

The Christian's Attitude Toward Civil Authorities - Part 1

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 13:1-7

Preached on: Sunday, September 30, 2012

Will you join me this morning by taking your Bibles and turning to Paul's epistle to the Romans. We are now in chapter 13 and we will be here a number of Sundays. There is much to glean from this text.

I would like to read the first seven verse, although I will be focusing primarily this morning on the very first phrase of verse one. Romans chapter 13 beginning with verse one.

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

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.¹

The apostle Peter tells us something very fascinating in 1 Peter chapter one and verse one. He tells us that we are aliens who are chosen. As God prepares the world for the antichrist and prepares the world to bring it to that final destination of judgment, just before he establishes his glorious kingdom on earth we, as Christians, are feeling more and more like aliens. And we rejoice more and more that we have been chosen by his grace.

Dear friends, may I remind you that we literally live on the eve of the secret coming of Christ to snatch away his bridal church? Satan knows that his time is short and so he is doing all that he can within the world to thwart the purposes of God and he works primarily within the context of systems, world systems, whether they be educational systems, political systems, certainly religious systems to do all he can to bring destruction, to deceive. The Church on earth has now entered into a state of wholesale apostasy. Only a remnant remains true to the Word of God. While living amidst the

¹ Romans 13:1-7.

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political and religious darkness of our time, we can look around and we can see a remnant of vexed souls scattered all across the world that are longing to see the greatness and the glory of God, to hear his Word proclaimed. They are longing to see the Lord come and take them away.

As we look at our country today we see that they literally mock biblical Christianity. And I underscore biblical Christianity. All of the other false forms of Christianity they adore of the most part. We look around the world and we see that 24 percent of the world's population wants us dead. They worship a false god, a god they call Allah. Of course, the world has always hated the one true God and all who worship him. And as we study through Romans thus far, we learned, for example, in Romans chapter one that man's rejection of divine revelation through creation and through conscience and because of his foolish idolatry to deify himself and other things that he makes up, really renders him guilty and condemned before a holy God. As a result, the apostle, you will recall, describes three stages of divine abandonment manifested in the collective whole of a culture. We learn in Romans one that God gives people over to sordid immorality and then, secondly, to shameless homosexuality and then finally to just shocking depravity. And each state is progressively worse in its evil and therefore in its consequence, but each is also a provision, I might add, of God's mercy in that it allows man to experience the fall reaches of his depravity that he might see his need for a savior and repent. But if man doesn't repent, the temporary and partial abandonment will become eternal and complete. And we are in the final stage of the wrath of divine abandonment here in our country.

It is beyond sordid immorality. It is beyond shameless homosexuality. We are now in the stage of shocking depravity. In verse 28 of Romans one Paul says:

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.²

My friends, this describes individuals and civilizations that reject him, people that cannot restrain their flesh on their own, so God gives them over to the consequences of their iniquity. And this has been the path of every civilization since the beginning of history and certainly it describes the godless, idolatrous, immoral condition of the United States.

² Romans 1:28-31.

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This is graphically illustrated in our current political climate. There is an article that has been going around the internet, one written by a reverend Austin Miles. He is from the Charlotte, North Carolina area and he speaks of what happened on 9/11 in Charlotte, quote, “When the Democratic National Convention came to Charlotte, area churches, 100 of them offered hospitality. Not knowing how much the Democrats hate God and would actually boo God at the convention. They had no idea now that hatred would be directed at them and their churches. The Sunday before the DNC, over 9000 people had come together to pray for the convention. Then, wanting to extend hospitality to the visitors to their city 56 of the churches set out to quote, ‘adopt a delegation.’ The put together gift baskets featuring Carolina pralines and a letter welcoming them to the city and offering assistance in transportation, child care or spiritual matters. According to write Tom Starns, the DNC banned the churches from distributing the gift baskets to delegates because DNC said the congregations hold values that are contrary to the party platform.”

He goes on to say, “David Denim, one of the organizers of the outreach said, quote, ‘We were just trying to display southern hospitality,’ end quote, but DNC officials conveyed to city leaders that the Christians would not be welcome to present their gift baskets. Even the Charlotte mayor’s office jumped in to tell the churches not to participate saying that their views on women’s rights are contrary to the platform. That is right. The same platform that that booed God later, he said. Denim then asked if they could send welcome letters to the delegates. Again, the DNC refused, because they said, quote, ‘The churches hold pro life values,’ end quote. The baskets did not contain a single political or pro life message. They just wanted to give them regional candles and a welcome letter. The DNC refused to return numerous phone calls seeking comment, but it gets worse. When a gathering of 200 Muslims showed up to pray for the convention, the Democrats welcomed them with open arms and the liberal media gave extensive national coverage. It is ironic that this day in the shadow of that Islamic prayer event we commemorate the greatest tragedy in American history when Muslims attacked America on September 11, 2001, brutally killing thousands of innocent people. Muslims who publicly state their hatred of our country with fierce determination to kill us all and put America under sharia law are welcomed by the democratic party which Christians are pushed out of sight like criminals because they respect life and hold family values. These are the same Democrats who want you to vote them into office to direct the United States of America and every life from beginning to end. It is obvious that we must not let this happen.”

Then he closes, “Our thanks to reverend Ed Berky, retired, who alerted us to this story.”

By the way I checked this out on Snopes and it says that this is undetermined which means it is true. You must know that that particular organization has an extreme liberal left leaning bias. It has some seriously flawed research methodologies so you have got to be careful. But I called one of my pastor friends in a sister church in the Charlotte area to ask him if indeed this is true and he said it is true and it shouldn’t be a surprise to us.

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By the way, I am not picking on one party. The Republican party is equally as wicked in many ways. But this is a perfect illustration, dear friends, of the progression of sin and idolatry described in Romans one. It is also consistent with all of the prophecies that describe what will happen to the nations of the world as they are being prepared for the antichrist just before the tribulation unfolds all of its judgments and the Lord comes his second time.

Now the question among many Christians in the United States is this. Why should we be obedient to these type of people? What should be our attitude toward civil authorities that are corrupt, that demonstrate this level of depravity and insanity in their policies? And the answer, in short, our attitude should be that we humbly submit to them and pay our taxes without condition.

But why, people will ask. What they are doing is clearly wicked. They spend our money in ways that is dishonoring to God. Oh, my friends, in this section of Scripture we are going to find that Paul gives us a number of reasons as to why.

But shouldn't we get involved in politics and social reform? Shouldn't we participate in non violent civil disobedience against things like abortion and same sex marriage and a 16 trillion dollar deficit and climbing? The answer, in short, no. That is not the mission of the Church. And here along with numerous other passages we will learn why.

But is there ever a time when we need to stand up and say, "No"? Yes, there is, when our government, our civil authorities ask us to be disobedient to the Word of God. We must obey God, not man. These are the issues, my friends, that Paul addresses in Romans 13. And I might add that these are further examples of what the apostle means when he asks us to present our bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice that is acceptable to God. You see, our new life in Christ should be manifested in every realm of our living. He has told us about our attitude toward God, toward fellow Christians, towards all people and now in chapter 13 toward civil authorities.

Now I would like to take you back to the days of the early Church. You see, having a submissive attitude towards civil authorities would have been something that was very difficult to do, especially for the Jewish converts that made up the majority of the Church, especially here in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire.

By way of context, Paul, of course, was a rabbi that saw his sin and saw his need for the Savior became a believer and he was very familiar with Rome's political corruption and autocratic rule. In fact, his body bore the scars of Roman cruelty. In 2 Corinthians 11:25 he tells us that:

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“Three times I was beaten with rods.”³

Later on we know that he was executed for his faith. Indeed, it was the Roman governor Pontus Pilate who unjustly condemned Jesus to death.

You see, the Jews in that day staggered under the yoke of roman Subjection. They longed to be freed and many believed when Jesus came along that he was going to be the Messiah that would free them politically. They were confused that he came first to free them from the bondage and the penalty of their sin and that he would later come and free them from the bondage of human cruelty.

First century Rome was dominated by crooked tax collectors that make the IRS look like a Sunday school. These tax collectors were allowed by the Roman government to over charge people. It was literally taxation... or government sponsored extortion, that kind of taxation that they had. And what happened is the people were kept in poverty by the exorbitant taxes so that the ruling class could live in luxury. Nothing much has changed, has it?

It is estimated that in the first century Roman Empire there were three slaves for every free person. They had merciless tyrants and murderous dictators that governed every region of the empire, like the Idumean King Herod that ruled most of Palestine. You will recall that when he felt like his throne was threatened, when the magi came and were asking where is the king of the Jews, this baby, well, he went on a murderous rampage and in Mathew two verse 16 we read that he became very enraged and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its vicinity from two years old and under.

Three decades later Herod's son Herod Antipas celebrated his birthday by having John the Baptist beheaded. Only a few years after Paul wrote this epistle he murderous emperor Nero went on his brutal rampages. So the believers of that day understood what Paul was saying by asking them to be a living sacrifice. They had lived as if they were, frankly, already dead, knowing that that could be their fate at any moment, given the whims of government officials.

And I want to paint this picture, my friends, to help you see how far more wicked it was back then than it is today in our culture, even though I do believe we are moving more and more towards that with the metastasizing corruption of sin.

One of the emperors during the early days of the Church was the infamous Caligula. He reigned from AD 37 through 41, which, by the way, was just a few years after the

³ 2 Corinthians 11:25.

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resurrection of Christ. Now during that time there is very little evidence that the Church was persecuted very much, because the Romans saw the Christians as basically a tiny little sect of Judaism, nothing to really worry about. But to give you a flavor of what it was like in that culture, when this epistle was written, I would like to read to you some history from a reliable source. And this will also take us into a few hundred years after the Church was established.

Quote, “Within six months after the Roman Senate appointed Caligula as the sole ruler he suffered a severe illness after which he appeared to go insane. He murdered most of his relatives, had people tortured and killed while he ate, named his favorite horse as a counselor, declared himself a god and had temples and sacrifices dedicated to himself. Not surprisingly, he was assassinated in AD 41 by the officers of his guard.

“Following Caligula was Claudius I, uncle of Caligula who reigned from AD 41 to 54. He delegated most of his responsibilities to his wife Messalina whom he had murdered in AD 48. He then married his niece, Agrippina the younger who was responsible for poisoning Claudius. Though Claudius treated the Jews in Rome with indulgence, he banished them all from Rome midway through his reign because of disturbances related to, quote, ‘Chrestus,’ which is probably reference to Jewish unrest after the preaching of the gospel of Christ in Rome. That is found in Acts 18:2.

“After Claudius’ death in AD 54 Nero assumed the throne and reigned until AD 68. Nero was emperor when Paul wrote Romans in about AD 57. The quote, ‘governing authority,’ to whom Paul made specific reference in Romans 13:1,” where we are at right here.

“His reign was no more salutary than those of his predecessors and ultimately was much worse as far as believers in Christ were concerned. Nero became emperor at age 15. And at age 22 he had his mother murdered, followed three years later by the divorce and later murder of his wife. It is thought by many historians that the great fire that swept Rome in AD 64 was instigated by Nero who blamed it on the Christians. He had Christians tortured and publicly burned, ultimately taking the lives of both the apostles Peter and Paul. Nero committed suicide under pressure against his policies in AD 68.

“Leaping forward more than two centuries we come to a brighter moment in the Church’s history, at least as far as physical safety was concerned. The Emperor Diocletian in the late third century had divided the empire into western and eastern portions, each with its own emperor. Constantine secured a hold on the eastern portion of the empire and brought to an end a fearful reign of terror upon Christians perpetrated by the emperor Galerius in AD 311. In AD 312 Constantine had seen a cross of light in the sky bearing the inscription, quote, ‘In this sign I conquer.’ Later Christ appeared to Constantine, he says, in a dream, bearing the sign which was a cross in the shape of a chi and rho, the first

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tow letters of the Greek Χριστος (khris-tos')—interestingly, enough, the name of our student ministries here—instructing him to mark his soldiers shields with the sign, which he did. He was victorious in his next battle which helped him secure his hold on the empire. Wishing to thank Christ for his victory in AD 313 Constantine and Licinius, the emperor in the West, issued the Edict of Milan granting religious freedom to the empire. He restored prosperity and granted money to the Christian Church and took and took an active role in Church matters, calling councils such as the now famous one at Nicea in AD 325.

“Wresting power from Licinius in AD 324, Constantine became emperor of the entire Roman Empire as are result of which the Church moved from being persecuted to enjoying greater privilege and power.

“This was not a totally good transition, however, as it caused the Church of Jesus Christ to adapt itself to the formal and structured paradigms of imperial governance. Discussions about the relationship between Church and state have continued apace ever since,” end quote.

Again, remember Paul’s warning. Don’t be conformed to this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

So with this context, we understand the profound importance of Paul’s very difficult exhortation to Christians here in Romans chapter 13. While not every believer is ... I should say every ruler is as vile as some, we are commanded to submit to them, because they have been established by God to accomplish his purposes. But I might add that against the present darkness of this world’s system governed by wicked men, we can see in the background through the truths of Scripture a bright light of hope knowing that a day of justice, a day of righteousness, a day of glory is coming. Beloved, never forget the king is coming, amen? The king is coming.

Keep in mind that the governments of the nations are not permanent. They are transient. But until the dawning of that glorious day we walk in the light of truth and hope, fulfilling the law of love, submitting to the authorities that God has placed over us, for the sake of the gospel that many might be saved.

Now these seven verses can be divided, really, into two sections, number one, the Christian’s attitude towards civil authorities. That is what we will look at some today. And then, secondly, the divinely sanctioned role of government that we will examine in days to come.

So, first of all, let’s look at this issue of what our attitude needs to be towards civil authorities. It is straight forward here in the first part of verse one.

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

I wish to spend our time this morning on this phrase. Be in subjection translates υποτασσω (hoop-ot-as'-so) in the original language which means to obey or to submit. And it was actually used many times as a military term describing the willing submission of a soldier to his superior officer. And the point is we are to do the same thing without any conditions unless we are asked to do something that violates the Word of God.

There are numerous illustrations of this in Scripture. For example, in Acts four you will recall that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem demanded that Peter and John, according to verse 18, not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Well, this was not consistent with what the Lord had commanded them to do and us to do. According to Mark 16:15, we were to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. So you can't obey both government and God in the case like this, so you obey God. So they reply in verse 19:

"Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard."⁵

So the text tells us that they continued causing the Jewish leaders to demand their silence once again. And in verse 28 of Acts five were saying:

"We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."⁶

“But Peter and the apostles answered and said, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’”⁷

I am often asked, especially by my friends in Canada who experience persecution as pastors when they teach against homosexuality, I am asked, “Pastor, what are you going to do when it becomes a hate crime to preach on homosexuality?” Well, the answer is real simple. We are going to obey God, not man. I am here to preach the Word of God, not the Word of man. I don't fear man. I fear God. And may I say that the more you fear God the less you will fear man. Said differently, the less you fear God, the more you will fear man.

It is interesting in verse one of chapter 12 we are urged, he says, to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God, but here we are commanded to submit to the governing authorities. Why? Because in principle, though not always in reality, submitting to civil

⁴ Romans 13:1.

⁵ Acts 4:19-20.

⁶ Acts 5:28.

⁷ Acts 5:29.

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authorities is tantamount to submitting to God so that ultimately he will achieve his purposes.

Notice at the end of verse one he says:

“For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”⁸

Even though most of the wicked rulers of the world have no idea that they are merely his apes.

Verse two:

“Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”⁹

We read a similar command in Titus chapter three beginning in verse one. There Paul instructed young pastor Titus saying:

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.¹⁰

My friends, it is for this reason that you will not find one passage of Scripture anywhere that tells us that we need to get involved in political activism and social reform. You see, that would be a contradiction to Scripture. In fact, the early saints were so uninvolved politically and socially in the regions where they lived that they were resented by other people and often times persecuted because of their lack of involvement. In this regard Tertullian, who was a third century author and theologian, commented that under the pagan Roman Empire Christians were not executed for inflammatory teaching or behavior, but for presumed antisocial tendencies.

See, they knew they were citizens of another kingdom. Seldom did Christians enlist in military service. Seldom did they ever get involved in political office. You see, the unsaved resent this idea that we see ourselves as citizens of another kingdom.

I have been the recipient of hateful remarks, maybe you have as well, certainly of the position of our church has been ridiculed by ostensibly Christian people and maybe some of them are, but they will slander us because we don't join in with all of the marches and

⁸ Romans 13:1.

⁹ Romans 13:2.

¹⁰ Titus 3:1-2.

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the sit ins and fight against all the social ills like, you know, abortion and same sex marriage and I have had so many want me to come speak at tea party events and so forth.

You see, it is interesting how subtly Christianity gets wrapped up in the American flag, doesn't it? Again, how the world will squeeze you into its mold and distract you from the mission of the gospel. You see, again, the mission of the Church is to preach the gospel, not change society. As believers we are to be salt and light. We slow down the inevitable decay of the world and we manifest the light of Christ in a dark and dying world. But, dear friends, our role is not to transform the culture, but to transform hearts through the preaching and the power of the gospel.

May I ask you? What difference does it make if a man goes to hell as a pro abortion person or a pro life person, whether he is a liberal Democrat that believes government should control our lives and ... or a conservative Republican that resents government control, whether he is a liberal Democrat who believes that you can take money away from those who work to give to those that won't and therefore buy votes, or if you are a conservative Republican who believes that if a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat? What difference does it make if a person is pro homosexual or anti homosexual? In the end, my friends, the only thing that matters of eternity is whether or not a man has been born again, whether or not he has been justified by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Why waste one minute on human institutions that are ultimately controlled by Satan through fallen men to accomplish his purposes when all of these things are temporal, all of them are transient? Why should we be interested in all of this?

John tells us in 1 John two:

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.¹¹

Now I know. I have heard this at least 100 times, so let me address it very quickly. But, pastor, don't you care about all of the millions of unborn babies that are murdered every year by the abortionists?

Well, of course I care. That is a horrible crime and God will vindicate himself. He will judge those people. But I also know that every child that is aborted goes straight to

¹¹ 1 John 2:15-17.

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heaven.

But await minute. I thought they have a sin nature.

Yes, but there is no example in Scripture anywhere a sinner is considered guilty and sentenced to eternal damnation based upon his sinful nature that he inherited in Adam. You see, it is not man's predisposition to sin that makes him culpable. It is willful conscious deliberate rebellion against the law of God.

While I am repulsed by the atrocity of abortions I am also equally burdened for those whose minds are so depraved that they can somehow justify such an act. It betrays the direction of their eternal destiny. And therein comes the need for the gospel.

I am compelled to address this misguided notion that Christian coalitions and social and political reform. Beloved, trying to legislate morality for the unsaved is like making a dog eat grass. Now he may do it, but that doesn't change his nature. Paul has already told us in chapter three and verse 10 that there is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands. There is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become useless. There is none who does good. There is not even one. So let's legislate morality to make them righteous.

Folks, that is idiotic to me. Whenever we legislate righteous behavior for the unsaved, frankly what we end up doing is creating a monster strain of hypocrites who then convince themselves that God is pleased with them on account of their good works, on account of their moral values. I want no part of that. I want you to see, beloved, the danger in this.

In Matthew 12 verse 43 and following Jesus described an illustration of a demon that abandoned a man who decided he was going to reform his life. So the demon that lived within him decided to pack it up and leave. And Jesus said in verse 43:

Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.¹²

So what the Lord is saying here is that the demon wanders around and after wandering around he decides to return to his original host. I will return to my house from which I came. My house implies a confident sense of ownership. This is where I belong. I want to go back. He continues and he says:

¹² Matthew 12:43-44.

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“...when it comes, it finds it unoccupied.”¹³

Meaning that there is no other demons that have taken up residence there. And obviously the Holy Spirit is there, is not there, not within him. He says it has been swept and put in order. So what happens is the man cleans up his act, maybe he buys into some legislative things that say, “Well, boy, you know, that does sound more moral. I think I am going to abide by that.”

So there is moral reform, but notice the fascinating insight in verse 45.

"Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there"¹⁴

The idea there is that they settle down and they become comfortable there. What happened? Well, first you have moral reform and the demon loses his influence and decides to leave. Then he returns. He finds that the host has swept and put things in order. And, hey, boy, look at is, he says, there is no genuine change here, nothing substantial has happened in this person's heart. The Holy Spirit is not here. So there is a vacancy. Boy, there is plenty of room for more of us to dwell in this phony religionist.

So what happens, dear friends, is you have reform without regeneration, a deadly combination. The man cleaned up his act by his own efforts without a change of heart, without regeneration and as a result becomes like a proud Pharisee, proud of his perceived righteousness which ends up making a man utterly blind to the reality of sin that remains in his heart. Beloved, this is the danger of reform without regeneration. And when this happens three things occur. Number one, it creates a delusion of spirituality. And this is what we see in the United States of America, a country that calls itself Christian. It is no more Christian than any other country in the world. Yes, there is a lot of believers that live here, but this is not a Christian country. Don't be deceived. This country hates biblical Christianity.

And, secondly, if you have reformation without Christ it only offers a temporary restraint from sin and finally desensitizes hypocrites to demonic influence and, thus, like in this passage, seven more wicked than the first make themselves at home in this newly renovated sanctuary of hypocrisy, suddenly strengthening the pillars of pride and self deception.

¹³ Matthew 12:44.

¹⁴ Mathew 12:45.

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Beloved, this is what happens with Christian political activism. What a colossal waste of time and resources, to try and moralize spiritual cadavers. The Word of God tells us in Ephesians two that they are dead in their trespasses and sins, that they walk according to the course of the world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Beloved, the lost in our country do not need a better president. They do not need a fairer tax system. They do not need family values. They do not need a democracy. They do not need a free market capitalistic society. They do not need better laws to make them feel more Christian. What they need is a transformed heart. What they need is the gospel. That is our mission. Trying to change man from the outside is an exercise in futility.

Beloved, the unregenerate are no more capable of living a moral righteous self, sacrificing God honoring life than a dog turning down a steak of a bowl of grass. It is not his nature. It is not the nature of the unregenerate.

Jesus said in Mark seven verse 20:

That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.¹⁵

You see, friends, only God can change the heart through the transforming power of the gospel. And when man is in Christ he is a new creation. The old things pass away. The new things come. A waste of time trying to change the outside that may at best last for a few years when we can give people the gospel that will radically change them from the inside, so that they can have eternal life.

More importantly, political and social reform, again, is not our responsibility it is not our mission. We are to preach the gospel and make disciples. Anything less, beloved, is merely rearranging the deck furniture on the *Titanic*.

Nowhere do we see Jesus and the disciples marching for social reform, having sit ins to remove tyrants or lower taxes or build political coalitions to advance some Christian cause.

John MacArthur said, quote, "Even social and political activities that are perfectly worthwhile can deplete the amount of a believer's time, energy and money that is

¹⁵ Mark 7:20-23.

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available for the central work of the gospel. The focus is shifted from the call to build a spiritual kingdom through the gospel to efforts to moralize the culture, trying to change society from the outside rather than individuals from the inside. When the church is politicized, even in support of good causes its spiritual power is viciated and its moral influence diluted. And when such causes are supported in worldly ways and by worldly means, the tragedy is compounded. We are to be the conscience of the nation through faithful preaching and godly living, confronting it not with political pressure of man's wisdom including our own, but with the spiritual power of God's Word."

He closes by saying, "Using legislation, adjudication or intimidation to achieve a superficial temporal, quote, Christian morality, is not our calling and has no eternal value."

Dear Christians, may I remind you again as Peter tells us. We are aliens in this world. We are chosen by God to be set apart from this world.

1 John 5:19 we read:

"...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."¹⁶

Referring to Satan.

We read in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that Satan is the god of this world who has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel. He is now, according to John 12:31 the ruler of this world. And he lays claim to all of the kingdoms of the world according to Luke 4:6. He told Jesus, "All is domain and its glory has been handed over to me and I give it to whomever I wish."

But the way, Jesus did not dispute that.

In Ephesians 6:12 we read that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Now I ask you. How do you possibly come up with the idea that political activism and social reform is going to change any of this? Well, if we could just elect Mitt Romney. Really? Do you really think that? He is a very nice man, a moral man, probably make a far better president than the one we have now. But he is spiritually deceived. He belongs to the cult of Mormonism, which, by the way, has absolutely no connection to biblical Christianity, none, zero, zilch.

¹⁶ 1 John 5:19.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Civil Authorities - Part 1

By David Harrell

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2 Corinthians four verse three Paul says:

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.”¹⁷

Obviously he is telling us we are at war.

...for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.¹⁸

Beloved, this is the kind of activism that we need to be about. As spiritual soldiers of the cross that march on our knees and wield effectively the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. So he says in verse one.

“Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities.”¹⁹

Don't go to war against them. All of this is going to do is turn them against you and forfeit your opportunities for the gospel. They need a heart change, not a political change. So obey our leaders. Submit to them in kindness and respect that we might lead them to Christ through our testimony.

Paul instructed Timothy in the same way in 1 Timothy two verse one. He says:

“...that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”²⁰

You remember in Acts chapter 16 Paul and Silas were in Philippi and they were falsely accused of breaking Roman law. And we read in that text that the magistrates tore off their robes and proceeded to have them beaten with rods and then they threw them into this terrible prisons and shackled them and very painful, torturous stocks. Well, what did they do? Well, I will tell you what they did. They started verbally attacking those nasty guys for being so inhumane. They demanded their rights. They called for their removal, right? They called up the ACLU and the Christian legal society to have them come and

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 10:3.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

¹⁹ Romans 13:1.

²⁰ 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

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defend them. They called for the establishment of Christian coalition to stand up for the political rights and freedoms of Christians.

Well, obviously that is not what they did. The Word of God tells us what they did. It says they prayed and sang hymns of praise to God. And they waited on the Lord. And the Lord in his grace miraculously delivered them with a great earthquake.

I love that story, don't you? The jailer was so ... he knew he was dead. He was getting read to kill himself. Verse 29 of Acts 16.

"Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household."²¹

Beloved, had Paul and Silas raised Cain like most Christians do today, they would have forfeited this wonderful opportunity in the providence of God whereby God orchestrated these events of persecution to bring about the salvation of this man and his family and many others. Dear Christian, let's learn to let God be God. Let's not get distracted from the power and the mission of the gospel. We need to obey him by obeying those he has sovereignly ordained to reign over us for the greater purpose of the gospel.

I close with what Peter said in 1 Peter one and verse one.

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen...."²²

And then in chapter two beginning in verse 12 he says:

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.²³

²¹ Acts 16:28-31.

²² 1 Peter 1:1.

²³ 1 Peter 2:13-17.

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Beloved, I challenge you this morning to examine your heart in this regard. Will you submit to the civil authorities? Daniel said that God sets up kings and he deposes them. Let's let God be God in these things. Don't let the difficult issues of our country distract us from our mission. Stay focused on the gospel and watch what God will do in the hearts of men.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths that bring such clarity to our lives, especially in the context in which we live as we watch the moral free fall of our country. Lord, I pray that we will take to heart these great truths for the sake of the gospel that many will be saved. And I ask this in Jesus' precious name and for his sake. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to pastor, Bible teacher and author David Harrell. For more information or to order additional tapes or CDs of pastor Harrell's messages, please visit OliveTreeResources.org.

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