

God and Government – Part 1
“Biblical Principles of Government”
10/18/20

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“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe [obey] everything I have commanded you...”

Matthew 28:19-20a

When a person places their faith in Christ for salvation, their whole world begins to change – their desires change, their thinking change, their priorities change, their allegiance change, even their politics change.

Why? Because when Jesus becomes your Savior and Lord your heart has been changed by Him and of course your future changes as well – both here in this life and for all eternity.

At salvation you become a disciple of Jesus. And as the verse on the screen instructs us, as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ the biggest change of all is that your way of living changes because you now begin living in obedience to a new standard – the teaching of Christ.

It's impossible to meet Jesus and surrender your life to Him and not be changed.

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“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!”

2 Corinthians 5:17

Now what Jesus taught is entirely found here in the Bible -and it's not just the Gospels that record His life, death and resurrection, and it's not just the New Testament either. Jesus IN His teaching also taught affirmed the Old Testament. So the entire Word of God reflects the teaching of Jesus.

The Bible is our only source of truth yet it is sufficient, containing all that God wants us to know about Himself and how to be in relationship with Him forever, about our past, our present and our future.

This is important because as we approach the subject of God and government our primary source of reference for understanding this subject must be the Bible – amen?!

Now the Bible says as followers of Christ we hold a very unique status among all the people of the world: we possess dual citizenship! We're citizens of an earthly, temporary kingdom – for us that's the United States of America...

AND we're citizens of a heavenly, eternal kingdom, the kingdom of God with Jesus Christ as our eternal King.

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“But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humble condition into likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.”

Philippians 3:20-21

As you read these verses, let me ask you,

- Between our earthly kingdom and our heavenly kingdom – which one guarantees eternal life? The kingdom of God!
- Which one has a perfect, holy and righteous king? The kingdom of God!
- Which one comes with the promise of new, heavenly bodies made for eternity? The kingdom of God!
- Which kingdom is the one that should saturate our heart and mind more? The kingdom of God!
- Which kingdom do you believe should get the best of who we are – our time, talents, treasure, and devotion? The kingdom of God!
- Which kingdom is the one we should be talking to others more about? The kingdom of God!
- Which kingdom is by far the better kingdom? The kingdom of God!

So while we are focusing our time and attention this morning on understanding God’s standard for this earthly, temporary kingdom in which we live...

At the same time, let's not forget that compared to our eternal heavenly kingdom, this earthly kingdom we live in pales in comparison and while it deserves our attention, God's kingdom deserves our devotion!!!

God's kingdom shapes our understanding of our earthly kingdom. God's kingdom is what gives purpose and meaning to our earthly kingdom and without God there is no earthly kingdom.

So with that, does anyone know the definition of a squirrel?

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The dictionary definition would say a squirrel is "An agile rodent with a bushy tail". But there's another definition that isn't in the dictionary. It's more of a cultural definition and it goes like this:

Squirrel: "distraction diversion, or interruption." Let me show you an example of this definition from a movie some of you might remember called "UP" ...

Youtube Clip: "Up - Dug the Talking Dog - "Squirrel !" (:20)

My point is, when it comes to God and government, it can be easy to experience what I call "Squirrel Moments" – times when you're trying to focus on what is important and what is biblical and pleasing to God –

But then something happens, something is said, something pops up in the media or on the internet or social media, and it's like "Squirrel"!...

And we lose our focus and we lose sight of what's most important, what we should be keeping our heart, mind and life focused on.

With all the political ads, debates, marches and protests, media attention, fake news, rallies and social media firestorms, "Squirrel Moments" can not only be distracting, they can be dangerous.

You see Squirrel moments can lead to rabbit trails that dead-end in foxholes. And of course that's not helpful or profitable and it gets us nowhere.

As disciples of Jesus we have to keep ourselves anchored, grounded, and focused on the truth found in the Bible which provides us with God's framework for government as well as how He wants us to relate to it.

So to be honest with you I could call this morning's message "Biblical Civics 101". In a Christian college setting, this would be the first class you would take in understanding God's instructions regarding government.

Since all of us are impacted by government every day in multiple ways, it only stands to reason that all of us should have a thorough understanding of what God says about government because that will determine how you relate to government, how you vote, and how you live as a disciple of Jesus.

I first introduced these concepts to you back in July and today I want to reinforce them with you and add further understanding to them I hope.

Here in this chapter God clearly lays out for us His instructions regarding government...

(Slide) 1. God commands that we be model citizens who are law-abiding, obedient, and respectfully submissive toward government (civil) authority – Rom. 13:1a (READ)

Notice the second word in verse 1 here: “everyone”. Question: Would “everyone” include both Christians AND non-Christians? Sure it would. God wants and expects ALL people to be law-abiding citizens.

But don’t you think that since this is God’s expectation for every person – even those who aren’t saved and don’t possess the Holy Spirit in them, empowering them for righteous living – don’t you think that if this is God’s expectation for them –

Surely it is even more so His expectation for those of us who are saved and have the Holy Spirit living inside us empowering us to live the way God wants us to live toward governing authorities? I believe that’s true!

Notice the third word in verse 1: “submit”. In the original language this carried the idea of a soldier’s absolute obedience to his commanding officer. Why? Because that commanding or superior office has been placed in a position of authority.

This verse is saying that God has created government as the civil authority over its citizens and therefore all citizens within that government are required by God to live in submission to that authority.

As Christians we should NEVER be characterized as rebellious, insulant, destructive, or exercising mob-rule over governing authorities like we've seen across our nation recently. (even here in Norwalk in the last week)

Rather we should be characterized by peacefulness, good works toward others, obedient to the laws of the land and submissive to authority – even if that authority is corrupt, immoral or evil.

The Exception to Submitting to Civil Authorities: When civil authorities command us to do what God forbids or when civil authorities forbid us from doing what God commands (Exodus 1:17; Daniel 3:16-18; 6:7,10; Acts 4:13-20).

Examples:

- The Egyptian midwives against Pharaoh – Ex. 1:17
- Sharach, Meshech and Abednego – Daniel 3:16-18
- Daniel – Daniel 6:7,10

The Apostle Peter weighs in on the importance of this first instruction of submission to government – Hold your place in Romans and turn to 1 Peter 2:13-14 (READ)

(NOTES) So as a disciple of Jesus I have to ask myself and you have to ask yourself: Am I a law-abiding citizen, respectfully submissive toward government and those who represent it?

Let's go back to Romans 1 now where the second half of verse 1 tells us why God commands us to live in submission to governing authorities in the second principle...

(Slide) 2. All governments are ultimately not only created by God but allowed by God to possess authority over its citizenry – Rom. 1:13b (READ)

This verse makes it clear that no matter the form of government, all human government – good, bad and everything in-between - is under the sovereign rule of God...

And while He may not endorse every form of government, in His sovereignty He is currently allowing all forms of government and therefore expects us to live in submission to whatever government we may find ourselves under.

Psalm 62:11 says “power belongs to God.” Ultimately God instituted government to fulfill His plans for maintaining social and civil order in societies.

Even though sinful man has misused government for sinful purposes throughout the history of the world, God still has used evil and wicked governments to advance His plans and purposes.

Biblical Examples:

- God used Egypt to further His plans for the nation of Israel
- God used Assyria to bring judgment on sinful Israel for rejecting Him and turning to false gods
- God used Babylon to bring judgment on sinful Judah for the same reason
- God used the Roman Empire in the times of Jesus to fulfill His plans to bring a Savior to the world
- Today God is using communist and Muslim nations to purify His church and to grow His church in spite of persecution and hardships

(Slide) 3. Failure to submit to governing authorities is rebellion against God
– Rom. 13:2a (READ)

When we refuse to submit to those who are in authority over us, we are actually rebelling against God and that of course is sin.

When the Israelites were wandering in the desert a group of them under the leadership of a man named Korah decided that rebelling against God's authority, which was centered in Moses and his brother Aaron, was a good idea. They soon learned it was a very bad idea. TURN TO NUMBERS 16

READ Numbers 16:1-3

God showed no patience for this rebellion and took swift action...

READ Numbers 16:28-33

You would think that would have quelled any further rebellion against authority. NOT! Look what happened the very next day...

Numbers 16:41-50

God thinks so seriously about rebellion against civil authority that he makes it clear that such rebellion is actually rebellion against God himself, since He is the one who has allowed all governing entities to be in authority.

If you want to be on God's side, if you want God's blessing on your life and not his judgment against you, we would all do well to submit and not resist the authorities HE has placed over us.

(NOTES) So as a disciple of Jesus I have to ask myself and you have to ask yourself: Am I in any way acting in or living in rebellion against the civil authorities that God has placed over me? If so, I need to repent.

(Slide) 4. God has empowered civil authorities to punish those who resist government's authority – Rom. 13:2b (READ)

Government has the God-given right to appropriately punish those who break the law and those who resist authority. It's only in appropriate punishment that people will see the foolishness of breaking laws and public rebellion and that punishment then acts as a deterrent to lawlessness.

But as we've seen instances of in recent years and especially examples of this year, government authorities can go too far in that punishment and cross over a moral line in excessively punishing law-breakers or even the innocent.

In such cases, those who do such things should be brought to justice just as much as lawbreakers should. And they should in-turn face punishment for their actions.

But there's also 2 points worth considering:

- 1.) Just because there are those in authority who break laws and deserve punishment like some cases we've seen recently, if measures are taken to weaken law enforcement and the right of government to appropriately punish law-breakers, those measures stand in opposition to God and the empowerment he has decreed for those in government.

And that now becomes a very important issue when it comes to the election, because the last thing that is needed is to weaken our law enforcement community who have been tasked by God to enforce laws with appropriate punishment against law-breakers.

Should we at the same time require appropriate punishment measures to be taken by our law enforcement community? Absolutely and we should seek to elect the people into office who will champion these measures.

But to underfund or defund our police is like throwing out the baby with the bathwater and this needs to be taken in consideration when we vote.

2.) The second consideration that seems very practical in nature but is still ignored by some is this:

If you don't want to be punished for breaking the law and/or potentially become the victim of inappropriate punishment by law enforcement, then don't be found breaking the law in the first place.

When you examine some of the cases in the news where accusations against the police were made or when the police went too far in their punishment, in many cases it started with someone found in violation of the law and it went down hill from there.

This doesn't justify any inappropriate punishment by the police, but it also doesn't vilify the person who shouldn't have been doing illegal activity in the first place.

And that leads into our next principle:

(Slide) 5. Government exists to suppress evil and to promote good— Rom. 13:3-4a (READ)

The purpose of government – by its laws and its enforcement of those laws - is to stand against evil and to promote good within a society. But here's the problem: what do people consider evil and what do people consider good?

For almost 200 years the primary standard our nation used for the determination of what is evil and what is good was this right here – the Bible!

But in the last half of the 20th century a shift began. Our nation began to move away from the Bible as the standard of right and wrong and when you do that, what happens is a moral free-for-all.

Morality and right and wrong are turned upside down. Biblical history shows us what happens when a nation turns it's back on Gods' moral standards.

The books of Judges records the immoral history of God's people when they turned their back on God and His standard of righteousness and in the last verse of the book, it gives a simple, yet profound final commentary on why and how the nation spiraled into moral and spiritual decline...

(On slide) *"...everyone did whatever seemed right to him."* Judges 21:25b

And this is what we see happening in our nation today these many years since our nation turned it's back on God's Word and His standard of what is right and what is wrong. Nobody know anymore what IS right and what's wrong.

And again, this becomes an issue for how we vote. We have to ask God to grant us discernment about which party, which candidate at every level is going to promote what is good and stand against what is evil by God's standard – the Bible, and not the always moving, ever-declining standard of the world.

I pray God will grant that discernment to each of us and to every disciple of Jesus as we approach this upcoming election.

(Slide) 6. God has empowered civil authorities to inflict the severest punishment on wrong-doers – Rom. 13:4b

God has authorized government authorities the right to use weapons of deadly force if necessary to keep the peace in society and to punish evil doers.

It is only by the use of this force, when used appropriately, that unlawful actions and activities are discouraged for the good of society.

(Slide) 7. God has authorized government the right to assess taxes on it's citizens because employees of government are actually serving God by serving government – Rom. 13:6

Whether anyone who is employed in public service at the local, state or federal level recognize it or not, they are actually serving God in their employment because God desires that government fulfill all the responsibilities that He has given it to fulfill as we've seen in the previous principles.

So actually God doesn't have a bad attitude about paying taxes, he sanctions paying taxes for the purpose of funding government. We may not like paying taxes or the amount we have to pay – that's a discussion for another day...

But God has set a purpose for taxes and here's is the final principle...

(Slide) 8. God expects citizens to pay their taxes and when they do they are not only recognizing the rightful role of government, but they are also honoring God – Rom. 13:7

As disciples of Jesus we have a moral and spiritual responsibility to pay taxes because that's what God wants us to do. If we somehow willingly fail to do that or cheat on our taxes or our reporting to the government then not only is it a crime against the government, it's a sin against God!

If we had the time this morning, I would show you that both Jesus and the Apostle Paul both taught this principle and practiced it themselves. Jesus never complained about paying taxes and he made sure that his taxes were paid.

So as a disciple of Jesus this morning I have to ask myself and you have to ask yourself, Do I have a bad attitude about paying taxes? Am I honest in the way I report and pay my taxes?

Fellowship, government isn't our enemy – Satan is. Government is God's instrument for civil harmony in society. Admittedly, we live in a sinful world and that's why government is and never will be the perfect instrument for this harmony that God intended it to be.

But that doesn't excuse us as disciples of Jesus from living by the principles God has instructed us to live by in regards to government.

We owe to ourselves to follow these principles, we owe it to our government to follow these principles, we owe it to a watching world who needs Jesus to follow these principles, and most of all we owe it to God to live by His principles of civil government. Are we?

And let me ask in closing, Are you a dual citizen? Are you a citizen not only of the United States of America, but are you also a citizen of the kingdom of God? Do know you Christ as your Savior?