God’s will for society as a whole.”
3. Involvement: This entails being compassionate to the world, serving our communities, and spreading the love of Christ.⁵²

Implications

Agreeing with Moo, believers must acknowledge that no government will ever be perfect. Even the theocratic governments in the Old Testament were not ideal because they were composed of fallen men. The believers should be at the forefront of being compliant. For example, churches in Kenya today are required, just like other institutions, to comply with tax payments and their operations. The recent Shakahola tragedy, where over five hundred adherents of a cultic group were starved to death by their leader, has forced the authorities to introduce stringent measures. The Good News International Ministries in Kilifi was linked to the cultic massacre. The victims were starved to death in forced fasting and then strangulation between 2020 and 2023 in Shakahola Forest. The faithful believed that the cult leader was leading them to Jesus.⁵³ The government came in to fulfill its mandate, according to Romans 13, as the avenger of God’s wrath on the evildoer.

The church has, however, insisted that it can self-regulate through the church and Clergy Association and that the whole church should not be condemned. It remains to be seen how the church in Kenya will come up with standards that all the churches can adopt to avoid such a scenario again. Rightfully so, however, as the clergy indicated at the time, the government, which licenses churches to operate, was to blame because it is supposed to regulate or oversee how the churches are being run according to the articles of association.

From the South African case, it is evident that the Church (Dutch Reformed) failed in its mandate to point out the evils committed by the government and compromised itself. They lost the moral authority to guide their people. The church should only work with the state to enhance justice for the people, not for any favors or gain. The indigenous churches did a commendable job by challenging the injustices of the authorities. There must be a distinction between the church’s relations with the state. The separation of church and state is pertinent

⁵² Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 104–105.

⁵³ Nation Team, “Prayers Then Murder: Inside Shakahola Holy Betrayal,” May 15, 2023, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/kilifi/death-toll-from-shakahola-massacre-rises-to-73-4211540>.

in Kenya, especially during elections. Citizens have accused churches and pastors of being compromised with vast donations of money, which are said to be proceeds of corruption. When this happens, the church and its leaders cannot speak out against any evil the politicians will commit because the same politicians have compromised them with money. They are no longer salt and light and cannot speak against corruption because they have partaken in it. The non-Christians criticize the church, and evangelism becomes an uphill task because they generalize the actions of a few churches and individuals to be the face of the church of Christ. This behavior brings dishonor to the faith, and churches must seek the highest levels of integrity to remain relevant worldwide.

The understanding of Scripture dictates how the church will relate to the state. Theologians and the church need to be cautious about their handling of Scripture to develop a unified theology that can guide the church to avoid the pitfalls. Churches must teach the gospel so their members know how God expects them to relate to the state as agents of his love. All pastors must be equipped to interpret God's word correctly.

During such a time of elections and hate speech, negative ethnicity, and violence, the church must be Christ's voice to preach love and cohesion not only among the congregants but in the whole nation. By being neutral and not supporting a particular candidate, the church will have a credible voice that accommodates all political affiliations. In 2022, the Evangelical Association of Kenya presented its one voice concerning governance, campaigns, elections, and leaders based on the Scriptures. They used media platforms like Hope TV, a Christian station, and social media to speak to and influence Kenyans.

Romans 13:7 encourages believers to pay for all they owe the government. Christians must say no to bribery and corruption and stand up for what is right because this will testify to Christ. Unless the believers choose their stand, corruption will never end. The church and the Christians need to seek all the information they need by acquainting themselves with the constitution and by-laws of their land. They should encourage their members to obey the laws of the land because this is honorable and pleasing to God.

Conclusion

God is the creator of all and is sovereign over all powers and nations. The Old Testament brings out God's sovereignty and that God gives authority as part of bringing order to his redemptive mission. It assures the believer that God is in control over the leaders, and they do not need to be afraid. Paul draws from this tradition to show that God is supreme and his mission must continue.

The believers have a responsibility towards the state to submit, to keep the law, to pay their dues, and to pray for the leaders. Jesus showed the believer how to do this by paying taxes to a regime that crucified him. They are dual citizens, and their allegiance is first to God. They must mirror kingdom principles in the world. The church must evangelize and perform acts of mercy, including civic activities such as policy-making or lobbying to align with biblical values.⁵⁴

The state is God's servant to maintain order and justice and to provide services to its citizens. It is accountable to God as a servant and should represent him well, knowing that in the same way, they are agents of terror to evildoers; God will also judge their actions. Paul is silent on dealing with governments that oppose God. However, Peter addresses this in Acts and clarifies that believers should choose allegiance to God when there is conflict because they are dual citizens of heaven and earth. The Romans 13 text is situational and is best read with other texts to avoid misinterpretation and wrongful application. The African cases show how imperfect relations between the church and state can negatively affect all citizens. When the church understands the full biblical mandate, it has positive results like the end of Apartheid in South Africa and the oppressive one-party rule in Kenya.

Biblical submission did not mean that the powers must be obeyed in every circumstance. Only when they are within their God-given mandate. The church and believers must hold the government accountable when it does not fulfill its duty. The study agrees with Martin Luther that a partnership model relationship allows both institutions to execute their mandates over the same group of people. It is the most practical and beneficial for the people.

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⁵⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, Jeff Purswell, and Wayne A. Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1999).

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