

“The Power of the Sword” Romans 13:1-7

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *A Nation Divided*

1. There's a massive debate taking place in our world today; It's over the War in Iraq.
2. Nations have lined up on two sides; on one side are those who *support* the action of Coalition forces and on the other side are those who *oppose* it.
3. We watched the debate play out over a couple weeks in the United Nations Security Council and in the streets of cities *all over* the world.
 - a. protestors against the war filled the streets in Paris, London, San Francisco, and Washington DC bringing traffic and commerce to a halt.
 - b. what got far less press was the large showing of those who held counter-rallies, showing their support, not so much of war, but of the effort to disarm Saddam Hussein and dislodge him from power.
4. Once hostilities began this last Wednesday, protestors in San Francisco, LA, DC, and a couple European cities once again went to the streets in an attempt to disrupt traffic & lodge their opposition to the war. There were hundreds of arrests.
5. When the news media covers these protests, it makes it appear as though there's a large portion of the public which opposes the war, maybe even the majority.
6. The casual observer might draw the conclusion that the government and the people are at odds – but this is not the case upon closer examination.
7. According to polls taken consistently throughout this crisis, about 70% of the American public supports this action against Hussein, 20% oppose it, and the other 10% are undecided, feeling they lack enough information to make a determination, or – just don't care! ^[1]
8. The question before us this morning is this – ***WHY?***
 - a. what's the *basis* for support or opposition of the War?
 - b. this morning, all of us find ourselves in one of those three categories: support, opposition, or undecided.
 - c. as Christians, we need to make sure that we don't draw our position from *political* arguments.
 - d. as the people of God who are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven *before* we are Americans, we stake our position on the counsel of God's Word!
 - e. and God's Word has some clear guidance as it relates to the just use of force.

B. *My Aim For Today*

1. My aim for today is to lay out a clear understanding of what the Bible says about the Use of Force and when War is *justified*.
2. That's a tall order. Many books have been written on this subject over the years.

- a. seminaries offer courses on the Doctrine of Just War
- b. the great minds of Church history have all weighed in on this subject: Ambrose, Augustine, Aquinas & Calvin all wrote extensively on it.
- 3. This subject could easily occupy us for several weeks.
- 4. So, this morning we face the challenge of culling all the salient points into one succinct sermon.
- 5. We begin with Romans 13 –

II. THE POWER OF THE SWORD

A. Romans 13

¹Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. ⁵Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

- 1. It's vital we understand this in it's *historical* context.
- 2. When Paul wrote this, the governing authority was Rome!
 - a. and even though Rome could at times be brutal in its use of force,
 - b. still Paul recognized the basic, God-ordained role of civil government and called on Christians to honor and submit to it.

¹Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

- 3. Paul is saying that civil government is *ordained* by God.
 - a. He appoints the office of rulers over others because there's a *need* for it.
 - b. that need arises because of the *Fall*, because of sin.
 - c. without an authority structure, the sinfulness of man, manifested in his *selfishness* will result in constant conflict.
 - d. civil government enables fallen man to live with a measure of peace and order because his sinfulness is checked *by* that structure of authority.
- 4. While some men, because of their sinfulness, will *rebel* against the God-ordained authority of civil government, Paul says *we* are to submit to it!

²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

- 5. Paul equates rebellion and a refusal to submit to the authority of civil rulers as nothing less than *opposition* to God Himself!
- 6. He says this precisely because civil rulers, in their posture toward the people they rule, are representatives of God, of His authority!

- a. oh that those who hold office would realize this – that one day they will stand before God *to give account* for *how* they have executed their office and *used* the authority God gave them!
 - b. what we as the ruled need to understand is that *our response* to their exercise of authority is really a response to God.
7. Let me use an example:
- a. in the home, God has ordained that a mother and father stand as *His representatives* in the lives of their children.
 - b. a child *learns* obedience and *owes* respect to his/her parents because of the way God has ordered (ordained) that relationship!
 - c. now – parents aren't perfect, they make mistakes and at times *misuse* their authority.
 - d. that doesn't change the fact that the children are to continue in a *heart attitude* and posture of subjection to their parents.
 - e. God will correct the erring parent; the child's *abiding duty* is reverent submission and respect for mom & dad.
8. That's what Paul is saying here. It's the duty of those ruled to be subject to the God-ordained authority of civil rulers.
9. Next, he lays out the proper scope and focus of civil rulers; He shows what their God-given authority is *for*.

³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴For he is God's minister [servant] to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

10. This confirms what I said earlier – that civil government is *necessary* because of the Fall!
- a. God ordains civil government to endorse and support morality while suppressing evil.
 - b. the authority, meaning the right function, of civil rulers is the *promotion of what is good* and *the restraint of evil*.
 - c. but authority is empty if it isn't backed up with force!
 - d. and that's why Paul speaks here of the *sword* – the sword is the power that gives weight and substance to authority.
11. Authority refers to *legal right*. Force speak of *ability to do*.
- a. authority without force is empty / force without authority is unlawful.
 - b. a police officer carries a badge & a gun
 - 1) the badge represents authority – he/she is a duly *authorized* agent of the civil government, charged with the task of restraining evil, exactly as Paul says here.
 - 2) the gun is power--force and makes the authority of the badge something tangible and effective.
 - 3) put the gun in a criminal's hand and you have *unauthorized* force, you have *evil*.
 - 4) without the gun, the police office is impotent and their authority is ineffectual.

12. Paul is clear here; God gives civil government *both* authority and the power to back it up.
13. The *proper use* of authority and force is the promotion of good and the restraint of evil.
14. Twice in verses 3 & 4 he refers to civil rulers and their agents as God's ministers; *servants!*
 - a. we think of ministers as those in a clerical robes -
 - b. those who hold office in the church; pastors & priests
 - c. or even the members of the body of Christ as Paul says in Eph. 4
15. Civil rulers and their agents are *no less* the servants of God *precisely because* their authority is *derived by the God's appointment!*

⁵Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

16. Paul says that as God's people, who are ultimately submitted to Him, we must recognize & honor the expressions of His authority.
17. We aren't to submit to civil government *merely* out of a desire to avoid punishment at their hands, but out of respect for God Himself!
18. A *general attitude* of submission to civil rulers is an expression of submission to God Himself.
19. The obverse is also true: A general attitude of hostility and rebellion toward civil rule is an expression of opposition to God.
20. Now, someone will immediately raise the objection; What about those civil rulers, those governments which hate God and place unrighteous demands on people?
 - a. a great question! And all I can do is point to the example our brothers & sisters who have lived under and endured such times.
 - b. not long after Paul wrote this to the Church at Rome, several emperors came to the throne who made it an official policy to arrest, torture and kill Christians.
 - c. they were rounded up and brought before the crowds for execution in the Coliseum.
 - d. throughout this campaign, the Christians were faced with the challenge of renouncing Christ or facing the lions.
 - e. they *could not* obey Caesar, because to do so would have been to disobey God, whose commands are higher than the commands of man.
 - f. but here's what's crucial to observe – those early Christian martyrs' radical submission to God *manifested* itself in a meek and humble respect for their executioners.
 - g. the martyrs weren't defiant, hostile, and mean-spirited. They went to their deaths with a joyous expectation of seeing Christ, knowing that the testimony of their submission to God found it's most obvious & brilliant expression as they walked out to face the wild beasts.
 - h. history tells us the quiet humility and dignity with which the martyrs faced death, coupled with the love and respect they showed their executioners resulted in many of their enemies, and the very men who were charged with their execution becoming Christians!

- i. the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.

⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

21. These last verses are crucial because Paul makes it clear that Christians not only owe a debt of *submission and respect* for civil rulers, they owe them *support!*
 - a. taxes are one of the ways we honor and affirm the God-ordained role of civil government.
 - b. our duty is to render what is due *to whom* it is due.
 - c. *how* they use it, is between them and God and they will have to give account for it.

B. The Use of Force

1. I want to focus on Paul's reference to *the sword* in v. 4.
2. He sees the *proper* or *just use* of the sword as being the restraint and punishment of evil

⁴For he [the civil ruler or his agent] is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

3. Some people see *all use of force* as evil but such is not the case.
4. Because we live in a fallen world, with evil men, force is necessary to *restrain* them and when they *perpetrate* evil, to *punish* them.
5. We know *God* will *spiritually* judge individuals for the evil they do in eternity.
6. What we need to understand is that the Bible is quite clear He also judges evil in the here & now through human agents.
 - a. we can think of some stories in scripture that give proof to this.
 - b. God judged the wicked Ammorites through the nation of Israel when they conquered Canaan.
 - c. God judged Israel with the sword of the Assyrians, and later the nation of Judah by the Babylonians.
 - d. when the Babylonians grew wicked, he judged them by the Persians, and on and on it goes.
 - e. why, there were even moments when God intervened *directly* and bypassed the human agent altogether to show His divine wrath – the Flood & Sodom & Gomorrah are *proverbial* as demonstrations of God's anger at unchecked sin.
7. The closing of the Red Sea on the armies of Egypt, the campaigns of the Judges, all these show that God is not adverse to the use of force when it's used to a *just* end.
8. Standing on the shore of the Red Sea, watching as the bodies of the Egyptians washed up on the banks, Moses and the children of Israel sang this song [Exodus 15:1-3]

¹ "I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider

He has thrown into the sea!

- 2 The LORD *is* my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He *is* my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him.
- 3 The LORD *is* a man of war; The LORD *is* His name.
9. Even in the Millennium we read that though the Lord will rule *visibly* on Earth, evil will still *occasionally* manifest itself, and He will punish it swiftly with a rod of iron!
10. It won't be until the New Heavens and Earth when evil is finally and forever banished that the use of force will be unnecessary.
12. In Luke 3, we read how when the people came out to be baptized by John the Baptist, some soldiers came out as well.
 - a. John was telling the people *how* to get ready for the Messiah Who would soon come.
 - b. in v. 14 we read –
14. Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."
 - c. note that John didn't tell them to *quit* soldiering!
 - 1) if being a soldier was immoral, then certainly that's what he would have told them,
 - 2) just as Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to go and sin no more.
 - 3) but John didn't give them such direction.
 - 4) rather, he told them to fulfill their occupation as soldiers *honorably* and within the scope of it's authority;
 - 5) not misusing the power they possessed to their own selfish ends,
 - 6) but with an eye to a justice that's aimed at love of their fellow man.
13. Justice & love are *not* mutually exclusive.
14. In fact, In Romans 13 Paul *links* the two when he says that civil rulers are ordained by God to *promote good* while *restraining evil*.
 - a. justice is not *an end in itself*; true justice always looks for the establishing of a state of love.
 - b. therefore justice doesn't **JUST** restrain or punish evil – it does so **BECAUSE** it's motivated by *love* for one's fellow.
 - c. *bare* justice, unmodified by love, can be brutal and cruel.
 - d. justice *in the cause and pursuit of love* seeks to restrain evil so that peace and goodness can prevail.

C. Just War

1. Based on what Paul say in Romans 13 and how we see God using force in the cause of justice in the Scriptures, theologians have given this list of qualifications for the Just Use of Force – or what is known as the *Doctrine of Just War*
2. There are 7 qualifications; A Just War must . . .

1- Have just cause / It can only be waged as a <i>last resort</i> . All non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified.

- 2 - Be declared by a proper authority / Even just causes cannot be served by actions taken by individuals or groups who do not constitute an authority sanctioned by whatever the society and outsiders to the society deem legitimate.
- 3 - Possess right intention / It can only be fought to redress a wrong suffered; the only permissible objective of a just war is to redress the injury.
- 4 - Have a reasonable chance of success / Deaths and injury incurred in a *hopeless* cause are not morally justifiable.
- 5 - Have as its ultimate goal the re-establish peace / The peace established after the war must be *preferable* to the peace that would have prevailed if the war had *not* been fought.
- 6 - Be waged with means proportional to the end / States are prohibited from using force not necessary to attain the limited objective of addressing the injury suffered and re-establishing a preferable peace.
- 7 - Use weapons and methods which discriminate between combatants and non-combatants / Civilians are never permissible targets of war, and every effort must be taken to avoid killing non-combatants. The deaths of civilians are justified *only* if they are unavoidable victims of a deliberate attack on a military-political target.

- 3. I encourage you to take this list, and use it as the filter to analyze the War in Iraq.
- 4. Some who oppose the use of force do so on the basis of Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount *not* to retaliate.
 - a. he said if someone strikes you on the cheek, you ought to turn the other also.
 - b. how do we square that with what Paul says in Romans 13?
 - c. Jesus was speaking about *personal* relationships and the exacting of *personal* vengeance –
 - d. He was not speaking about the duty of the civil government in protecting its people.
- 5. But what Jesus said about this bears on the *way* soldiers carry out their legitimate function – they need to see themselves and go about their duties as agents of God; seeking true justice and not merely *personal vendetta*.

D. The Policeman

- 1. Let me ask you a question this morning: Would you feel *safe* if there were no Police in Ventura County?
 - a. what I mean is, if *nothing* changed in terms of world conditions – nothing at all,
 - b. just remove all of the police and law enforcement departments of all the cities and county; would you feel safe?
- 2. Why? Because of the presence of evil!
 - a. we know if the police were taken out of the picture, crime would skyrocket
 - b. even travel on the streets would quickly turn dangerous as people ignored the traffic laws.
- 3. Okay – tell me; if a policeman saw a criminal in the act of committing a crime,

- what do we expect him to do about it – drive on, or stop and restrain the crook?
4. One of the big complaints during the LA riots was that the police retreated and didn't do their job.
 - a. businesses and homes burned - stores lost millions of dollars in goods to looting.
 - c. evil was unrestrained because the civil rulers and their agents didn't do their job.
 5. What's true of police on the *local level* – now expand to the *world stage*.
 - a. the military are our *national police*,
 - b. charged with the task of protecting us from crooks and criminals who happen to be presidents and premiers -
 - c. and who use the resources of *their nations* to do evil.
 6. A strong and capable military acts as a *restraint* to evil.
 7. And when the evil attack us, then it's the solemn duty of the civil rulers to use the power of the sword to punish that evil.

III. CONCLUSION

A. A War Of Aggression?

1. The question that confronts us as the People of God who don't draw our opinions from the arguments that are bandied back and forth among men and women but from the Counsel of God's Word, is whether or not the action in Iraq is a Just War.
2. As I said a moment ago, look at the War through the filter of the 7 qualifications of a Just War to decide that.
3. There are some who will jump to the immediate conclusion that the action in Iraq is a *war of aggression*, and so could *never* be justified.
4. At first glance, such a position seems to have merit – but not on closer examination.
5. You see, the action in Iraq is just that; it's but *one campaign, one battle, one phase* of a *War* that started some time ago, but in September of 2001 became known as the *War On Terror*.
6. The War in Iraq is part of the *War On Terror*, or the *War with Militant Islam!!!*

B. The War On Terror

1. It's taken the American people a long time to wake up to the fact that we're at war.
2. In fact, judging by the anti-war protests, there's a lot of people who still don't get it.
3. Militant Islam declared *jihad*, war! on the United States a long time ago.
 - a. looking back, we realize now we ought to have seen 9/11 coming.
 - 1) there was the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983 which killed 241.
 - 2) there was the bombing on the US Troops barracks in Saudi Arabia in 1996
 - 3) in 1998 two US embassies in Africa were bombed.

- 4) there was the attack on the USS Cole in 2000
- 5) 8 years BEFORE the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers, the WTC was bombed!
- b. the forces of militant Islam believe they have a mandate from God to conquer the World and force it's conversion to Islam through any and every means possible.
- c. they believe that *any* means are justified by their ends; including deceit, violence and terror.
- d. they divide the world into *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*; The House of Islam and the House of *War*
- e. guess which house the US dwells in from their perspective.
- 4. We did not declare war on them – they declared war on us and we'd better wake up to the fact before it's too late.
- 5. There's abundant evidence Saddam Hussein has allied himself with militant Islam in its War on the US and has aided and abetted the terrorists in their attacks and schemes against our nation.
- 6. In light of that evidence, the action in Iraq needs to be seen as part of the larger *War with Militant Islam*.
- 7. Because we live in a fallen world, War is *sometimes* a *necessity* and can be used to affect a good and just end.
 - a. war gave America its independence,
 - b. war saved the Union and freed the slaves,
 - c. war kept Hitler from killing the rest of Europe's Jews.
 - d. and perhaps now it will be necessary to keep mass murder at bay.

C. Our Calling

- 1. As Christians, we must be careful that we don't get sucked into one side or another of the *political* debate over War.
- 2. We mustn't let party affiliations like *Republican* or *Democrat* determine our view.
- 3. Support of the President ought not be based on whether we *like* him or not.
- 4. Our first calling is as the People of Christ.
 - a. we serve a King *before* a president.
 - b. our citizenship is in Heaven before any earthly nation.
 - c. in fact, our allegiance to God makes us the best possible citizens here on Earth.
- 5. We do not blindly or chauvinistically support any man or political agenda.
- 6. Our cause is Justice bound by a passionate pursuit of Love.
- 7. Our task, our duty, as it says in 1 Tim. 2, is to pray for those in authority, where ever they are.
 - a. to pray that they would be faithful to their God-ordained duty to be agents of justice.
 - b. to pray for peace, and the most *just route to it!*
- 8. No matter how good the World may be doing – it is ever the role of the Church to stand as a prophetic voice calling the world to an even *greater* degree of righteousness.

9. And that means, within the Church – we must endeavor to be a place of just love and righteousness.
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D. Serious Caution

1. In Hab. 1:15-17, the prophet tells how once the Babylonians are used by God to judge Judah, they will themselves be judged for their arrogance.
2. That arrogance is centered in their superior military might and technology of war.
3. They are likened to fishermen who worship their “net” because it’s caught a lot of fish.
4. The Babylonians “worship” their technology, and so will be judged because they fail to recognize they can only prosper because of God!
5. This message today is not a piece of “Pro-American” propaganda; it’s an attempt at trying to look at the current crisis through Biblical principles.
6. Could it be – that the War in Iraq, is actually a way for God to judge the US?
 - a. as He looks at the nations, does the arrogance of our nation, manifest in the repeated comments about our military superiority, stink in His nostrils even more than the sins of Saddam’s regime?
 - b. could we be playing Goliath to his David?
7. We must keep perspective and pray earnestly that our cause is both just and executed with a humility that looks to the Lord!
8. May the words of Proverbs 24:24-25 guides us -

He who says to the wicked, “You are righteous,” Him the people will curse; Nations will abhor him. But those who rebuke *the wicked* will have delight, And a good blessing will come upon them.

End with having all military, loved ones and close friends stand and pray for them, the President and Congress and specially those military officers directing the battle.

[1] <http://specials.msn.com/special/americatwar/default.asp>