

The Christian's Attitude Toward Civil Authorities - Part 2

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 13:1-5

Preached on:

Sunday, November 4, 2012

...series on the Christian's attitude toward...

Before we read the text and examine it, may I remind you that in the first 11 chapters of this epistle, Paul explains the magnificent doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ as well as God's plan and his purpose for his covenant people Israel. And now beginning in chapter 12 Paul speaks very practically to the saints in Rome and, by extension, to all believers. Beginning in chapter 12 he helps us understand the Christian's attitude toward God, the Christian's attitude toward fellow Christians, the Christian's attitude toward all people. And now in chapter 13 the Christian's attitude toward civil authorities.

Now these practical admonitions should be underscored. They should be highlighted in your Bible and in your mind. They should be heeded with utmost diligence. Frankly, these things should be the topic of our conversation during the week subsequent to hearing them preached during a Sunday morning service. These need to be things of a fervent prayer, the priority of our lives to examine ourselves and to confess and to repent and to be whole heartedly obedient.

In fact, in Psalm 119 verse seven we have the proper response to the preaching and the reading and the studying of the Word of God. The psalmist says:

"I shall give thanks to Thee with uprightness of heart, When I learn Thy righteous judgments. I shall keep Thy statutes."¹

And in verse 11 he says:

"Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee."²

This, beloved, is why we gather together on Sunday mornings. The exposition of the Word of God is to be the pinnacle of our time of worship together. It is our time, according to Ephesians 12 to be equipped for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith. That is doctrinal unity. And of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man. The apostle goes on to say that there is a result to all of this. There is a consequence to this kind of equipping. It is that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. He says, "But speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head even Christ."

¹ Psalm 119:7-8.

² Psalm 119:11.

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Beloved, this is the Holy Spirit's fervent desire for you every Sunday morning and it is also his requirement of me to make sure you are fed properly and taught accurately. So I pray that you have prepared your hearts to receive the Word this morning. Frankly, if you come here for any other purpose, I would prefer that you just stay home or go somewhere else where you can hear what you want to hear rather than what you need to hear and be satisfied in whatever fleshly agenda of your hypocrisy you choose to pursue. Don't come here. Better yet, I would boldly call you to repentance and plead with you to come here with your heart prepared, be serious about receiving the Word of God and living it. I pray that you would be like what Peter described in 1 Peter two beginning in verse two that you would long for the pure milk of the Word that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. So let's focus on what the Spirit would have for us here today.

Once, again, the context of chapter 13 is the Christian's attitude toward the civil authorities, primarily and this is a continuation of these practical admonitions that began in chapter 12.

Now it is very crucial for you to understand that fundamental to all of these admonitions is this idea that Paul presents in the first verse of chapter 12. There you will recall he says:

"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."³

In other words, because of the undeserved mercy that God has lavished upon us, because we are such debtors to grace, Paul implores us to offer up the totality of our being as a living sacrifice to him. He pleads for us to understand the importance of whole hearted commitment to the Lord, being committed to him in secret as well as in private, a life that is God centered, where God is the deepest passion of our desire and our longing is to be pleasing to him.

Beloved, this is what it means in Deuteronomy 6:5 to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your might. And if this is true of you, then pleasing the Lord will occupy your thinking. It will motivate the direction of your life. It will motivate your decisions. The Lord will truly be your greatest desire. Your supreme satisfaction in life will be found in him, in your relationship with him, come what may. Nothing else in life will really matter. And also he reminds us in chapter 12 verse two that we are not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. In other words, if you are a living and a holy sacrifice, the world is not going to be able to shape you into its way of thinking. It is not going to be able to mold your behavior. That will become a work of the Spirit of God through the sanctifying power of the Word of God.

³ Romans 12:1.

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You show me a man or a woman who has no appetite for the Word of God, who spends no time learning it, who has no serious commitment in living it, proclaiming, protecting it and I will show you a person who is conformed to this world, a person that is useless in service, a person that is miserable I private, a person whose life is dishonoring to the Lord in public, a person who is a hypocrite, a person who wastes their live on trivial pursuits and the fleeting pleasures of this very short life that, beloved, God blesses and uses those who are committed to being a living and a holy sacrifice. So this is foundational to all that Paul is going to present. Only when this is the immovable position of your heart and therefore the dominant direction of your life will you be able to have a proper attitude towards God and fellow Christians and all people and even the civil authorities. If your life is not a living and a holy sacrifice it will be a living and selfish slave acceptable only to self.

Paul has illustrated this with utmost clarity. May I remind you what he said in verse three of chapter 12. He is saying that if you refuse to be an integral part of the church body, if you have no desire to exercise your spiritual gift, then he says you think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. In other words, you are filled with pride, filled with selfishness. That is the opposite of a living and a holy sacrifice.

To give you another example, if you have a hard time with exhortation that he gives us in verse nine of chapter 12 where he says, "Let love be without hypocrisy, abhor what is evil, cling to what is good, be devoted to one another in brotherly love, give preference to one another in honor." If that is hard for you, then it betrays the fact that you have a very shallow understanding of God's mercy towards you and you demonstrate a high view of self, a low view of God and, again, your life is the opposite of a living and a holy sacrifice. And certainly if that is true of you, if you are devoted to self, then you will equally rebel against having the proper kind of attitude that we are called to with respect to the governing authorities that God has placed over us. So, again, fundamental to all of this will be this idea of being a living and holy sacrifice. Those who rebel against government in Christian circles tend to be those who are obsessed with their personal rights and personal freedoms rather than sacrificing themselves for the sake of the gospel. They will be people far more committed to political reform and social activism than evangelism and discipleship.

Think of what God could do even in this church if just a fraction of the passion and enthusiasm that many of you exhibit towards this presidential campaign were devoted to prayer and evangelism and discipleship. It is amazing how misplaced priorities and wasted opportunities have historically been the Achilles heel of immature Christians. Sadly, the remaining influence of our fallen nature tempts us to be distracted to things that are eternally insignificant.

I know of preachers who give their entire life to try to reverse Roe versus Wade. You have heard about that, the abortion law. Or other social ills. And yet they really have no zeal of evangelism. That is not their devotion. Then there are those Christians who waste their lives entertaining themselves with video games and movies or engaging in the

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mindless interactions of social media, all characteristics of slot, sluggards living in a fool's paradise, fashioned by the folly of this world. It is amazing how the vortex of Satan's temptations in this world seem so irresistible to our flesh and they just suck us into black hole of wasted opportunity and fruitless lives.

My friends, Satan has a wonderful plan for your life as a Christian. And that plan is to make you miserable, useless, fruitless and dishonoring to Christ. As you fritter away your life like a fool that would try to collect air in a mason jar.

I fear this describes the vast majority of blood bought saints and it is a tragedy.

So Paul begins to build his case upon this foundational priority of sacrificial living. And it is only this kind of devotion that will predispose a believer to submit to the governing authorities that God has placed over us.

Now, by way of review we have learned thus far in our study of chapter 13 that we are to submit to our authorities of the sake of the gospel that others might be saved. That was the very first point that I made to you the last time we were together that emerges from this text. Paul speaks, number one, about the Christian's attitude towards civil authorities and we see it, the very first part of verse one.

“Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities.”⁴

Again, by way of review, the mission of the Church is to preach the gospel, not change society. As believers we are to be salt and light. We are to slow down the decay in the world and manifest the light of Christ in a dark and dying world. Our role is not to transform the culture, but to transform hearts by the power of the gospel of Christ. Jesus is our example. And as I mentioned to you before, there is not one example in all of Scripture where believers ever got involved in political activism or social reform. Why waste one minute on human institutions that are ultimately controlled by Satan through fallen men to accomplish his purposes when all of those things are transient? All of those things are temporal. We are to set our mind on things above, not on the things of this earth. And what a colossal waste of time it is to spend our time and resources trying to moralize spiritual cadavers, people that are dead in their trespasses and sins as Ephesians one tells us.

Paul tells us they walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, that the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. And we are going to try to change them from the outside? It is crazy. It is futile.

Moreover, why waste time on changing the outside that may at last... may at best last for a few years when you can give them the gospel and change them for all of eternity?

⁴ Romans 13:1.

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Well, this leads us to the second emphasis in this section and our text for this morning. The second part of verse one through verse five. Let me read it to you. Romans 13 in the middle of verse one.

For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 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; 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. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.⁵

So what is the divinely role, divinely sanctified role of government? What is it? Let me give you just a simple summary. God has ordained human government to benefit society, very simple, primarily by promoting good behavior and punishing evil behavior. Now, to be sure, at times governments which are ruled by sinful men and women will fail. Sometimes governments will turn on various segments of society that they leaders do not like and will treat them unfairly. We see this in the United States all the time. We see government now punishing, for example, small businesses and successful people by inflicting upon them unfair tax burdens and still complaining that they are not paying their fair share. They often take from those who work to give it to those who won't work. Close to 50 percent of Americans today pay no taxes and, of course, a lot of this is just a ploy to be able to buy votes. But it has produced a country where we have got more takers than we have got makers. Our government rewards laziness and punishes self reliance and personal responsibility and hard work. It is turning us into a nanny state.

The {?} research group has some interesting statistics. It says that the disability population the United States, those that apply for disability has increased 400 percent in the last 10 years. Of course, why work when the government will pay you for doing nothing? They also say that 50 percent of Americans will be on foot stamps at some time in their life and it jumps up to 90 percent if you are in the black community. It is staggering. We experience massive government overreach into every area of our lives. We try to determine what type of curriculum needs to be taught to our children. Of course, it is anti Christian material. They try to strangle businesses with excessive regulations. They use our tax dollars to fund abortions and all manner of nefarious and politically motivated activities, policies and programs that are blatantly evil.

But, my friends, these are not the kinds of things that God has ordained. This is always the result of sinful man and the abuses of government. But God has ordained government to ultimately benefit society by promoting good behavior and punishing evil behavior and

⁵ Romans 13:1-5.

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as Christians our responsibility is to humbly submit to the civil authorities unless they ask us to violate a clear command from God. And then we are left with no alternative but to disobey man and obey the supreme authority as Acts 5:28 tells us. We must obey God rather than men.

And, by the way, if this happens, and I believe probably if the Lord tarries within the next 10 years it is going to happen, probably to me as a pastor. If this happens then we must disobey respectfully. We must do it without rancor and rebellion and humbly submit to whatever consequences the human authorities over us have.

And, beloved, there is a reason for this. Because the bigger issue is the gospel. The issue is the gospel. It is not my rights or my freedoms or yours. We gave up our rights. We gave up our lives when we submitted to the lordship of salvation and to the lordship of Christ in salvation.

Paul said, again, in Romans 12 one we present our bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice acceptable to God. Our lives belong to God, not ourselves. In Romans 14 verse eight Paul tells us:

“...for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”⁶

And so if we are persecuted, we patiently endure in righteousness. We do not rebel. We wait and watch what God is up to for the sake of the gospel. And we are to show the world the power of God in salvation.

In Matthew chapter 10 beginning in verse 18 Jesus warned:

“But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall even be brought before governors and kings...”⁷

...to bring reform to the government and bring freedom and prosperity to the people. That this not what it says, right? No.

...and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.⁸

⁶ Romans 14:8.

⁷ Matthew 10:17-18.

⁸ Matthew 10:18-20.

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Now I would hasten to add that God does not expect us to seek persecution. In fact, Jesus said later on in that same chapter in verse 23:

“But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next.”⁹

But we are to remember that we are aliens, we are strangers in this world. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom and our mission is the gospel.

Now let's look more closely at the divinely sanctioned role of government and, by implication our attitude towards it as Christians. There are several sub points that emerge from this text. First of all, I want you to notice that God has ordained government. Notice again verse 1b. He says:

“For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”¹⁰

Beloved, here is the quintessential reason why we should submit to government, because God has appointed governments to rule over us. Imagine the impact that this would have had on those early saints, most of them being Jewish who were enduring a very wicked Roman government, wicked Roman rulers. And now they are learning that ultimately even the Romans owed their right to govern to the providence of God, that God is ultimately still at work.

I find it fascinating to see how God has permitted Satan to be the temporary ruler of this world. We read that earlier in our Scripture reader reading in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that he is the small g god of this world. 1 John 5:19 we learned that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Moreover, as we examine Scripture we learn that specific demons have been assigned to various nations of the world to accomplish Satan's purposes which ultimately God will use to accomplish his own.

But Ephesians chapter six and verse 12 we read of the different strata and rankings of the rule of Satan with his demons and his supernatural empire. I like the way the ESV puts it. He says:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”¹¹

These various ranks of well organized demons infiltrate various religious and political systems, the systems of this world. They concoct demonic doctrines. Paul calls them doctrines of demons and various philosophies all designed to thwart the purposes of God

⁹ Matthew 10:23.

¹⁰ Romans 13:1.

¹¹ Ephesians 6:12.

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like the insanity of political correctness. And these demons both influence as well as indwell human beings to carry out the ingenious schemes of the devil.

Daniel speaks about this. You may recall that in Daniel 10 in particular Daniel gives us a glimpse into this world. Let me give you the context briefly. Daniel was protracted in earnest prayer and in order to understand what God was up to with his covenant people Israel. And, by the way, Satan absolutely despises believers that pray with fervency, asking for divine assistance. And whenever that happens we learn from this text, as well as others, that as we are carrying out for God to unleash his power and his grace at the same time Satan tries to do the same to thwart those purposes.

By the way, this would be good for us all to remember when we kneel in fervent intercession before the throne of grace, that God is at work and so is Satan and ultimately we are fighting a battle that has already been won.

But you may recall in that text he quotes, we believe, the angel Gabriel who appeared to him after being delayed for three weeks having to do battle with a powerful demon. And it required one of the chief angels, Michael, to come to his rescue, verse 13 of Daniel 10. He says:

"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia."¹²

Kings being plural probably referring to multiple demonic rulers assigned to Persia. By the way, they prince of the kingdom of Persia, this demon and others with him, I am sure are still there. Persia today is Iran. Those demons were directly responsible for influencing the rulers in Daniel's day in Persia to try to oppose God's plan for Israel, God's plan for all of his people. Obviously they are still at work today in those people. Iran today is one of the most venomous and violent haters of Israel in all of the world. And I am sure that the United States has its share of demons assigned to it as well as every other country, because, again, the whole world lies in the lap of the evil one.

So God has allowed Satan and his minions to have limited power in the world especially as they influence the affairs of men I world empires for the purpose of thwarting the eternal purposes of God. Jesus acknowledge this as well. Do you recall his interaction with Satan when the evil one tried to tempt him? Jesus did not refute Satan's claim to possessing, quote, all the kingdoms of the world, Luke 4:6. Nor did he in any way refute Satan's offer to give the Lord, quote, all this domain and its glory for it has been handed over to me and I give it to whomever I wish.

So, my friends, as we look at Scripture, whether we are subjects of an evil Roman empire or Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia or Obama's America, know full well that

¹² Daniel 10:13.

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ultimately God has ordained it all to accomplish his purposes. Demons are God's unwitting apes that God uses to accomplish his purposes even as they serve their father the devil.

Let me digress for a moment. Beloved, this is such an amazing thought. And I want this to be an encouragement to you. Once again you hear me say this a lot. God is the Creator. He is the Sustainer. And he is the Consummator of all thing and his ultimate purpose in creation is to bring glory to himself. From predestination to glorification the Bible is the story of God's redeeming his chosen people for they praise of his glory. God's redemptive purposes and his plan are all there in Scripture. As you unfold Scripture you see five recurring motifs. You see the character of God, the judgment for sin and obedience, the blessing for faith and obedience. We see the Lord's Savior and sacrifice for sin and the coming kingdom and glory. And everything that is revealed on the pages of the Old Testament and the pages of the New Testament is associated with these five categories. You cannot escape them. And as we examine the sacred text, we can conclude that God's elective purposes were decreed and set into motion even before creation. This would include the Lord's incarnation and atoning work that ultimately defeated Satan and sin. As we look at Scripture we see that he has ordained everything. He even ordained evil to enter his perfect universe through the voluntary choices of moral creatures in order to dramatically display his glory, his holiness, his wrath, his mercy, his grace, his love and his power.

And, indeed, all of his elective purposes were ordained. As Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:9, from all eternity, literally before time began, which would, by implication, include his divine decree for Satan to rebel, for Adam and Eve to sin and by imputation all men to sin in Adam. That is why we even read in Revelation 13:8 that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.

Beloved, even God's dealings with Israel is a marvelous picture of his undeserved mercy and grace towards a rebellious people, but also a living illustration of God's sovereign rule over his universe and ultimate completion of his eternal purposes that will result in unimaginable glory. Remember that if one day you are put in prison for the sake of the gospel.

This is why Paul said in Philippian two and verse 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth and that every tongue should confess Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. So he is in control of all of these things, even our governments that sometimes, not always, will act wickedly.

You will recall that Daniel said in Daniel two and verse 21 that God sets up kings and deposes them. Remember that on Wednesday morning when we have either the same president or a new president. Recall what Paul said to the pagan philosophers in Athens in Acts 17 beginning in verse 24. He said:

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The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation.¹³

So, beloved, we can find great comfort in this, can't we? That no matter how bad things get, God is in control. He has established his rule and he has established them even to rule over us, not only for the benefit of society that we will see, but ultimately to accomplish his eternal purposes and bring glory to himself. This is why we submit to civil authorities. To rebel against government is actually to rebel against God.

For this reason Paul continues in verse two. He says:

“Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”¹⁴

This would include, by the way, punishment that is inflicted by the authorities as well as divine judgment which is often administered as well by earthly authorities. Now, again, this does not speak of unlimited compliance to government. Certainly if they ask us to do something that violates God's commands we obey God, not man. And at that point we put our trust in what God is up to in our life.

By the way, Scripture is filled with examples of that. Remember the great story of Daniel and of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They refused to obey the royal edicts and ordinances of Nebuchadnezzar and they were in direct conflict with God's will as revealed in his law so he disobeyed them and God protected them and rewarded their faithfulness and ultimately used their disobedience to bring glory to himself.

But the emphasis here is on submission to just the normal laws and regulations of the governments that God has placed over us. I want you to notice, secondly, that God has ordained government for the benefit of society. Notice verse four, the first part. It says:

“...for it is a minister of God to you for good.”¹⁵

You see, God knows the extreme wickedness of the human heart. Just think what it would be like in our country without the rule of law, without government, without police, without a military. Anarchy would prevail. Man would ultimately destroy himself.

I always think about what happened back in the days of Katrina. Do you remember those horrific scenes in New Orleans after that hurricane? Suddenly there was no police, no

¹³ Acts 17:24-26.

¹⁴ Romans 13:2.

¹⁵ Romans 13:4.

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way to enforce the law and thousands of people and they had it on television. They are looting stores. There is violence. There is murder. Rape. All of those things soared. People were terrified in that area. Neighborhoods were patrolled by roaming gangs. Well, this is what happens when man is left to himself and is not subject to authority.

By the way, that is also a graphic picture as to what happens to any man that refuses to submit to authority. So, indeed, God has given us government to benefit society. It is a minister of God to you for good. And Paul makes it clear why this is the case. And this would move me to my third point that government promotes good and punishes evil.

Notice back in verse three he says:

“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.”¹⁶

So, again, God’s wisdom in ordaining government is to benefit society by promoting good, punishing evil and so forth.

But he says:

“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.”¹⁷

This, of course, speaks of capital punishment that the Lord instituted early on in human history. You will recall in Genesis 9:6 we read:

“Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.”¹⁸

You see, capital punishment was a part of the Mosaic law. He declared in Numbers 35:33:

“So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.”¹⁹

Imagine if there is no punishment for crime. And, frankly, that is not too hard to do in our country anymore. Just look at how our country tends to treat criminals. It is amazing how liberalism has given more rights to criminals than to their victims. Look at how our government treats terrorists. It is amazing. I was talking with my son recently who works

¹⁶ Romans 13:3.

¹⁷ Romans 13:4.

¹⁸ Genesis 9:6.

¹⁹ Numbers 35:33.

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for Corrections Corporation of America, a private company that has prisons, they run prisons all over the country. And he was telling me that in the state of Hawaii that Hawaiian prisoners are required by law to have a TV and an x-box in their cell so that they can play video games. Where is the famous Arizona sheriff Joe {?} when you need him, right? It is amazing.

You see laws and punishment are supposed to be a deterrent to crime. And sometimes criminals find living in prison is actually better than living where they were. Think of all the violent crimes committed by women and men today and when you read about them, they have got a rap sheet a mile long. You know, why weren't they in prison? Well, the reason is because some touchy feely politician, some special interest group has lobbied and gotten us to have and helped us to now have laws to protect them, people that are convinced that man is more deprived than he is depraved. What a terrible word, they would say. And, therefore, if you could just give people the right environment, their true goodness will prevail, which is utter folly.

You want to see what happens when a government fails to promote good and punish evil, just look at what is happening in the United States. It is no wonder I was reading the other day that the United States now has 25 percent of the world's prison population.

Now contrast this to ancient Israel and God's law, the way government should be. Do you realize there were no prisons in ancient Israel? And there is a good reason for that. The reason was because criminals were executed immediately or they were punished severely and appropriately immediately. Under the Mosaic law there were punishments that fit the crime. The law was designed to administer justice. The appropriate retribution for a crime or some other evil committed. In fact, in Deuteronomy 19:21 we read that there was to be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. In other words, God wanted to make sure that the punishment matched the crime.'

By the way, punishment was always administered by the civil authorities, never by private individuals, never by the victim. And punishment was always swift. It was always public. Interesting. And it was generally corporal, meaning physical like lashes from a whip.

Deuteronomy 25 verse two we read:

"... then it shall be if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall then make him lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of stripes according to his guilt."²⁰

The price for many crimes in ancient Israel—and, by the way, in many countries today—is execution by stoning. And it was to be administered without pity.

²⁰ Deuteronomy 25:2.

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In Deuteronomy 19 verse 13 we read:

“You shall not pity him, but you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, that it may go well with you.”²¹

Stop and think about it. There were no child predator registries in ancient Israel. There were no sexual offender registries in ancient Israel. Do you know why? They were all dead. For things like theft the punishment would include restitution, not incarceration. The thief would have been required to return what he stole or to pay back something of equal value.

It is interesting. I read again the other day the FBI says there is a home break in every 15 seconds. Our legal system is working really well, isn't it?

You see, Old Testament law also provided for pardon. It provided for rehabilitation. Once a crime was committed and the punishment was given, then the criminal was to be accepted back into society. It is interesting. Deuteronomy 25:3 tells us that the judge was only allowed to beat the guilty, quote, 40 times, but no more lest he beat him with many more stripes than these and your brother be degraded in your eyes.

My, how far we have fallen in our country. Imagine how it would be in our country today if justice was administered fairly, if the hundreds of thousands of prisoners that we have in our prisons today who spend their life lifting weights and watching television and movies and playing video games were required to pay off their debts. Anybody that knows anything about what is happening in prisons will agree that prisons become breeding grounds for immorality and homosexuality. They become universities for people to get a PhD in crime. They come out more violent and more wicked than when they went in.

Well, ultimately what we learn from Scripture is that government is ordained by God to punish crime and proper punishment is to be enacted swiftly as a deterrent for crime. Ecclesiastes 8:11 we read:

“Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.”²²

So this is the way God has ordained it. It doesn't always work that way. As I have illustrated, nevertheless God has asked us to submit to the governing authorities he has placed over us, ultimately for the sake of the gospel.

And then Paul closes this section by reinforcing, once again, the importance of our submission and he adds to it an interesting motivation. Notice finally in verse five.’

²¹ Deuteronomy 19:13.

²² Ecclesiastes 8:11.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Civil Authorities - Part 2

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 13:1-5

Preached on:

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“Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.”²³

In other words, not only are we to submit to civil authorities, because to do otherwise would result in punishment, but also our conscience binds us to do what is honoring to the Lord. You see, friends, to willfully disobey the Lord on any matter is to go against a biblically informed conscience and you simply don’t want to do that.

In so doing what you end up doing is bringing reproach upon yourself, bringing reproach upon Christ. Fellow citizens begin to see you as nothing more than just another political activist if not a law breaker, a trouble maker and at that point your witness is lost and your mission to preach the gospel and make disciples is greatly impaired.

Beloved, never violate your conscience. And every time you do you weaken its power to convict. And if you continue to do that, eventually you will weaken it to a point where it will no longer affect the will and it will allow you to fall into great sin and great ruin.

So this is our attitude toward civil authority. We are to be in subjection to it because God has ordained it for our good and his glory.

And I close with Peter’s words, 1 Peter 1:1. He reminds the saints that we are aliens yet we are chosen. Never forget that. We are aliens. We don’t belong here. And to people that don’t know Christ, when we say we are aliens they would say, “Boy, that is for sure. You people are living in a parallel universe.”

Well, at some level they are right. We are aliens, but we are also chosen. God is up to something. And then he says in chapter two beginning in verse 12.

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.²⁴

May I challenge each of you to these ends, to the praise of God’s glory.

Let’s pray together.

²³ Romans 13:5.

²⁴ 1 Peter 2:13-17.

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Father, thank you for these eternal truths. Help us to grasp them intellectually, but, more importantly, Lord, help us to live them out in a way that will bring honor to you and will predispose us to having an effective, fruitful ministry for the sake of the gospel. For those, Lord, that do not know of your saving grace, those who have never repented of their sins and cried out for salvation, I pray that today you will overwhelm them with conviction, that today will be the day that they humble themselves before you and be saved. I ask all of these things in the precious name of Jesus our Savior and for his sake. Amen.

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