

ROMANS (13:3-4)

Governing the Government

PART 75 – JULY 9, 2006

A COMPOUND EQUATION

Paul is teaching about our relationship to the government. And last time we discussed one third of this compound equation:

The governing authorities have been established by God. And he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. – *Romans 13:1-2 NIV paraphrased*

And the two big lessons we learned were that:

1. Disobedience to civil authority is *defiance* to God.
2. Obedience to those authorities is *reverence* to God.

Which means: Obeying the speed limit is true worship!

A cop pulled a little old lady over for going 22 mph on a hwy. Her three female passengers were scared stiff. When asked why she was going so slowly, she explained that it was the *posted* limit. The cop said, “That’s not a speed limit sign – it’s a highway marker. This is highway 22. Then he asked if her wide-eyed passengers were okay. “Oh, they’ll be fine” she said. We just got off the 154!



Q: What does the “STOP” in a stop sign stand for?

A: Short Time Of Prayer! (“Just for You, Lord!”)

Preparing an honest tax-return; observing burn-bans and building codes; putting litter in its place; respecting seat-belts and cross-walks ... it’s all worship!

It is out of respect for *God’s* authority that we submit to the laws of the land, and resist the self-indulgence of self-rule. Paul says this is the believer’s part of the bargain. He’s not advocating blind allegiance to wicked men. He’s encouraging open-eyed obedience to God’s will. So now, in the second portion of this compound equation, we’ll read about the government’s part of the bargain:

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. 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. – *Romans 13:3-4 NIV*

IS PAUL CRAZY?

This particular passage can be troubling for the casual reader because at face value (to put it bluntly), it's ... not ... true.

Rulers hold no terror for those who do right(?)

Q: Is Paul crazy? Did he forget that Daniel was thrown into the lions' den? What about Shadrack, Meshach, Abednego, and that furnace? Did he forget that Christ was crucified on a *Roman* cross?



When Paul wrote this, NERO was Emperor; a vile and depraved ruler who executed his mother and pregnant wife; and saw himself as the new God of the sun. He even castrated a man who resembled his wife, and married him.

Nero later achieved infamy for his brutal persecution of Christians - using some as living torches in the arena.

And yet, Paul makes these sweeping, unqualified statements (that he *must* have known had exceptions, because *he* was an exception!) four chapters earlier, Paul himself wrote:

For your sake [oh God] we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. - *Romans 8:36 NIV*

Q: What's the key to unlocking this little mystery?

A: Understanding who this passage was intended for.

If I told *you* that we don't swear in my family, I admit that that would be a lie; Shar and the kids swear like sailors! But it would be correct for me to take my foul-mouthed *children* aside and say to them, "We don't swear in my family!"

See the difference? Paul had his eye on Caesar. Paul had influence with Roman officials. Later, when he signed off his letter to the Philippians he said:

All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. - *Philippians 4:22 NIV*

Paul (and his Roman readers) knew this passage would be read by officials, and ultimately make its way into Caesar's household. Paul had hope for the future of Rome.

Romans was written in 56 or 57 AD; Nero became emperor in 54 AD at the age of 16; so Nero was only 18 or 19 when Paul wrote this letter. He was still a kid!

Rulers hold no terror for those who do right(!)

RIGHT AND WRONG

It's interesting to reread this passage not only through the eyes of Caesar's household, but through the eyes of Paul's readers who knew their officials would be seeing this!

Paul wanted to make a couple of things very clear:

1. [First] Christians are *not* a threat to the empire, even though they claim that Jesus is "Lord" (and not Nero).
2. [And more importantly] Nero is *not* God ... he is God's *servant*!

And as God's servant, Nero (and every authority and official) has two responsibilities:

- A. To commend what is moral and honorable. (The *right-doer*)
Do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's *servant* to do you good
- B. To condemn the immoral and dishonorable. (The *wrongdoer*)
He is God's *servant*, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer

This is a powerful statement that Caesar is *not* absolute. He is secondary, not primary. There is a God-decreed right and wrong.

- A *good* government acknowledges and conforms to it.
- A *bad* government denies it, and rebels against it.

These are objective realities defined by God; not by Caesar; not by government; and not even by democratic vote.

- Believers are to submit to their governing authorities.
- Governments are to submit to God's sovereign authority.

I believe America has the best form of government on the planet. However, God would be more pleased with a dictator who rewarded good and punished evil, than a democracy that did the opposite!

There is one God-pleasing question every nation should ask itself, regardless of its form or flavor of government: To what degree is right being *encouraged* and wrong being *discouraged*?

And God has established for *us* as Americans, a unique civic responsibility that we must not treat flippantly, to engage and assist our own government on matters of right and wrong.

SALT AND LIGHT



According to Paul, God has established our system of government, and He commands us to submit to it. And to *submit* to our system is to participate in it. Therefore, Voting is worship, and not voting is rebellion.

“We the people” are God’s civil “servants”! We can educate ourselves on the issues and we can vote. We can write our congressmen, or letters to the editor. We can sign petitions and occupy positions and protest.

We have so many ways to make our voice heard, and to disagree and debate with opposing political and philosophical causes.



We have a divine *duty* to influence our society (with the Bible as our guide), to encourage right and discourage wrong. But, we must never violate our faith, or the fruit of God’s Spirit in the pursuit of a political agenda! The kingdom of God is not forced or coerced.

When Jesus was being arrested, he said:

My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would *fight* ... - *John 18:36 NIV*

Believers can become so politically minded that they confuse “winning the *world*” with “winning the *vote*”. But, we must always remember that:

- Laws are for the symptoms, salvation is for the problem.



Laws can modify behavior, but they can’t transform the heart! Which is why we can’t legislate in the Kingdom of God. As Rick Warren says: The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

However, a *good* doctor treats both the symptoms *and* the problem. But the priority is always on treating the root cause.

And the kingdom of God is established by one thing: faith.

Faith comes from hearing the message ... - *Romans 10:17 NIV*

In Matthew five, Jesus offers us two analogies regarding our role and responsibility to our culture. He calls us to the “light of the world” and the “salt of the earth” (*Mat 5:13-16*).

- As light, we pierce the darkness, and illuminate truth.
- As salt, we penetrate, flavor, preserve, and protect.



This is the balancing act for *civil servant Christians*: we must shine for Christ while we shape our culture.

