

**Answering Tough Questions About the Christian and Government**

Scripture: Romans 13:1-5

Code: 45-101

Well, we wanted to spend a little bit of time tonight because we knew we might have twenty minutes or so and I don't want to take too long. I came in and sat down over there by Melinda and she looked at me and said, "You're not going to preach, are you?" So I said, "I'll deal with you when I get home." But anyway, no, dear, I won't. See, I not only preach at the church but she lives in my house and I preach there too, you understand.

But I did want to spend a brief amount of time because I know there were many of you who had questions and some of them may have unfortunately fallen through the cracks in the process of getting them to me. But I received a rather lengthy stack. I tried to collect them briefly this evening before the baptismal service and sort of put them in some sequence and pull a few of them together that were asking basically the same thing to see if we can't help with an understanding of what we've been learning. I've been really gratified at the response to this series. And there's been a great eagerness to have us get that series out in tapes and study notes and put it on the radio, and so we're going to be doing that. I'm very grateful for that.

But some of the questions I'm going to answer may have been touched on in the series and it might be that someone missed that particular evening or didn't quite get all of it. You know, I understand as a speaker and you can know that I understand this that you come and go, some of you just came back. You've been gone for the last fifteen seconds or so. It's just the nature of the way we're made...see, you just...oh, what did he say? What did he say?...see. No one or few people can really zero in and hear every single thing. And so there's a coming in and out and it might have been that something I said sort of escaped and I'll try to touch on these important things and just hit a question and just give you somewhat of a brief answer because I want to cover as many as I can. And you can follow them up in your own study of Scripture.

The first question that I wrote down, they're not in any order of importance, was: SINCE CHRISTIANS KNOW THAT SCRIPTURE TEACHES AGAINST ABORTION AND IT TEACHES FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, WHAT IS WRONG WITH GETTING INVOLVED IN AN ORDERLY LAWFUL MANNER TO SEE THESE THINGS ACCOMPLISHED?

What they're saying is is it all right then if you know there is a means to bring about capital punishment or a means to bring an end to abortion, should you get involved? And the answer is yes. If there is a referendum with the people, if there is an opportunity to vote, if there is an opportunity for

you to articulate your view on something, to apply the right kind of pressure, we need to do it.

Now another question that came in, and I think about half a dozen people at least asked this question, we did cover it but I'll mention it briefly. The question is: HOW IS WAR TO BE JUSTIFIED? IS IT RIGHT OR ISN'T IT RIGHT FOR A CHRISTIAN TO BE A PART OF THE MILITARY SERVICE AND IN THE PROCESS OF BEING INVOLVED IN THE MILITARY SERVICE TAKE A LIFE?

Well, the answer to the question is obviously that biblically speaking there is war. At many points in Old Testament history that is war not only allowed by God but war basically designed by God, right? So the issue is not is it wrong to kill, the issue is what are the conditions in which it's wrong. And basically we know that it's wrong to murder because it says in the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not murder," using the Hebrew word meaning murder, not meaning to take the life in a war. There is no place for murder. But Scripture is very clear that there is a just selfdefense, there is a just retribution.

You'll remember in Romans 13 we said that the powers that be are ordained of God and it says that they are ministers of God who do not bear the sword for nothing. They bear it for something and the something they bear it for is the taking of a life. There are conditions when it is just to take a life. When someone violates national law or when a group of people violate national law and when they intrude upon the liberties and the rights and privileges of the citizenry then there is to be retribution. Even Jesus said, you remember, in Matthew 26 to Peter, "If you use the sword you'll...what?...you'll die by the sword," and He was affirming that if you took a life then it is so that God has ordained you should give your life, so you better put your sword away. They'll have every right to take your life.

So a government then can take the life of a murderer or someone who perpetrates a crime, that's the law of lex talionis in the Old Testament, an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life. And Genesis 9, "The one who sheds man's blood by man should his blood be shed."

Now if that is true on a national basis with an individual criminal, it could as well be true on a national basis with a collective group of criminals. So I believe the issue in war can be very simply understood. If a war is a war of defense against an evil and aggressive intruder who comes to murder an innocent people, then I believe selfdefense is a just act. If, for example, I'm in the United States and I was drafted into the services of the United States in the time of war because we were attacked by Russia and the Russians came to try to take away our nation and destroy our lives and massacre millions of us...or if Russia decided to invade our Canadian friends to the north and I was called to go there and defend them against that evil aggressor, I believe that that would be a just act of defense. If, however, I was a Russian citizen and the Russians recruited me for their army and said, "Go to Afghanistan and massacre as many people as possible so we can take their land and turn it into a communist land," I couldn't do that.

So the issue is not as simple as taking a life. A policeman on the street faces the very same thing when he sees, for example, some innocent people under attack, about to be murdered, in defense of those people he may choose that the best discretion is to take the life of the one who will kill the innocent. That's the difference between the policeman and the criminal. The criminal takes the innocent life, the policeman protects the innocent. And that happens on a national level and it has always been, and we can be happy for that in one sense, that the United States of America has taken the posture of a protector of innocent people. We got a little bit confused about that in Vietnam, unfortunately, because we were being inundated by socialistic humanists who wanted to destroy what America stood for, and they did a good job of confusing it to the point where Vietnam was a turning point in the history of our nation. But at least up until that time we were the nation that went to the aid of those who were being attacked by the evil aggressors. Now that is not to say that every life taken was in selfdefense, that there were no abuses of that, but I think that's clearly to be understood.

It was interesting at the National Religious Broadcasters convention last week where President Reagan spoke that he referred to the fourteenth chapter of Luke, and I know the press made it a little difficult for him after that, they don't like people using the Bible. That's certainly out of their range. And he used the Luke 14:31 statement where it says, "What king going to make war against another king sits not down first and consults whether he's able with ten thousand to meet that enemy that comes against him with twenty thousand?" And the Lord simply is saying here that using a simple illustration, He sort of acquiesces to the fact that war is just there. I mean, we're going to have to deal with it, it's a reality. And so He just assuming the reality of war says any king who has any sense is going to take a good look at what he's got, and whether with his ten thousand he's able to handle the one who has twenty thousand or else while the other is still afar off he sends an embassy and desires conditions of peace. Now that's what's known as some kind of detente, or some kind of peace arrangement or negotiation or stalemate. That's what generates the arms race.

So the Lord acknowledges that sometimes there's going to be a king who is outnumbered and in order to deal with the enemy that he fears, he has to do something on the negotiating level. And I only mention that passage just to point out that the Lord assumed that war was a fact of life and that war had to be dealt with carefully. It would be good to avoid it if you were going to be on the losing end, obviously. He doesn't moralize on it, He just states it as a fact. War is a fact, it has to do with history. Nations rise, nations fall, war is a part of that. I believe as a Christian the only time that you can enter in to such activity, whether it's as a soldier in an army or as a policeman is in defense of someone who is being attacked by an evil aggressor.

The same would be true, and someone asked the question, I HAVE A BUSINESS, WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO COME IN WITH ALL KINDS OF GUNS AND THREATEN THE LIVES OF INNOCENT PEOPLE IN MY BUSINESS? IF IT COMES TO THE MARGIN OF LIFE AND DEATH AND I HAVE A WEAPON, DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO USE THE WEAPON? And I think again that

comes to the point of the discretion of the person as to whether or not you are acting as an evil aggressor or whether you are acting in defense of life and property. Same thing would be true in your own home. And that's a very personal issue.

We also recognize and someone asked the question: IS IT RIGHT TO OWN YOUR OWN GUNS OR YOUR OWN WEAPONRY? And again I would add that it is again up to the point of view of the law. Whatever the law in our nation permits, if we're within the limits of that law, we have a right to possess those things. If you just want to go out in the backyard and shoot Coke cans off a fence, or whatever you have in mind for those kinds of things, but as soon as you take that weapon and turn it into a weapon of aggression against someone else, you have violated not only the divine standard but certainly have violated the intention of the law of the land.

Now another question that came in says: DON'T THE SCRIPTURES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT APPLY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL RATHER THAN GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL? In other words, the person is asking how can you take biblical principles out of the Old Testament and biblical principles out of the New Testament and apply them to governments other than the government of Israel?

The answer to that is this, what God established in the nation Israel was to be the rest of the nations an example of His best choice. Israel was designed by God to be a model to human society of the best way that a society should live and function. Whatever God did in Israel, apart naturally from the very unique and special covenant, whatever God did in Israel was by His own design as the King, the true King of Israel, because it was the best way for a people to enjoy the benefits of national life. And also, there's nothing in Scripture to indicate that God has one set of moral values for Israel and another set for everybody else. So we have no reason to conclude that the principles given to the nation Israel would be any different for anyone else. And we could abide by those principles given to the nation Israel in any nation in any time in any government and be benefited and blessed.

Somebody asked the interesting question along that line about balance of power...about the idea of having a judicial branch, a legislative branch and sort of a presidential function where you have this balance of power. You may not realize that but that, by the way, is biblical and that was God's design. In fact, that was God's design for the people of Israel. In the seventeenth verse of Isaiah 33, "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty, they shall behold the land that is very far, thine heart shall meditate terror, where is the scribe, where is the receiver, where is he that counts the towers," and he goes on to talk about this. And then down in verse 22 he says, and this is most interesting, "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law giver and the Lord is our King." And here is a very interesting statement. There is the judicial and the legislative and the presidential...the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law giver, and the Lord is our king. And there is even in the sense of the rule of God in the land of Israel a certain description of what we experience in our own nation as the balance of power.

So the principles, and that's just one illustration, the principles related to Israel are principles that men have found to be effective in any time in any place and in any nation.

Another question came: HOW DOES OUR SUBMISSION TO GOVERNMENT RECONCILE WITH THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS?

Now I don't know if you know about the imprecatory Psalms, they are a series of Psalms which you read and in those Psalms you find the psalmist crying out for God to destroy the wicked. Remember those? And he's praying, "O Lord, when are You going to destroy mine enemies?" David is the one who is into the imprecatory Psalms. He's running away from Absalom, he's running away from somebody who has betrayed him and he cries out to God, why don't You do something, you know, it's like why do the righteous suffer and why do the evil prosper, and so forth and so on. And how do you reconcile that which is a godly attitude with an attitude of submission to the government?

The answer is this, we submit to the government but if there is evil within it, we can pray for God to eliminate the evil. But there's a difference between prayer and rebellion, right? We submit to the government and if we follow the course of David we pray to God to eliminate the evil. And I think that gives us the proper balance.

Another question that was asked was a quite interesting question, it was: WHAT ABOUT ILLEGAL ALIENS AND REFUGEES WHO ARE ILLEGAL IN THE COUNTRY, SHOULD THE CHURCH HARBOR THEM?

You might not realize this but we have had to deal with that not on a few occasions, of people who have come into the United States, for example, across the Mexican border or from Latin America, they come to California, they come to Los Angeles, they come to Grace Community Church, they come to a Bible study or whatever, perhaps in the Spanish department, they come to know Jesus Christ, they are saved, they become a part of the church and then we discover they're here illegally. What is our responsibility?

Well the position we have taken on that is that our responsibility is to report them as illegal but do all we can to demonstrate that there are means to maintain their residence and presence and stand along side in any way we can to assist and help. But again, not to harbor them in violation of the law.

Now somebody is going to say, "Well, I mean, if they go back they're not going to have any Christian friends, and so forth and so forth and so on." The issue is not that, the issue is you obey what God says and you trust Him to take care of the circumstances. If we had a God who couldn't be trusted, we might have a little problem here, right? If we had a God who couldn't take care of them without us, we might worry about it. And so it becomes a situation where we need to go to the authorities and let

them know what the situation is. We had a young man in a very unique situation some years ago. Came to the United States because he had kidney failure, couldn't get dialysis in Mexico. Came to the United States, found here the ability to live and was saved, became a part of Grace Community Church and there he was an undocumented illegal alien, desperately in need to be here not only for spiritual reasons but for physical ones as well. And I don't remember all the details of the situation except my memory serves to point out the fact that we did everything we could with the authorities who are not without some compassion and he was able to stay until eventually, I believe, he went to be with the Lord.

Now somebody asked the question also, WHAT ABOUT SMUGGLING BIBLES? WHAT ABOUT PRINTING BIBLES WHEN IT IS FORBIDDEN?

Listen, I don't have any problem with that. I mean, now you're talking about a divine mandate, right? Now you're talking about proclaiming the Word of God, going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature. So if you want to smuggle them, smuggle them. But just realize this, just realize this, that if they catch you, I never told you to do that (laughter). No...no, I don't know how that came out...(laughter). You have to bear the consequences. But the Word of God needs to go forth. And, you know, I'm always thrilled when I hear that in basements behind the Iron Curtain there are printing presses made out of bicycle parts, I love that. And somebody's turning a sprocket off a bicycle to print Scripture.

WHAT ROLE IS THERE FOR A CHRISTIAN LAWYER? Somebody asked. A very important one. Do you realize that the entire world is run by lawyers? It is. And no one else knows what they're talking about. You can't do anything without a lawyer. And that's the way the system is built. Lawyers are the lawyers, lawyers are the judges, lawyers are the politicians, lawyers are the legislatures. And there needs to be Christian lawyers because the nonChristian ones really don't know where the standard is of truth and justice. Some are better than others. But I really believe there's a place for a Christian lawyer to represent the Christian cause, the Christian belief, truth and justice in our system. I thank God for Christian attorneys.

The other night when I was in Wisconsin a man came up to me, a very fine man by the name of John McClario who is a wellknown and godly Christian attorney who has been involved in many many issues across the country in defense of the rights of Christians in the church and so forth. And when I meet a man like that, I thank God for that man who articulates the truth of Scripture in the arena of justice.

Someone else asked the question: WHAT COMES FIRST, PAYING YOUR TAXES OR KEEPING YOUR KIDS IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL? That's for next week. Next week we're going to talk about paying your taxes and so you come next week and we'll talk about what comes first. But what I read just to give you a hint, in Romans 13, is not, "Dearly beloved, keep your kids in Christian school," it is,

"Pay your taxes."

Another question: SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED TO ELECT THOSE WHO AFFIRM A BIBLICAL VIEW? The answer is yes, of course. I find it impossible to vote for anyone who doesn't. And to be honest with you, I don't know if this is fair to admit, but here it goes, there are a lot of things I don't even vote for because there's no choice. It's two people who don't affirm a biblical view. And if it's a grab bag, I tend to back away from it.

Someone else asked an interesting question, CAN THE LORD CALL INDIVIDUALS TO WORK IN THE GOVERNMENT? The answer to that is yes also. I'm grateful to God for Christian policemen. Our church is, by the way, filled with Christian policemen. I want you to know that, they're watching you. (Laughter) How you drive in the parking lot, what you do when the offering goes by...oh yeah, (laughter) they're watching you. I thank God for them, don't you? I thank God for Christian policemen...for the fact that when a guy goes to jail, and some of them have shared this with me many many times, they have the privilege of going in to interrogate a prisoner and when they're done with the interrogation they give them the gospel. Thank God for that. Thank God for the ministry of these men who stand for truth and justice and the upholding of not only the law of the land but the law of the Lord. I think there's a place for a Christian in all the forms of government because Christ needs to be represented everywhere. I just feel that wherever the Lord wants you to be is where you ought to be.

And then someone asked the question, WHY IN THE SCRIPTURE DID NOT ALL THE MURDERERS DIE? The first one would be Cain, why didn't he die? And, of course, God had not yet instituted capital punishment when Cain killed Abel in chapter 4, it didn't come till chapter 9. So that wasn't fully yet given by God. God was patient in that case because the law was not established.

But even after Genesis chapter 9 you have many times when people committed crimes and didn't die. Now there may be some special times when God was merciful and that's at the discretion of God. But in my study several years and Dick Mayhue and I went over this pretty thoroughly for a period of time, it was our conclusion that in discussing the matter of why people didn't die immediately when they committed crimes that were prescribed to have the sentence of death, the real issue was twofold. Number one, there was nobody left in the land in many cases who was just enough to carry out the execution. In other words, the whole land was so apostate that there wasn't really anybody in positions of authority who was just and righteous to carry it out. Secondly, if they started doing it they would be killing everybody off because everyone had followed idols and to follow an idol was cause for death, wasn't it? The whole nation, a whole generation of children were disobedient to their parents and that was worthy of death.

In other words, the whole thing went apostate. And it wasn't that God changed His will, it was that there was no one there to carry it out. But God didn't change His will.

Let's see...one more question, SHOULD A CHRISTIAN STRIKE? Well, that's an interesting question. And I've talked about that with many many Christians over the years and I've come to the conclusion it's a very personal, private decision you make in your own heart...given all the factors involved. The motive of everything that's involved. And I can't really biblically determine that there's anything that relates to striking on the pages of Scripture. What I do read in Scripture in Ephesians and Colossians is that if you are an employee, you are to submit yourself to your employer...period, period.

You say, "Yeah, but my employer is...he's a bad guy." Yeah, that's probably true in a lot of cases. But you're supposed to submit to bad guys, too. I'm thinking of chapter 6 of Ephesians verse 5, "Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling and singleness of your heart as unto Christ." If it were me, I would submit to my employer. I would find it very difficult to do anything other than that biblically. And I'm not doing it to please him, not as a man pleaser but as a servant of Christ doing the will of God from the heart with a ready mind doing service as to the Lord and not to men...knowing that whatever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord whether he be bond or free. It just says the same thing over and over and over...obey your master, obey your master.

Now you say, "But the conditions are unfair." Well this was a day when there were slaves, that's unfair too. I mean, that's more unfair than anything you've probably experienced. But that didn't change the condition.

And in Colossians it's the same thing. Verse 22 of chapter 3, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service as men pleasers and singleness of heart fearing God, whatever you do do it heartily unto the Lord, not unto men, knowing that of the Lord you'll receive the reward of the inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ." You've got to remember that you may have a boss but the one you really serve is whom? Is the Lord. And again we're back to the fact that Christians are to live quiet and peaceable lives.

Now what I said at the beginning it becomes an individual choice. There may be some confusion that comes down the line. There may be some conflict that's going to cause you to wonder how to interpret that and you have to depend upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. But the bottom line in Scripture is you submit to your employer, that's the way it is. And if you say, "Well the conditions are unfair," then you've got to go back to the slavery of the New Testament in which the command is originally given.

I guess I feel that Christians really run into some problems if they go beyond the Scripture and try to invent responses based on what they think is logical and so forth. So I hope that gives you a perspective on it. I really think we're called to submit. Unless the circumstances are such where that command is not clear cut, or it's not clear cut who your master is, or who your boss is, or whatever.



But not because of more money, not because of peer pressure, not because you don't like the guy do you have the right to violate the biblical standard.

Well, we could go on but let's stop at that point. I thank you for your questions. I hope we covered the ones that you had in your mind. Let's stand for closing prayer.

Thank You, Father, for our time tonight, for a wonderful day, the testimonies of baptism. We praise You, we bless Your name with thanksgiving for all that You've done this day. We pray, O Lord, that we might live to Your glory as we go from this place, we give You praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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