

God and Government 10-22-06

Romans 13:1-7; Acts 4:19

¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Romans 13:1-7 (NIV)

¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. Acts 4:19 (NIV)

There is a great deal of confusion in the Christian world today about the role of the government and the individual Christian's relationship to it. What is the Christians role in the world of politics? What should our emphasis be? Should we demonstrate? Should we actively campaign for laws that legislate morality? And what role does a nation have in going to war? Aren't we were to turn the other cheek? (Matthew 5:39) We need the Word of God to clarify our stand on these issues.

In the Old Testament, God dealt with the nation of Israel as a unique people called out to represent God to the world. (Exodus 19:6) Their kings were supposed to be God's servants that, with the help of the priests, directed people to live that example before the world. When, because of disobedience, Israel as a political entity was destroyed, there was a shift to the Kingdom of God in the hearts of individuals that make up the body of Christ. Note the words of Jesus to Pilate when He was being examined. "... now my kingdom is from another place." John 18:36c (NIV) There is no longer a chosen nation of God that represents God's work in the world. The body of Christ around the world, cross-culturally and trans-nationally represent Jesus to the world. (Luke 17:20-21)

Many see America as a Christian nation. Certainly it is a blessed nation, but it is only Christian in the sense that many of its founders and the majority of its citizens claim Christianity as their religion. The very founding of our country was in direct opposition to our text for today. That does not mean that God has not blessed our nation because of the Christian influence. That does not mean that we should not vote for moral principles or even participate in government if we are called to do so. First and foremost, however, is the fact that we are citizens of the Kingdom of God. (Ephesians 2:19) Christians are a worldwide and time transcendent group that has a calling that

Commented [notes1]: 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Matt 5:39 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." Ex 19:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." 22 Then he said to his disciples Luke 17:20-22 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, Eph 2:19 (NIV)

is immeasurably greater than any one government. (Revelation 11:15) We are citizens of a timeless kingdom. We are rescuing the drowning souls of men on sea of uncertainty and constant change. We are pulling them out of the frigid waves that threaten to engulf their souls and putting their feet on the solid rock of Christ. (Colossians 1:13-14) We are giving them a reason to live and hope for eternity. That reason is not the American flag. It is the cross of Christ. I am a patriot, but my allegiance to Jesus Christ makes all my other loyalties pale in comparison. (Luke 14:26) I love this country. I value its freedom. There is no place that I'd rather live on the planet. The blessing of God has made this country prosperous. But this is not the Kingdom of God. America is a far cry from the Kingdom of God. (Revelation 21:4)

Do you recall the vision of Daniel chapter 2? Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a man made up of various metals. Each part of the man represented the nations of man. In the end, a rock came and smote the image of man utterly destroying it, and the rock became a mountain that filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:44) The image represented the governments of man. The Rock is Jesus and His kingdom. I didn't read about any little chunk of metal that was separate from the image. America is part of the image, part of the governments of man.

I'm not a person who bad-mouths this country. I am a believer in the word of God. Many won't like this message because they want to believe that patriotism and Christianity are of equal importance. Biblical Christianity realizes that we serve the God that is King over all kings, Bush, Putin or Kim Jung Ill included. We know God turns their hearts in whatever way will bring His will to pass in the earth. (Proverbs 21:1) Our focus should be advancing the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men across the entire planet. We are one with our suffering brothers and sisters in China, North Korea, and Muslim nations. We fight, but not with the weapons of men. (2 Corinthians 10:4)

The confusion comes from not understanding the Word of God and not recognizing our role as Christians. To understand the role that God would have us take, let us look first at the Apostle Paul. He was the most influential Apostle as he wrote a good portion of the New Testament. He wrote the first passage we read. He ministered during the reign of Nero, one of the craziest and most evil Caesars of Rome. Paul understood that we, as Christians, have one great purpose. That purpose is to proclaim Jesus the Messiah, and part of the proclamation is through the witness of our own life transformation. (1 Peter 2:12) He never proposed resisting Rome. He never started a political movement for the recognition of Christianity. He didn't even write derogatory comments about Nero when Nero burned Christians on poles to light up his gardens at night.

Listen to his words from 2 Corinthians. ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:2-5 (NIV) He

Commented [notes5]: 15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."
Rev 11:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
Col 1:13-14 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.
Luke 14:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
Rev 21:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.
Dan 2:44 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.
Prov 21:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.
2 Cor 10:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)

declared that we don't live by the world's standards, nor do we engage in the battles the world engages in. We fight but not with weapons the world recognizes. Our fight is for the eternal souls of men. We fight spiritual forces, arguments against surrendering to Jesus, and thoughts in our own minds and the minds of others, thoughts of selfishness and lust and the pretense that we are some kind of god. Our battle is to have our own mind and the mind of others obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3) That cause far transcends any political effort.

This is a politically charged time for us in the USA. Our country is totally divided and the rhetoric is ugly and fierce. Our personal opinions are shutting our minds off to hearing anything but what reinforces our mindset. When politics is first in our heart and mind we are focusing on something so inferior to the Kingdom of God, something temporal and soon to pass, something far less than what we were meant to do. Let me ask you a heart-examining question. Do you talk as much about the beauty and love of Jesus as you do about politics? Do you focus more on the truth of Scripture than you do about whether or not we should be in Iraq? Are you more concerned with the war on terror or the war for man's soul? The Kingdom of God should be so much higher, so much more important to us, so much more urgent to us, than any other thing in life. (Matthew 6:33)

The Apostle Paul spent years in Roman jails. He finally had his head lifted off his shoulders by Rome, but he never bothered with Rome. Why not? It was insignificant! The worst thing that happened to the church was when Constantine recognized Christianity and adopted it as the banner to fight under. We went from being persecuted and growing, to accepted and corrupted. Why do you think the Chinese ask us not to pray for persecution in their country to cease? They don't want to end up lukewarm like us, more concerned about the economy, comfort and politics than the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

Do you believe that people are living and dying without Christ? What does that have to do with politics? Nothing! Unless by me ranting about some political issue I offend a seeker so that they aren't able to hear the good news of Jesus. The Apostle Paul wrote, ³ *We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.* 2Corinthians 6:3 (NIV) Paul was willing to avoid certain doctrines and subjects and even liberties that should rightfully be his so that nothing would get in the way of his audience hearing about the life giving Savior, Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 8:9)

God is not calling you to be a Democrat or Republican, pro Bush or Bush basher, a pro-war or an anti-war kind of believer. He does want you to pray for your leaders, but His calling is for you to be a radical Christ proclaimer, by your life and by your words. No other stand holds a candle to that call. No other need is so urgent. (John 4:35)

I'm all for the marriage amendment in our state. If it passes or doesn't pass is in the hands of the Sovereign God of the universe. That proposition won't change the hearts of men. Only Jesus can do that. The only thing that changes the hearts of men is the

Commented [notes13]: 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.
2 Cor 11:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
Matt 6:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.
1 Cor 8:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.
John 4:35 (NIV)

Spirit of the Living God. (Titus 3:5-7) We can make moral laws by the boatload, Israel was great at that, but it didn't change their hearts or keep them from idolatry.

The Apostle Paul is very clear in our passage today and also in Titus 3:1-2. God uses the governments of men to punish evil and maintain order. We are to submit to them. We are to pay our taxes. We are to honor those in governmental positions because God put them there, Clinton or Bush, God put them in office. And when one of them converts, as was the case with Sergius Paulus, they can be an influence for the Kingdom of God while in that office. (Acts 13:7) That will far outweigh any political decisions they make.

There is one exception noted in our other text. If the government asks you to deny your faith, or stop proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Then you are to tell them your first allegiance is to your Creator. You may suffer for that. If you do, you are blessed beyond measure and will share in the glory of Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:17)

But let us go to a higher authority than Paul. Let us go to the Lord Jesus Himself. Did He ever preach against Rome? He called Herod a fox, but Herod would take that as a compliment. Did He tell Zaccheus to give up his work as a tax collector? Apparently not! He just convicted him to be an honest one. (Luke 19:1-10) Did He tell the centurion that received Him to stop serving Rome? No! (Matthew 8:5-13) The accusations against Him were political in nature, but they were a lie.

Rome was going to be the instrument of Jesus' crucifixion. He had seen many of his fellow citizens suffer the horrors of crucifixion, yet He never spoke out against it. Instead, Jesus always spoke of a much greater Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. It is a Kingdom that transcends all the kingdoms of this world. He said the Kingdom was within us. It doesn't come in a visible way, like with an army or a revolution. It comes when the heart bows before Him and surrenders our demand to be god to Him alone. (Matthew 12:28)

When Jesus stood before Pilate, the governor of Judea, the representative of Rome, He made it very clear that Pilate could do nothing that God did not allow him to do. ¹¹ *Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. John 19:11 (NIV) That was consistent with the words of King Nebuchadnezzar who after a severe humbling declared that God does wherever He desires and we cannot question it. (Daniel 4:35) Do you believe that? I think part of our desperate efforts to affect politics is from our lack of faith in the Sovereignty of God.*

Jesus told Pilate that His Kingdom was not of this world, and yet we seem to think Jesus misspoke. (John 18:36) He knew exactly what He was saying. We are not a threat to governments if we are real Christians. The Crusades were not representative of the gospel of Jesus. God does not call us to band together as believers and kill others in His name. As individuals we should turn the other cheek. Our weapons are love and the Word of God. God may move a nation to exercise His judgment on another nation. That is not our concern, unless you are called by the government to serve in that war. Then, as our passage tells us, we obey. In doing so we seek to influence those serving with us for the Kingdom of God. (Luke 3:14) The outcome of

Commented [notes17]: 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:5-7 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 1 Remind the people to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. Titus 3:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. Acts 13:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Romans 8:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 8 But Zaccheus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:8-10 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour. Matt 8:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Matt 12:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

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Commented [notes25]: 36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." John 18:36 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

... [2]

any war is in the hands of God. We couldn't stop it if we tried. We can certainly speak out against specific sins in war, but the decisions of national leaders are in God's hands. We are to be about the Kingdom of God.

We look at some of the tragedies committed by world leaders in Sudan and North Korea and ask how it is possible that these monsters could be moving as God allows. I'm sure the recipients of the Apostle Paul's letters wondered why they should honor Nero. But then, we only have to look back to the cross to see that what we see as only evil, God can use for immeasurable good. Why would God allow the Chinese brothers and sisters in Christ today to serve hard labor and be tortured day in and day out? They say it is to train them up by the tens of thousands to go into Muslim countries to proclaim the Gospel, something us soft Westerners could not do.

We have to realize something. When we start going on about the way it should be, and I'm as guilty as anyone, we are boasting like we had some revelation from God. If you do, fine. Otherwise, we ought to humble ourselves and realize that His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. (Isaiah 55:8) As I wrote this message, I had to repent and ask God to put a bridle on my tongue. I realized it was as much or more for me than anyone. I imagine God laughs as we declare what should happen in Iraq or who should be elected. What if we need persecution to wake our nation up? Then would the best thing be to hold off that persecution? How would you or I know unless we had a revelation from God?

Vote for the godliest candidate, for the moral propositions, for what you think is best for others, as far as your understanding goes, but realize that the outcome is in the hands of God. Realize that the worst-case scenario in your mind might be the very best in the eyes of God for the country to find itself in the depths of despair so that individuals might come to repentance and find a relationship with Jesus.

I am not in the mainstream with this message, but I am convinced it is the message of the Bible. If you want to argue with it, argue with the Scriptures. I am only trying to conform my life, and hopefully encourage you to conform yours to the word of God, not popular culture. If the Scriptures don't convince you, I certainly can't. The Scriptures are our most powerful tool. They are the weapons of our warfare, a warfare that transcends ages and nations and cultures. (Ephesians 6:11-12)

Why does God want us to take this kind of a stand? It's because it is not about governments of man, or about liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That is part of our problem. It is about Jesus, glorious, loving, gracious and merciful Jesus. It is about eternity and the destiny of the souls of men. It is about the cross and the power of redemption. It is about glorifying God and not man. (Jude 1:25)

After writing this sermon, examining the Scriptures, and thinking back on some of the comments I've made about politicians and political positions I realize how I could have stumbled someone searching for truth. I may have closed the door to a chance to share with them what really matters simply over differing political viewpoints. We have a calling so much higher than politics. Will you put first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness to such a degree that that is your main focus, what you eat and

Commented [notes27]: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.
Isaiah 55:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.
12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
Eph 6:11-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.
Jude 1:25 (NIV)

breathe, the reason you live? Will you speak more of the glory of Jesus than the passing powers of this world? Will you save your passion for Him alone? (Galatians 4:18)

Commented [notes30]: 18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.
Gal 4:18 (NIV)

35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Dan 4:35 (NIV)

14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

Luke 3:14 (NIV)