

General Topics :: On Government**On Government - posted by dolfan (), on: 2014/4/21 1:40**

There is a lot that has been and may be said about government. I don't hate it. But I want to spell out a little bit of explanation on why I view it as I do, which is that all human forms of government are inherently opposed to God. My relationship to it is one of inescapability, and since I must live here in this present order and age, I simply reject its influence as much as I can by refusing to treat it as any legitimate expression of power.

So, here is my take....

It is happening with greater frequency and intensity that "spirit of Caesar", as one might call it or what I call the "culture of government", demands sole devotion. A choice has to be made, and if nothing else, we have an excellent opportunity to teach Christians a lesson about the nature of civil government and why it is important to know what Paul was saying in Romans 13.

Let's get to the core. Get a bible and go to Romans 13, but be ready to look at chapter 12 and to flip to parts of Isaiah.

Okay, so some trot out Romans 13, the infamous passage about civil authorities, and say, "See? Obey the civil laws!" I concede that my view is a minority view, here, by the way. But, the passage is constantly wrenched out of the larger context and used to mean the opposite of Paul's teaching, as I understand him. Let me explain.

"Be subject to" in Rom. 13:1 is used by Paul after he has already laid down a theme of "loving your enemies" in the sense that Jesus described. That is the bed in which Paul lays this pillow in Rom. 13:1. We must begin understanding Paul's point in 13:1 by going back to Rom. 12:14. In fact, as Paul rolls into his "be subject to" statement in 13:1, he assumes that the powers-that-be are evil at the core in the preceding sentence at 12:21 -- "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." That very sentence is also embedded in a very Sermon-on-the-Mount, didactic and imperative type of instruction in how Christians are to live. It is interesting that those instructions include loving enemies, feeding the hungry and helping those who are both needy and opposed to us. THAT is the backdrop of 13:1 and the "be subject to" instruction.

So, in no way does Romans 13:1 teach that "Hey, the government is a legitimate force to be obeyed. Acknowledge it, submit to it, because it is the government." On the contrary, Paul uses the government as Exhibit #1 of who the enemy of Christians really is and instructs us to do the very thing that is most counter-intuitive but is the epitome of losing-life-for-the-sake-of-Jesus'-name: let the enemy rail. Don't resist. Don't counter. Don't try and pull a power play back on it.

Now, as to the part of Romans 13 about government being instituted by God. Here's the deal. We must keep the backdrop in mind and not peel the words out and stick them on present circumstances and make them something they weren't when Paul wrote them.

Paul is an Old Testament scholar. There was no "New Testament" canon yet; in fact, Paul was writing part of the NT in this letter. He knows the lesson Israel learned (or failed to) in 1 Samuel 8 and thereafter -- that God accepts human, civil government as an accomplished fact. He does not establish or ordain in any sense of "approval" or "legitimization" any civil government; the only government now recognized as "legitimate" by God is the church, the body of Christ, ruled over by its Head, Jesus, who is described elsewhere by Paul as the one and only King. (See, 1 Timothy 6:15, wherein Paul says of Jesus that He is "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords"). Civil, human government is the rejection of the government of God, as illustrated in 1 Sam. 8 and by every government thereafter. If Paul means to say that God legitimizes and approves civil government in Romans 13, then he is lying about Jesus to Timothy and admits of more than one sovereign. But, just as hard-heartedness of humanity lead to the "acceptance" of divorce by God (see, Matthew 19), God has "accepted" or "allowed" human government -- but both are sinful and both are objects of God's scorn, and both (along with everything else) will face a final extinction in the day of wrath. But, that's another topic.

What of these government folks being called "servants of God"? In Isaiah 13, God calls pagan warriors who exercise His judgment on Israel the same thing. Yet, God, through Isaiah, makes plain that even their evil will meet an end: when God is finished using them to do His work in exacting judgment on Israel, He will destroy those pagan warriors, too! (And, that did, in fact, happen. Read Isaiah 10:5-7, 12-13.)

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The Assyrian 'government' in Isaiah 10 acted as present governments and voters act now: "I have acted in my own might and I have laid my schemes using my own wisdom" -- and that is precisely what God judged of the Assyrians.

Let's look also at Isaiah 45, where God speaks of Cyrus of Persia as God's "Messiah"! That's right. He uses that very lofty word to describe His servant Cyrus whom He would use to allow Israel to return to Jerusalem from captivity in Persia. Paul's use of "servants of God" in Romans 13 is highly informed by these prophetic mentors of his. Government, to Paul, is not a legitimate, God-approved entity. Rather, it is an enemy of the true faith, but one who must be loved in the way Jesus commands to love enemies, and one who is allowed by God (because that's what humans have chosen and keep on choosing, which has huge implications eschatologically, by the way) to deliver the world up to him until that point in time where every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (See, Philippians 2).

What we owe to those in government is love. They are people. But, we are not to obey and follow their folly when they act in ways that are, in truth and in fact, anti-Christ. Most civil laws being passed now are in some inescapable way anti-Christ.

I would extend that rationale of government's inherent opposition to Christ to every action it makes. I have never been more skeptical of the ability of anyone to be a Christian and an elected politician because, at bottom of it, selfishness as a candidate and then the actual support by the office holder of the government that is inherently opposed to Christ must happen. In fact, I am seriously shaky on whether a sworn officer of the court who has to give an oath of support and allegiance to that government can continue to be and do both if he calls himself Christian.