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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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The Christian and Government, Part 2

Romans 13:1-7

Introduction:

In Romans 12-16, we see the daily life applications of the doctrine of the Gospel Paul laid out in Romans 1-11... it answers the key question: "How then shall we live?"

Romans 13:1-7: How should a Spirit-filled Christian live with secular governments?

"Life in Two Kingdoms": Presents very difficult challenges

Saint Augustine wrote of the City of God and the City of Man: The circumstances were the most dramatic imaginable... Alaric and the Goths had just sacked the so-called "Eternal City," Rome, and the end of the Roman Empire in the West was in view. It was a time of great upheaval in which many people wondered if the end of the world were at hand. Rome had been "Christianized" for just under a century, since Constantine had declared himself to be a Christian. Rome's military might and governmental organization had protected the church from encroaching barbarian tribes for almost one hundred years. Now, with Rome in flames and the Goths in charge of the so-called "Eternal City," Christians in Augustine's era wondered if the church would survive.

Augustine sat down and put pen to paper and answered the question for all time. His work was called "The City of God," and it argued that there are two cities: the City of Man and the City of God. The City of Man is made up of one human empire after another. The City of God, however, is the true eternal city. It is made up of all true believers who have confessed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. That City cannot be touched by earthly upheavals like the sack of Rome.

Eleven centuries later, the German Reformer Martin Luther wrote about his "Two Kingdoms" theory, following much the same line of reasoning.

Behind both of them is the thought of the New Testament: Christians are citizens of a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem

But Romans 13 says we are also to be good citizens of whatever earthly government exists

For example, the Apostle Paul repeatedly claimed the privileges of status as a citizen of Rome... in Acts 22 he says to a Roman about to beat him for a crime he didn't commit that

it is not lawful for him to be flogged without a trial. The Roman commander then was sent for:

Acts 22:27-28 The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. ²⁸ Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

However, in Philippians 3:

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ

Being good citizens of two different countries presents some very complex problems for all Christians

This is an issue that has engendered much debate and strong emotions over the course of twenty centuries of church history

This clash of convictions has resulted in many bitter moments in church history, and much disagreement over test issues:

Mentioned right in our text: Is it right to pay taxes to secular governments, even if those taxes are used for ungodly purposes?

Historical ethical issues not in our text:

- A. Limits to Obedience: Is submission to government absolute or are there limitations?
- B. Limits to Opposition: Is armed opposition to government ever permissible?
- C. Capital Punishment: Does government have the right to take human life?
- D. Christians Participating in Government: How much and in what manner may a Christian participate in government?
- E. Persecuted Christians: What should Christians do about governments who persecute Christians?
- F. Christians and War: Should a Christian fight for secular governments? If so, won't that lead to the absurdity of two Spirit-filled Christians killing each other?

My purpose this week and next week is to survey the terrain of these questions... not to resolve every issue but to give you a sense of what convictions Christians have had over the centuries... and to humble you and cause you to seek God for yourselves... and to help you not to judge other Christians who have different convictions... and especially to cause you to yearn for the day when Christ will put an end to all human government and set up His eternal Kingdom

II. Government in the Bible: Basic Principles

- A. God is Lord of Heaven and Earth
- B. God Delegates Some of His Authority to Created Beings
- C. God Will Judge Both Governors and Subjects
- D. God Sovereignly Rules Over Both Governors and Subjects
- E. Good Government is a Blessing
 - 1. It restrains chaos and evil
 - 2. Government also demonstrates God's passion for justice
 - 3. Government promotes order and peace
 - 4. This order and peace is essential to the spread of the gospel
 - 5. This order and peace is also essential to general productivity
 - 6. Good government encourages love and good deeds
 - 7. The key passage on Government as a Blessing: Romans 13
- F. Bad Government is a Curse from the Devil

- 1. The key passage for government gone wicked: Revelation 13

Question: How is a Spirit-filled Christian supposed to live related to human governments while on the earth?

Romans 13:1-7 gives two great commands

- 1) Submit to Human Government
- 2) Give to Human Government whatever you owe it: taxes, respect, honor

III. Command #1: Submit to Human Government

- A. What is the Command?

Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities

- 1. Submission: Means willingly and gladly to accept a subordinate position because it is pleasing to God

2. Submission is NOT demeaning or insulting
3. To whom is this command given? To everyone... especially to Christians

B. Paul's Seven Reasons Listed (vs. 1-5)

Summary: For seven reasons, Paul is commanding the Roman Christians to submit themselves to the government

Christians were not looking to overthrow Nero or any other Roman Emperor... or to agitate against the Empire as a whole

They were to submit, obey, be good citizens, fit in... mind their own business, work hard with their hands, and advance the gospel by lifestyle and by witnessing

But they were also to go beyond merely submitting: they were actively to support human government by paying taxes and revenue and respect and honor

IV. Command #2: Support Human Government

Romans 13:6-7 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.

A. Pay Taxes

1. Resentment over Taxes is an Ancient Issue
 - a. Benjamin Franklin: "Nothing is certain but death and taxes"
 - b. Anger by colonies over "taxation without representation"
 - c. District of Columbia residents license plate: "Taxation without representation"... advocating "D.C. Statehood"
 - d. Many people hate filing their tax return... 1040 every April
 - e. Resentment over taxes goes much further back than that... even to Bible times
2. Taxes and Christ
 - a. Tax Census by Caesar Augustus fulfilled prophecy that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem
 - b. Jesus' extensive ministry to tax collectors

- i) Tax collectors among the most hated people in Israel
- ii) The taxes represented Israel's status as an enslaved nation
- iii) Paying Rome tax money was brutally offensive to many Jews
- iv) Tax collectors were deeply resented because they profited greatly from Israel's subservience to Rome
- v) Most tax collectors collected more than they were supposed to and got filthy rich on the backs of their neighbors
- vi) If anyone tried to attack a tax collector, the threat of Roman reprisals was extreme and terrifying
- vii) Furthermore, tax collectors were in constant contact with filthy Gentiles, making them ritually unclean
- viii) Jesus acknowledged that tax collectors were sinners
- ix) However, He constantly associated Himself with them and desired to save them

c. Zealots hated the Roman occupation and the taxes they collected

- i) They wanted to expel the Romans forcibly... were willing to die to purge the Promised Land of all Roman occupiers
- ii) They had a special hatred for tax collectors, whom they viewed as collaborators with a foreign power
- iii) Amazingly, though, Jesus' calling went above these earthly loyalties
- iv) One of his disciples was called "Simon the Zealot" and another "Matthew the tax collector"... ordinarily these two would be at each others' throats

d. Christ taught twice about taxes

- i) Once about the temple tax: Jesus argued in Matthew 17 that children of God should not have to pay a tax to worship in His house... BUT:

Matthew 17:24-27 "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

- ii) Once about taxes to the Romans: Matthew 22

3. Giving to Caesar what is Caesar's

- a. Jesus' enemies sought to trap him
- b. The Pharisees and the Herodians wanted to trap him in his words
- c. The hot topic was paying taxes to Caesar

Matthew 22:15-22 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

- d. They wanted to stick Jesus on the horns of a dilemma
 - i) If he taught that you should pay taxes to Caesar, many Jewish people, especially the Zealots, would hate Him, thinking He'd betrayed the Promises made to Abraham concerning the Promised Land
 - ii) BUT if He taught that you should NOT pay taxes to Caesar, they would report Him to the Romans and He'd be arrested for inciting rebellion
- e. Jesus' answer is classic, and it is the foundation of what Paul teaches here

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" ²¹ "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

- f. What does it mean to give the Caesar what is Caesar's?
- g. At least it means this: pay taxes

4. Paul's reasoning in Romans 13

Romans 13:6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.

- a. Rulers are God's servants... literally "ministers" ... serving God directly

The exact same word Paul uses to describe himself later in Romans:

Romans 15:16 a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God

- b. They give their full time to governing

- c. Therefore they must be supported financially... this is why you pay taxes
 - d. The services they render to God and to society are worthwhile and thus taxes should be paid
5. Some Christians might have objected to paying taxes to a pagan empire and a wicked ruler like Nero
- a. Why should we take God's money and give it to support such wicked causes?
 - b. Does God really want us to contribute to the advance of the Roman Empire?
 - c. Paul's answer is Yes... pay your taxes... for rulers are God's servants
6. Christians struggle with paying taxes... especially since some taxes are used to support things they would never support
- a. Keeping abortion "safe, legal, and funded"
 - b. Saddam Hussein's suit!!!!
 - c. Idea: designated giving like to churches!!
 - i) BUT then (perhaps) the roads would be extremely well funded, but the bridges not so well funded
 - ii) Perhaps no one would give to myriad programs that they consider boring or unattractive

BUT Paul goes beyond this basic level of merely paying taxes:

B. Show Appropriate Respect and Honor

Romans 13:7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

1. A sense of obligation: give everyone what you owe him
 - a. This obligation comes from the order in which God set things
 - b. We owe certain things to authorities because of God's ordering of the universe
 - c. AND it goes beyond merely paying taxes
2. Paul uses a variety of words here

- a. Taxes = tribute, usually collected from all individual citizens as a tribute to their Roman overlords
- b. Revenue = fees and taxes collected from specific people at specific moments, like levies at ports of entry, use of bridges, places of commerce, crossroads, and sale of goods

Illus. In Japan we traveled across one of the world's longest bridges—the Seto Ohashi connecting Shikoku and the Main Island of Honshu—and the fee levied was equivalent to over a hundred dollars!!

Basically any form of tax Christians should be willing to pay

- c. ALSO: fear and honor
 - i) The idea is that there are certain outward displays of submission that all subjects must be willing to display
 - ii) Illus. the “Kowtow”... the act of formal supplication made by Chinese from the inferior person to the superior person; foreign envoys greeting the emperor would have to kneel three times, prostrate themselves nine times... by the eighteenth century, British envoy Lord Macartney refused to kowtow because of its religious significance; he would only kneel on one knee as he would before his own King
 - iii) Every culture has ways of showing respect to government authorities... in Kenya, President Daniel Arap Moi carried around a mzee stick and people would touch it as a sign of submission to his authority
 - iv) In England, there are extensive courtesies and rituals surrounding greeting the Queen; a protocol officer teaches commoners those rituals
- d. America is one of the least formal countries in the world... as I mentioned last time we actually enjoy seeing our leaders ridiculed in some ways... perhaps through Saturday night live mimic actors and skits or by political cartoons
- e. However, God calls Christians to give honor to whom honor is due

3. How is this done?

- a. Personal address: “Mr. President”... “yes sir” or “no sir”
- b. In a courtroom: “Yes your honor” “No your honor”
- c. These things taught in families

- i) Children should be brought up to use titles of respect for their parents
- ii) AND speak respectfully to those older than they

C. Underlying Attitude: Worshiping God

- 1. The issue here is not that we're worshipping a person
- 2. Rather that we're worshipping the God who set up the authority structure

Summary:

How should Christians live with human government?

Romans 13:1-7 gives two great commands

- 1. Submit to Human Government
- 2. Give to Human Government whatever you owe it: taxes, respect, honor

V. Six Key Ethical Questions

A. Limits to Obedience: Is submission to government absolute or are there limitations?

- 1. Some Christians have taken Romans 13 as a requirement for unquestioning submission to human government
- 2. Others have taken this submission very far... example, Martin Luther
 - a. During the peasant revolt of 1525, German peasants who had legitimate grievances against their masters decided to take up arms and fight,
 - b. They hoped to get support for their cause from Martin Luther, the great reformer... but they were shocked by what they got from him instead
 - c. Luther wrote one of his most vicious tracts: *Against the Murderous Thieving Hordes of Peasants* (1525)
 - d. He advised the princes and nobles to "crush, kill, destroy..." these rebellious peasants... his basic argumentation was they were rebelling against God-ordained authority
 - e. German sense of duty and submission to authority a very strong national trait

- f. This was tested to the maximum when Adolf Hitler came to power... the Nazis took over the German church and made it a puppet of the Nazi Party; some courageous Protestant Pastors rebelled and formed their own denomination called the Confessing Church... Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of them
3. This question of the limits of a Christian's submission to government is an old one
- a. Peter and John were commanded to obey the Sanhedrin and stop preaching Christ... their answer stands for all time as a LIMIT to a Christian's submission to evil government

Acts 4:18-19 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."

The key is that it was impossible both to obey them AND God because God had specifically commanded them to speak and teach in Christ's name

Later in Acts, the same issue comes up again:

Acts 5:27-29 Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." ²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

- b. The Hebrew midwives refused to carry out the Egyptian pharaoh's wicked command to murder all the boy babies
- c. The book of Daniel contains many cases of godly refusal to obey ungodly commands while remaining totally submissive to government authority in all other respects
 - i) Daniel and his friends refused to eat the ceremonially unclean food Nebuchadnezzar wanted to serve them in Babylon... but he ASKED PERMISSION not to defile himself and permission was granted
 - ii) Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego refused to obey Nebuchadnezzar's evil law to bow down and worship the golden statue... but they obeyed Nebuchadnezzar in all other respects
 - iii) Daniel refused to obey the Persian law that no one should pray to any god except to King Darius, but was gladly submissive and obedient in all other respects

- d. Christians suffering persecution under the Romans were forced to burn a pinch of incense to Caesar to prove their loyalty to the Empire
 - i) It was a form of worship
 - ii) Christians refused and many suffered martyr's deaths as a result
4. The ultimate issue of civil disobedience will come in the future, during the time of the anti-Christ

Revelation 13:16-17 He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, ¹⁷ so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Revelation 14:9-12 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰ he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." ¹² This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

In other words, in that era, if you don't defy human government and refuse to accept the mark of the beast, you will suffer eternal torment in hell!!!

5. Summary

- a. Submission to government is not absolute
- b. When government forces us to disobey God's commands, we must refuse, we must disobey government in order to obey God

Summary and Application

1. Follow Paul's two commands: submit to every authority, and pay to every authority what you owe: taxes, honor, respect
2. Recognize the rightful place of God-ordained authority and be grateful for it... it holds the sinful world together until Christ will come... parents: teach your children to honor and respect God-ordained authority, beginning with parental authority over children; from there instruct about government

3. Recognize the limits of God-ordained authority, because it is carried out by sinful people, its history is rife with tyranny and rebellion against God, and its future is the ungodly reign of antichrist... yet submit wherever and whenever you can as an act of worship to God
4. Look forward to the perfect reign of Christ
5. Next week:

- B. Limits to Opposition: Is armed opposition to government ever permissible?
- C. Capital Punishment: Does government have the right to take human life?
- D. Christians Participating in Government: How much and in what manner may a Christian participate in government?
- E. Persecuted Christians: What should Christians do about governments who persecute Christians?
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