

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Christian's Responsibility to Government Part 3

Scripture: Romans 13:1-2

Code: 45-99

Let's open our Bibles to Romans chapter 13 again tonight. And I am really excited about the things that the word of God is unfolding to me. I find myself somewhat constrained. I suppose if I had my preference, I'd just stick it in this chapter and get all three or four hours of it done in one night, but I'm afraid I would lose you all by the time we got to the end. There are so many wonderful things, and I can't really even touch on all of them, but I'm trying to be somewhat selective in unfolding the great truth of this wonderful portion of Scripture.

We're looking at Romans 13:1-7, in our wonderful time in the Epistle of Paul to the Roman Church. The title of the section is, "The Christian's Responsibility to Government." And this is our third in the series of messages on these great verses.

Let me say in the beginning that as Christians, it's obvious, I think, to all of us that we are in the world but not of the world. We're pretty clear on the fact that our citizenship is in heaven. Our allegiance is to our Lord. But at the same time, we realize that we have to exist in this world. We have to live on this earth. And so we have a certain citizenship function here that has to be fulfilled and discharged properly.

We are sort of a society within society. We are a community within a community. And we must fit within that society. We must fit within that community. And yet our priorities are totally unique and distinct from the society in which we live. We live for eternal reasons. We follow the directions, the commandments, and the standards of our God, the Lord Jesus Christ, given to us in the Scripture and energized in us by the Holy Spirit. And so we live for eternal matters. We live with a whole different set of priorities. And because of that, we need clear teaching as to how we are to relate to the government in which we exist.

We saw that film tonight about China. And perhaps you were thinking what I was thinking: "How would it be to be a Christian in China?" Now with a little bit more freedom, but even a few years ago, under the very strong and rigid controls of the Mao system. How would it be to be a Christian? How do you relate to such an oppressive narrow communistic kind of government? Whatever society a Christian may be in, he or she must ask the very same question: "How do I, as a Christian, fit within the system in which I live?"

There are many things, of course, about the Chinese form of government that would threaten us, that would impinge upon our already experienced freedoms, and that would make us very uncomfortable. There are some things we would perceive that they do not do very well in terms of providing a happy and meaningful life to their citizens. On the other hand, they might look at our government and think we have miserably failed in some areas as well. And the truth is, they would be right, and we would be right as well, because any government of man will reflect man's fallenness and certain shortcomings.

So we all struggle ... whatever government it may be, whatever society we may fit in ... we struggle with how we are to relate to that. And I fear that in our society in America, Christians have lost their perspective. They've lost the sense of their distinctiveness, and they've lost uniqueness. They've lost their moorings, if you will, and they're sort of floating on an open sea.

I see that in a couple of ways ... first of all, in the current preoccupation of American Christianity with a materialistic lifestyle. America has provided for us such an almost gross kind of lifestyle potential that Christians have been caught up in this to the point where they've lost the sense of eternal values. They've made some great exchanges for temporal things instead of eternal realities. I see American Christianity buying the whole American dream to a fault.

I don't want to talk about that anymore tonight. I want to turn the corner a little bit. We have in our contemporary Christianity an overindulgent materialistic kind of approach that really is absolutely antithetical to everything that Christianity speaks of. That isn't to say that it is wrong to be blessed by God. It is wrong to be wasteful with what God gives you and what God blesses you with.

The other thing that I see in American Christianity that disturbs me is a preoccupation with the political system. We are enamored with the American dream of capitalistic materialistic potential. And we are also enamored with the American system of democracy and politics to the point where the church today seems to be preoccupied with making its impression in the political world rather in a spiritual dimension, and I'm greatly concerned with that.

Our battle has become a battle of political weapons ... a battle of raising enough money to lobby for our particular cause ... a battle of intimidating people in office by our voting power. And millions, and literally millions more of the Lord's dollars that aren't going to fund somebody's personal self-aggrandizement and ego trip are going to buy political power. And I've often wondered if all of those tremendous dollar amounts could be channeled to reaching the world the right way, what in the world Christianity would be doing.

It's frightening to think of one television program in America needing one million dollars every three days, and it's more frightening to realize they get it. What if all of that could be channeled to the work of God and the way He wants His work done? And I think about the fact that Christian people give

millions and millions of dollars to political causes in the name of Christianity that don't really touch on the heart of the real issue of reaching a world without the Savior with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ that can change men's hearts.

Now this kind of mentality that we see in our country is contrary to the tradition of the church. It is contrary to what the church has always known. The church has always had a sense of stewardship on the one hand, where its resources ... and God has blessed us with much ... but its resources are carefully used for the glory of the Lord, not for personal embellishment. And that its stance in the world is not as a political power, but as a spiritual power whose weapons are not fleshly, but spiritual, mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, as Paul says.

Just to strengthen my own understanding on this, I went back a little bit into history. I read a book entitled, "Christians As the Romans Saw Them," written by someone who apparently is not a Christian, just a historian, a professor at Notre Dame, writing on the early church and the view of the Romans toward that early church. He basically chronicles the view of the very most well-known writers of those ancient times ... writings of ancient men like Pliny, the Roman historian who was born about 62 A.D., Galen, born about 130 A.D., the physician philosopher of Pergamus; also Selsus, a well-known rationalistic thinker of early Greek philosophy, born about 140 A.D., and then a man named Porphyry, who was the most learned and astute Greek critic of Christianity ... he was born in 233 A.D. And then Julian the Emperor, born around 330 A.D., who was known as Julian the Apostate, because he was raised in a nominal Christian family and apostatized paganism, and then became a very overt critic of Christianity.

And the writer of the book, Wilkin, takes these critics of Christianity who, by the way, made such a tremendous impression on the Christian church that the Christian church spent centuries answering their criticisms. Clear up to the time of Augustine, the church was trying to deal with the criticisms that these very prolific, articulate, and astute critics were bringing against Christianity. And if you read their writings, you will get the idea of how the Christians were perceived in the first three centuries of the time after Christ. And it is very interesting to study their writings and find out what the Christians were really like from the standpoint of their critics who were analyzing their faults and would almost caricature whatever was true about them.

The sum of all of their criticisms is very interesting. They saw Christians as religious fanatics, first of all. Unanimously they affirmed that they were utterly, totally, and almost exclusively preoccupied with their religion. They also noted that they were self-righteous outsiders who very infrequently got themselves involved in the things that the rest of society was doing. They called them arrogant innovators of religion who thought only their beliefs were true, which is to say that they did not try to accommodate their world, but it made it very clear what they believed, which was in fact contrary to what their world believed.

They also said they were believers in one God who was free and transcendent, and to whom the man, Jesus, was equal. They understood that that was Christian theology. They thought that was a weakness in their system. How could they believe in one God, they said, who was free and transcendent, and Jesus be equal to Him? If He is one God, nobody could be equal to Him, which shows they did not understand the Trinity.

They also said that Christians were fools who hoped for resurrection from the dead and foolishly believed in an eternal reward. They further said that they were believers in a historical revelation given in the Scripture. So far, they're doing very well.

Further, they said they are people who are totally committed to personal virtue and piety. And they are indifferent to the matters of the world, both material and political. Isn't that interesting? The early Christians were indifferent to the matters of the world that were material and political.

Origin, writing about 250 A.D., in that particular timeframe, showed that Christians did more good for the empire by focusing on a kind of personal holiness that prayed for the wellbeing of the emperor and the safety of the empire. How interesting.

If we have lost touch with 1 Timothy 2, they hadn't, which says if you want to lead a quiet and peaceful life, and you want to get along well, then pray for the king and all those in authority over you. In other words, our means are not fleshly means of politics; they are the spiritual means of prayer. The early church knew that.

Further, it was uncommon for them to be involved in any way in the empire, even as soldiers. A Christian actually becoming a soldier was very uncommon. It did occur. It was not something they pursued as a group. Selsus wrote that the Christians were definitely not passivists ... that is, they didn't speak against being a soldier; they didn't think it wrong to be a soldier. But they felt themselves called to a higher kind of warfare. They felt themselves not called to a public and civil life in the Roman Empire as much as a spiritual life in the Kingdom of Heaven, and so their preoccupation was beyond that. In fact, one writer, Minutia, said, "Christians" ... and I quote ... "do not understand their civic duty," end quote.

Now the historian, Tasidus, reported that they were executed by Nero. And I think it's so interesting ... Tasidus said they were executed by Nero, not for their religious beliefs. Now remember that ... they were not executed by Nero for their religious beliefs, but because of their hatred of the human race, Nero said, which was manifest supposedly by their aloofness and disdain for the common ways of life. Isn't that interesting? They were actually executed for a failure to get involved in the system. I fear that, on that basis, no Christian today would be executed ... or very few.

In fact, quoting Tasidus, "They are people who wall themselves off and break away from the rest of mankind." They were very distinct. They were not unkind, they were not unloving, they were not insensitive, but they were unique.

Turtellian also replied that early Christianity was an association, he said, devoted not to political maneuvering, but to inculcating moral principles into its members and training people to live virtuously. I mean their preoccupation was with virtuous life, godliness, serving the Lord, and committing themselves to the Kingdom. And they were executed, said Turtellian, not for incendiarism, which is inflammatory teaching or behavior ... an incendiary is some kind of an explosive that sets a fire. They were not executed for incendiarism ... that is for inflammatory teaching or behavior. But, says Turtellian, they were executed for their antisocial tendencies ... interesting.

Now the point of all of this is to note that the early church, while individuals among them served in all walks of life ... some were soldiers, some were workers in the government, to be sure. And you can be sure also that they were the best at what they did if they were devoted to Christ. Some were leaders. They filled every walk of life, but they were not perceived as a group to be concerned with temporal government. They were not perceived as a group to be concerned with temporal materialism, but rather as a group ... as an association to be preoccupied with that which was eternal and spiritual. In fact, they were accused of following the pattern of Christ and the Apostles ... how is that for a crime?

Now I fear that when history is written about this generation, it will say something very different about our kind of Christianity ... that it was very much preoccupied with the things of the world, that it was very much into political maneuvering, and seemingly had little concern for holiness, little concern for virtue, little concern for piety, little concern for the spiritual dimension, and the weapons of the spiritual dimension ... prayer ... and little concern for the advance of the Kingdom in the hearts of men.

Now having said all of that, I want to go a step further, because I want to cover as much as I can in just the introduction time as we kind of warm up to the text. All of this does not preclude the fact that many Christians in the earliest days of the church served in temporal government positions. Some of you may be involved in that. But we have people in our church who serve our city in many ways, who serve our state in many ways, and who serve our country in jobs that are involved in civil service. And we honor and respect those people. And we would not at all diminish the respectability of that function. But as a group, we are not preoccupied with bringing the Kingdom of God through those means.

Jesus said it when he said it to Pilot: "If my Kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight," which is to say, "We're not on this level, so we're not concerned to fight on this level." But I want you to know that there were individuals, even in the Scripture, who were very highly involved in the

governments of their time, and very honorably so. But they never banded together to become some kind of coercive Christian lobby.

But for illustration, in Matthew 8, for example, we read about a Capernaum centurion ... you don't have to turn to it; I'm going to move on fast ... but a centurion ... basically the word, "century" or 100 is identified with that ... a centurion was a Roman soldier who was over 100 other soldiers. This centurion from Capernaum ... stationed in Capernaum ... in Matthew 8 ... had authority over lesser-ranked Roman soldiers. You remember that his servant was healed by Jesus. And when Jesus healed the servant of a Roman soldier, he didn't say to the guy, "Now stop being a soldier. Turn in your armor." He said to him, "Go your way." Here was a man who came to Christ. Here was a man that Christ encountered and said to him, "Go your way. Go on with what you're doing." There was no diminishing of the role that he had ... "Keep on soldiering even though you now have a place in an eternal Kingdom."

And then we find in Mark chapter 5, there was a ruler in a synagogue who was a local leader, much like a mayor of a town would be. The chief ruler in the synagogue would be like the mayor of a Jewish community. You remember his daughter was raised from the dead. And he no doubt continued to function in that same role of leadership. Our Lord did not call him away from that.

It's remarkable too that in Luke chapter 19, we meet a short little man by the name of Zaccheus, and what was his profession? He was a tax collector. He was in the JRS ... the Jewish Revenue Service ... or better, the RRS ... the Roman Revenue Service ... it was a combination of both. And he had extorted from the people he was supposed to be taking tax money. And you know he met Jesus Christ. Christ went to his home, salvation entered his house, and he promised to pay back everybody four-fold of what he had embezzled. And the wonderful story about Zaccheus is not that Jesus said, "Stop working for the Roman government and collecting taxes." The wonderful story about Zaccheus is he became an honest tax collector ... nothing wrong with that. The Lord never dissuaded him from his profession.

The believing centurion, you remember, who looked at the cross and saw Jesus dying and said, "Truly this was the Son of God," and gave glory to God, came to faith in Jesus Christ, was a man of dignity, and a man of beauty, and a picture of ugliness as Jesus died, and stands in my mind as a very respectable and honorable man with great faith and great integrity.

And by the way, the first gentile Christian in Acts chapter 10 was a man named Cornelius who was also a Roman soldier, another centurion, a commander of 100 soldiers.

And then do you remember in Acts chapter 13 when the Gospel first went out from Antioch ... Paul and the other pastors at Antioch, you remember, were praying that the spirit of God would send ... Psalm and Paul and Barnabas were sent out to preach the Gospel, and they came to an island called

Cyprus, and they came to a place called Paphos, and they met there the man who is called the onthupatas ... the pro-consul ... he would be the head of the provincial government of that region. He was the number one guy ... his name was Sergius Paulus. And he was saved and no doubt continued in the same governmental function as a leader there to have influence for Christ.

And then in Acts chapter 16, there was the Philippian jailer, a Roman soldier of great responsibility. Jailers were men of great responsibility who commanded all the other soldiers who had responsibility for the prisoners who were proven capable. He came to faith in Jesus Christ. His whole family came to faith in Jesus Christ. And as you read the aftermath of the story, it's apparent that he stayed there and carried on his function, even though he was a member of the Kingdom.

And then there was Crispus in Acts 18 who was the chief ruler of the Jewish community in that region of Corinth. He was saved, and all his house. Then there was Sosthenes in Acts 18, another chief ruler among the Jews in Achaia ... he was saved.

Then there was Felix and Festus who were Roman provincial governors. They were given the Gospel and in each case treated with respect and regard by Paul in Acts 24 and 25.

Then there was Herod Agrippa the second who was the Idumian king who was in the line from Herod the Great, who was ruling under Roman toleration. He was overseeing the Jews. He was evangelized again by Paul with great respect in Acts 26.

Then there was Paul himself who saw the importance of government by appealing to Caesar when he needed justice in his own case and couldn't get it, and you'll find that in Acts 26, 27, and 28.

And then of course, in Philippians 4:22, Paul says, "All the saints greet you chiefly, they that are in Caesar's household." There were many who were a part of the very cabinet of Caesar who had come to faith in Christ.

And those were not dishonorable roles. Since God himself has ordained government, the position within that government is a position of honor. And if a Christian is there, he should serve there as a Christian should serve. But Christians don't collectively turn to the world's means to accomplish spiritual ends ... do you understand that? That's the point.

Many key people in government, today as well as then, are Christians ... thank God for that. Even in the Old Testament, thank God for Joseph in Egypt, or Daniel in Babylon and Media. Or Shadrach and Meshack in Babylon ... princes in a pagan government.

But wherever we are, whether we serve the government or not, we are to live as Christians whose preoccupation, whose priorities, whose perspective is at a different level, a different dimension, than

to try to use political means to accomplish spiritual ends.

You say then, "What is a Christian to do with his government?" Two things Paul tells us here. First, submit to it. Secondly, pay your taxes. We'll get to that when we get down to verse 6 and 7. Submit to it and pay your taxes.

Now we're looking at the first principle of submission. And now you can go, after all of that, to verse 1 finally. But I needed to say those things. And if I don't finish tonight, I'll try to finish next time. But I won't do that either, I'm quite sure, because I haven't even started verses 6 and 7 on paying your taxes, and we'll get into some interesting things there.

You'll notice the principle that is outlined here in verse 1 ... here's the first principle, that "every soul be subject unto the higher powers." Now that's the first principle. The second principle comes in verse 6, "For this cause, pay your taxes." And then he kind of expands on that. But principle number one is this idea of submitting to the government. Every one of us is to be subject unto the higher power, and that has reference to government.

And we've looked in detail at 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Titus 3, verses 1, 2, and 8. We looked at 1 Peter 2:12-17. Those three passages say basically the very same thing. We are called to a role of submissiveness. We are called to maintain good works in a context of peaceful, honest, godly, quiet, living as model citizens who solve our problems with government by prayer, and to accept whatever situation we're in with thanksgiving, knowing God has ordained it for His own purposes, whether we are Christians in China, the United States, or anywhere else.

All we can expect from a government is the protection of life and property, and any government basically does that. We can't necessarily expect that we're going to have all that we would like to have out of a government which basically reflects sinful man. The issue here is not whether it's a good government or a bad government, whether it's a dictatorship or a democracy, or a monarchy or whatever it is. All government is constituting a higher power for the protection of life and property to which we are subject.

Now I'm not saying that our government is something special, and so we want to be sure we're subject to ours because we have a quote-unquote "Christian nation." Listen, if you think America is a Christian nation, you're wrong. There is no such thing as a Christian nation; there are only Christian people. You can't have a Christian nation.

Now we have had civil religion. I mean we have "In God we trust" on our coins. Unfortunately, we have "Me first" in our hearts, but we have "In God we trust" on our coins. That's a very vague kind of thing. That could be anything. Our tradition is a civil religion tradition.

But when I look at our government, I see a lot of things in our government that disturb me greatly. I mean I look at our government and I see graft. I see people in high places who are immoral. We hear all the time about bribery. I have very little toleration for allowing homosexuals to have freedom and equal rights with everybody else as if they're only a sort of sexual preference, rather than a vile sin. I don't like the fact that our government contributes, by its laws, to the destruction of the family, and the destruction of marriage, and the promotion of a role for women that is the opposite of Scripture. I don't like it that our government makes laws against reading the Bible in school and praying. I don't like it that our government has what I believe to be very inadequate punishment for criminals, a failure to prevent immorality in the media, and lets people publish absolute filth and splatter it all over the place. I don't like it that our government does that in the name of free speech. I don't like it that our government legalizes abortion and allows millions of persons still in the womb to be massacred. I don't like it that our government gives children rights apart from their parents so that a 15-year-old girl has the right to have an abortion without letting her parents know. I don't like it that our government seems more concerned sometimes to protect criminals than it does law-abiding citizens. I don't like it that there are stifling rules constantly being made to restrain law enforcement.

I don't really believe we have the ideal system here. I mean it's ... I'm not asking for my walking papers. I'm happy to be here. But I'm not under any illusion that we have some very special Christian approach to everything. But in spite of all of those things, I still find myself coming under the statement of verse 1 that I am to be subject to the higher powers.

I do like it that my government wants to protect my life and property. I do like it that there are laws instituted to indicate that if something is mine, it is mine, and you can't have it unless I willfully give it to you. And that anyone who tries to harm me or those I love will be brought to the law. I'm appreciative of those things. I'm appreciative of the great freedoms that we have in this country for the ministry of the word of God and the preaching of the Gospel, although I'm not under any particular illusion that the Lord needs our kind of government to build His church. China has proven quite the contrary.

There are many things I'm thankful for. And I'm not saying I'm not. I just want you to know that I don't find, as I look at this passage, that it might be any easier for me to think about being subject to the higher power than it is for somebody in a country that we might think is far worse. Any Christian is going to find difficulty in his country just as we do.

And I ask the same questions you do. It's awfully difficult sometimes to send my check to the IRS if I were to believe that the government was going to fund abortions with it. I'm called to be subject to those powers that be ... they're ordained of God ... God has His purposes, His reasons. Now the only time that I'm ever permitted to violate the government that is over me is if that government makes a law that violates the Law of God, right? And we've seen that in Acts 4 and 5.

Now for a moment, I want you to turn back to Matthew chapter 10. And I don't think I'll get done with my introduction, so it's all right. In Matthew chapter 10 and verse 16 ... and all this is so important ... the Lord gives us here some very basic information that we can assume is going to be very helpful to us. "I send you forth" ... verse 16 ... "as sheep in the midst of wolves." Now get it straight, folks. He says this in general to all who go out representing him ... "You're going to go out as sheep in the midst of wolves." In other words, "You're going to be headed for some difficulty. Whatever governmental system you find yourself in, you're going to find that your strong Christian testimony will generate certain hostility. So be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." That is such a very important statement. That tells us the profile of a Christian in a hostile environment. "Wise as a serpent" ... a serpent, of course, is the model of cunning, shrewdness, keenness, caution. A serpent is not a fierce attacker. A serpent is stealthy. A serpent is calculating. A serpent doesn't court trouble. A serpent doesn't force the issue. They were the model of shrewdness, the model of caution. And that's what he says to begin with ... "Be very cautious. Be very shrewd. Be very keen-minded."

Secondly, "Be as harmless as doves." And that was proverbial also. Nothing is more harmless than a dove. It couldn't do harm to anything. A dove was a symbol of purity. A dove was a symbol of innocence. So he says, "Whatever you are, even if you're in the midst of wolves, even if the environment is as hostile as wolves are to sheep, be wise and cautious and shrewd and keen, and don't court trouble, and don't force the issue, and be as harmless as a dove, as innocent, as honest, as full of integrity, as non-retaliatory, seeking no hurt for anyone." That's how we're to be, marked by wisdom, marked by purity, marked by gentleness without compromise.

I read, like you do, in the paper about these people back in the Midwest who were always being thrown in jail by the state authorities because they won't comply with some state law. And I see that ... to be honest with you, I don't think the state is right in those things. But I'll tell you, I don't think they're right in the way they react either. And I think if they reacted as wise as serpents and harmless as doves, if they demonstrated a little bit of wisdom, and a little bit of caution, and a little bit of willingness to work things out, and they showed some purity, and some innocence, and a spirit of non-retaliation, there would be very different things happening than turn out to happen.

But it's almost as if they seek the theater. It's almost as if they seek the conflict, which is the antithesis of what our Lord calls us to when he calls us to face the world around us. We are not to be vengeful.

You remember, don't you, Romans 13 ... pardon me, Romans 12:17, "recompensed to no man evil for evil." If they do evil to you, don't give them evil back. Don't slander, slam, and slur them. If it's possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably. Find a way to live peaceably. If there is some paper you need to sign, then maybe there's a way you can sign the paper and not compromise your own heart conviction. And don't avenge yourself. And if your enemy is hungry, feed him. And if he's thirsty, give him a drink. And overcome his evil with good. That's the attitude of the Christian. We're not trying

to pick a fight. We're not trying to start a war. We want to be as gracious, loving, and gentle as we can, and not compromise. And if, in the end, we are persecuted for the sake of our message, and the sake of our life, then let it be. But let it only be in that case.

And he goes down into verse 17. It says, "Beware" ... in Matthew 10 ... "Beware of men. They're going to deliver you up to the councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You're going to be treated unjustly. They're going to whip you. And you're going to be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the heathen or the gentiles."

Yes, the time is going to come when the state persecutes believers. It's been that way all through history. The state is going to slaughter the sheep. The kings and the governors are going to call you in. And sometimes this is going to happen. But remember this: when it happens, it'll be a testimony ... that's right. It'll be a witness. And I want you to know that whenever the church is persecuted, it tends to what? To grow, and the blood of the martyrs becomes the seed of the church. And sometimes this is what purges the church.

And then in verse 19, he says that "When they deliver you up" ... that is when they take you prisoner ... "don't be anxious." Not even then, don't make a protest. Don't make a case out of it. Don't worry about what you're going to say, "for it'll be given you in that same hour what you shall speak." Isn't that wonderful? The Lord promises to give you what to say. Be calm and dependent, "for it is not you that speak but the spirit of your father who speaks in you" ... verse 20 ... isn't that great?

So we want to do all we can to be peaceable, all we can to be loving, all we can to be the best citizens possible. And quietly and honestly, and with integrity and virtue and piety, sew the seeds of spiritual truth in our society, live godly lives, influence our world. And indeed if they decide to persecute us, let it be only for our faith, let it be only for our testimony. And even then we have no anxiety because the Lord will give us what to say in the moment that we're to say it.

And then I like what it says in verse 21-23. It says a brother will deliver up the brother to death. It'll happen even in a family. And fathers are going to give their children over to death. Children are going to rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death. And the history of the church tells us this is really true. There's conflict in a family. It's not uncommon that there's a conflict, even within a family.

And he says in verse 22, "You'll be hated of all men for my namesake, but he that endures to the end will be saved."

And then I like verse 23. You say, "Well, when they persecute you, what do you do?" Just say, "Here, hit me. Hit me again. This is wonderful."?

[Laughter]

No. Verse 23 ... "When they persecute you in this city," what? "Flee." Get out of there. You're not supposed to be cultivating a martyr complex. Get out of there and go to another place, and keep going as long as you've got another place to go. In other words, the Lord says, "I'm not asking you to stand there and get beaten to a pulp. If you can find a way to get out, get out."

I mean patience does have a limit ... leave ... but we submit quietly, peaceably ... we are as wise as serpents, harmless as doves. And we infect our society with our godliness, not with our political clout, not with our worldly gaudy showy materialism. Those things defeat us. They don't help us. The world needs to know clearly what we are, doesn't it?

And why do we submit? Let's go back to Romans 13 and at least review what I gave you last time. In Romans 13, he gives us seven reasons why we submit. Reason number one is government is by divine decree, for there's no power but of God ... the powers that be are ordained of God. And we've been making that point, I think, over and over again, that whatever the government is, God put it there for whatever purpose He wants. If it's a good government, He put it there for good. If it's an evil one, He put it there to accomplish something. I mean God has put all government into place. There's no power that isn't of God, and all the powers that are are ordained of God ... that's saying it both ways. There's no power that is not of God, and all power is of God ... same things said two ways, exclusively and inclusively.

Government is by God ... even governments that have a lack of freedom reflect the purpose of God. We ought to stand very clearly taught by the lesson of China, the absolute antithesis of everything we know in American democracy. And the church has flourished in that because the growth of the Kingdom is not related to any kind of political cult ... none. It has nothing to do with it. And the people who are under the illusion that you have to preserve American democracy to preserve the Kingdom of God are wrong. They're not connected. Even Nero, who burned Christians, was ordained by God. And the death of those Christians became the development of the church. God knew what he was doing. So we are subject because government is ordained by God.

Secondly, because resistance to government is rebellion against God. Verse 2 ... "Whosoever therefore resists the power resists the ordinance of God." So we submit because if you resist, you're resisting God. And these people who supposedly, in the name of Christian freedom, resist what the government wants to do by some ... carrying out some legal function, or having them sign some paper, or go through some qualifying thing ... they're resisting the ordinance of God. For this time and that place, God has instituted that or allowed it to be instituted. I don't mean by that that God is writing all the laws, but they're within the framework of His tolerance and purpose. And they resist God.

And then we saw the third reason, didn't we, at the end of verse 2. We submit, first of all, because government is ordained by God. Secondly, resistance to government is rebellion against God. And thirdly, those who resist will be punished. It says, "And they that resist shall receive to themselves punishment or judgment." And it's talking there not only about the judgment of God, but about the judgment of man. God has given government the right to punish evildoers. God has granted the government the privilege of punishment.

Turn with me for a minute back to the pentitute. Let's go back to Exodus. I'll just give you a little brief look at this, and then we'll wrap up for tonight. But in Exodus chapter 21, God instituted a law, and the law was that government had a right to punish ... Exodus 21:23 ... "And if any mischief, then thou shalt give life for life," eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, strife for strife. In other words, any crime committed deserves a corresponding punishment. If a life is taken, a life is owed. If an eye is taken, an eye is owed. If a tooth is taken, a tooth is owed, a hand ... a hand, a foot ... a foot. If burning has occurred, burning is owed. If strifes have been given, strifes are owed. And here is the institution of governmental privilege in punishing evildoers. This is not personal vengeance ... these were never given for personal vengeance. This is for government carrying out a punishment.

And it further goes into chapter 22, "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. If a thief be found breaking in and be smitten that he die, there shall be no blood shed for him." In other words, if somebody breaks in and he dies breaking in and stealing, and you defend yourself against him, you don't die. "If the sun be risen on him, there shall be blood shed for him, for he shall make full restitution. If he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft." If he lives through the night and gets up in the morning, he has to pay back every single thing. And if he doesn't have anything to pay, he is sold into slavery. And the money that is gained from his sale is given to the person he robbed.

So this is a function of government from the very beginning. When God lay down the laws of government, He established that there were principles to be followed.

Go to Deuteronomy 35, and again we find ... there are many other chapters ... I'm just giving you some highlights of it. Deuteronomy 35:19, "The avenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer." When he meets him, he shall slay him. In other words, if somebody murders someone, there is to be an avenger. And the avenger goes and takes the life of the murderer. I mean that's capital punishment ... that's the institution of the law. Again in verse 21, it says the same thing.

Then over in Deuteronomy chapter 22 ... by the way, it was kind of an interesting thing that when someone committed a murder, someone close to the murdered victim was the avenger who would go and take the life under, of course, the direction of the court ... take the life of the guilty party.

In Deuteronomy 22:18, it talks about a man who has committed a crime, and it says in verse 18 of Deuteronomy 22, "The elders of the city shall take the man, chastise him, fine him 100 shackles of silver, give them to the father of the damsel, because he's brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel, and she shall be his wife. He may not divorce her all his days." So here is a man who has slandered, he is given a fine, and his penalty is to marry the girl. And that's of course for life by God's standard. I mean it goes on and on like this.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 8 ... don't try to find Ecclesiastes at this moment ... happiness is sitting next to someone who knows where Ecclesiastes is.

[Laughter]

But in Ecclesiastes, it tells us that judgment is to be meted out immediately and hastily. And that, of course, is what causes people to fear punishment ... punishment that is hasty.

I'm just reminded also ... I think it's the 31st chapter of Job and verse 11 ... I might be wrong on this, but I think it ... yes, it says, "For this a heinous crime," identifying a heinous crime, "yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges." In other words, it's the same idea. The judges, the leaders, the rulers, have been given by God the right of enacting on those who commit a crime a corresponding and righteous punishment.

And when a government punishes a criminal, it is enacting the will of God ... do you understand that? And when it fails to do that, it has blood on its hands. And I believe the absence of capital punishment makes a nation blood-guilty before God. For where life is not taken for life, the ground ... even in the case of Cain and Abel ... the ground cries out unto God of unrequited blood.

Do you want to know why the murder rate in our country goes higher and higher? It's the reason. So the instruments of punishment are human, but the source is divine. It is the purpose, plan, and will of God carried out by earthly government. And when this breaks down ... when criminals are not properly punished, an institution of God is destroyed. It's like the home ... when children aren't properly punished, what happens to the family? It disintegrates. And the same is true in society.

And I really believe that America is headed for destruction. And I don't think the destruction is going to come from the Russians dropping a bomb on us. I don't think it's going to come from some outside power conquering us. I think our destruction comes from within. Our lowering of moral values, putting a high price on material things, massacring unborn babies, failing to quickly and strongly punish evildoers, tolerating vice, elevating homosexuals to places of honor, taking women out of the home ... I mean you just go on and on with this kind of stuff. And that's the devastating reality of the fall of our country.

And ultimately, as in the case of individuals, I think God will give us over to a reprobate mind. The answer, dear ones, is not politics. You understand that, don't you? And the answer is not, "Let's be like them and have our own Christian materialism." The answer is to put our money and our time and our effort and our prayers and our lives into living a godly life and speaking boldly the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone can change a heart. And changed hearts can turn around a nation. So we submit because government is from God. To rebel is to resist God. To resist means punishment.

And now we're up to where I left off last time.

[Laughter]

And we'll pick it up next time. I can't get to the good stuff. I just spin my wheels.

Let's bow in prayer. Lord, we want to understand how it is that we're to live in this world. We want to understand what Your word is saying to us. Help us. Help me. Help me not to say things that don't reflect your perfect will, that don't reflect a proper interpretation of Your Holy Word. And oh, Lord, help us to be in the world what You want us to be. Help us not to get diverted. Help us, Lord, to be faithful, to live as You want us to live, to speak as You want us to speak, to be bold in proclaiming the truth, to speak of the sins of our nation, the sins of our lives. But Lord, when it comes to living, help us to live quiet and honest and peaceful lives, lives filled with the love of Christ, filled with purity, filled with an uncompromising stand for truth. That Lord, it may be that we move this nation. And may it be, Lord, that we might even save this nation, not by political organization, but by the power of transformed lives. Help us to know that if the world is to be reached at all, it is to be reached with the message of redeeming faith. May we be faithful, Lord, to reach out, to so live in an uncompromising ... and yet as model citizens in such a way who govern our lives so that Christ can be seen in us. May we be like that early church, a community of people who live so much for the Kingdom, who live so much for the spiritual dimension, who are so lost in serving the Savior, that our critics might be able to accuse us of being indifferent to the world around us. And may we, like them, not gain our ends by our wealth or political power, but by our holiness and purity of life. We thank You for the privilege of following the footsteps of our Savior. May we walk as He walked, who name His name, Amen.

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