

The Powers That Be Are Ordained of God  
Romans 13:1-7,  
Trinity Sunday XXIII November 23, 2014

Beloved of the Lord....Our government, which we sometimes call the State, has authority over us, even power over our own bodies. In the beginning God created government when He made Adam the head of the family, with power to discipline. Adam was the first father of mankind, and the authority of all kings and Caesars in this world can be traced back to Adam, our first father. Jesus therefore said "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." This passage teaches what we call separation of Church and State. Church and State are two different estates God has created for the benefit of mankind. The purpose of the Church, the Holy Christian Church, is to preach the Gospel for the salvation of souls. The purpose of the State however is to maintain order in the world by use of the sword. The State then rules our body, but Christ is the lover and Savior of our soul.

Naturally as a Christian, you live in two worlds at the same time, Church and State. You are a member of the Holy Christian Church so that our "citizenship is in heaven", but you are also a citizen of the United States of America, whose days are numbered because of her sins. The challenge you thus face is this: when do you obey the State and when must you not? Also how do you know? Generally speaking you should always obey the State with all her laws, for God does not condone or bless lawless behavior. Just as we cannot stand a lawless president, so God cannot stand lawless citizen who rebel. However, if your State commands you to do anything against God's Word, or even your own conscience which is bound by God's Word, you must not obey, "For we ought to obey God rather than men." When you as a Christian then are not sure what to do, keep God's Word and Gospel at the center of your thinking. You should be a good citizen, a faithful subject of the State obeying all laws for the sake of the Gospel. But if the State trespasses into the realm of Church, namely your faith and God's Kingdom, don't yield an inch for the sake of your conscience and their soul. For example, if you are pulled over for speeding by a lesbian cop, honor her for the sake of the badge, confess your guilt and pay the fine. But if she knows you are a Christian and starts harassing you for it, remind her that homosexuals will perish in hell for their sins except they repent. Sincerely urge her to believe in Jesus who died on the cross to save her from sins. If you end up in jail, she has not kept Church and State separate, but you have. God will bless you but she will be cursed. Therefore "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."

I. There is no power, but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Throughout history there are kings and powers which come and go. For example, before the pilgrims came from England to this country, "the powers that be" were the Indian chiefs of various tribes. Yet God made a judgment upon them for their idolatry, and God allowed a new power to rule America by way of the European settlers. Today there are many people

who complain about all the injustices the Native Americans received at the hands of white men, and we ought to condemn every wicked work on both sides, nevertheless understand God did bring the Gospel to the Indians back then by way of certain Christian settlers. The same is true for that period of history when slavery was legal. It is horrible to think of African people being kidnapped and brought to this country by slave traders, nevertheless in this country it is likely they heard the Gospel for the first time. Regarding the rise and fall of nations and people let us keep two things in mind.... FIRST, God is the power behind all kings, rulers, presidents, conquerors, etc., and throughout history God has judged the sins of the people by the powers that be. SECOND, God doesn't just punish men for their sins, but He punishes only so the wicked will repent and receive the Gospel. The giving of the Gospel or the taking away of the Gospel is what causes nations to rise and fall. Keep the Gospel then and the spreading of the Gospel at the center of your thoughts when you see God judging nations, or changing the powers that be.

That is the background for our own country, and "the powers that be" which are ordained of God. Not to justify the ways or means, if it is the "power that be", God has ordained it. God does not bless rebellion, but He did allow our forefathers to rebel against England so we became an independent nation. Moreover some of our forefathers were Christians, and they knew and had experienced oppression, hence a Bill of Rights and our Constitution were created. For the time being this is the legal power of our country, and all men, even our president are underneath these laws. And while it is evident there is gross abuse of power at the highest levels, Christ does not permit us to take up arms against our own government because "there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Think here of King Saul and David. In that cave when the Lord had delivered King Saul into David's hands, David did not take up his sword against the Lord's anointed. Peter on the other hand did in the Garden of Gethsemane, but "Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

Of course we also have the right of self-defense and there is Christian Liberty so that love alone is the interpreter of the law. It is not evil for us to protect our life or our family with a gun, if it is truly necessary. Just consider what is going on in Ferguson Missouri. If it is true the policeman was fighting for his life and in self-defense he shot that young man, this was not sin. But if the death of the young man was not a matter of self-defense, but abuse of power, then it is a homicide. In any case it is a matter for the courts to decide and violence in the streets is not the answer, for "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Let it also be said if we have experienced injustice by our neighbor, we have the right to appeal to Caesar, namely we take the matter to court.

I know in our country there is a lot of righteous anger against certain rulers who are indeed abusing their power. Nevertheless God does not allow us to become lawless rebels and lash out with the sword as Peter did. We must be as David who said of wicked King Saul, "As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine

hand against the LORD'S anointed." Saul did die in battle for his sins. The same may be true for our president, unless he repents of his pro-abortion stance, and support of same-sex marriage. God may soon judge him for his sins. Nevertheless we wait for God's judgment, and "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. We should also pity our president and pray for him, as he lives in spiritual blindness. For all sinners it is always true, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." He is not our king, but he is God-ordained for the moment. So God commands us to pray "For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

II. Our government is God's sword, exercising wrath upon those that do evil. Temporal government is thus God's sword on the earth to reward good and punish evil. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." Think of all the criminals in jail right now thanks to the sword God has given our government. God through our government is punishing perverts, rapists, child molesters, thieves, tax cheats, and even white collar criminals. The government is God's minister who swings his sword at all who injure and hurt their own neighbor. Likewise when God punishes us with bad rulers, we must still be able to say "Because of my sins I deserve these bad rulers, and I am just as corrupt in God's sight because of my own sins. By grace ALONE am I saved."

Let us also see in our text, that God will also bless us through our government if we do good. It is written "Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid." David did good for example, when he resisted the temptation to slay King Saul in that cave. And Saul later acknowledged David was more righteous than he. In like manner if you are a good citizen of the state, they will have to praise you. But if you despise your government and rebel, God will punish you through His minister, your government. Remember the rebellious Jews of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

III. Be subject to them for the sake of your conscience. Our last point for the day is that we are to be subject to our government for the sake of our conscience which knows our government is an authority created by God. "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." In other words, don't obey them because you are afraid of punishment, but obey them so your conscience will be clean. If you try to cheat your government by falsely reporting taxes or income, you are a thief robbing from your fellow Americans and your conscience will tell you so.

But if you render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, faithfully paying your taxes, your government will attend to all that is useful in our land. Roads will be maintained. The police will protect you and firemen your house. Soldiers will protect your country. God will keep evil from you.

But more importantly, this passage teaches you to obey your government "for conscience sake." You know from God's Word, and even His law written in your heart, this is a power and authority God has created, and God commands you to obey. If you don't honor and obey your God-given government, your conscience will testify to your sin and it will smart. The nagging conscience never goes away until we confess the sin, believe in Christ, and forsake the sin. But also let it be said, your government has no authority over your soul. If they trespass, if they cross the line, if they try and compel you to sin against God or conscience, don't obey for conscience' sake. If they condemn you because you condemn abortion or same-sex marriage, you are doing a good work in God's sight. Don't bow to their pressure lest you soil your conscience. Likewise if you uphold the constitution which is above every citizen and president, and they condemn you for it, you are doing a good work in God's sight by acknowledging the law and not being lawless. It is then a good work to condemn various evils today which are upheld by our own government....but do not let their sins seduce you into sinning against them. "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." May God help us all to do so in these trying days, but thanks be to God our true citizenship "is in heaven from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds and faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.