

XXVII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“How Christ Governs the State”

Romans 13:1–7

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

November 15, 2015 – Evening sermon

This is our 25th study in this series. In the last study we covered what Christ says about governing the church and in this study we’ll look at how Christ governs the State. At the conclusion I think it would be appropriate to set out Biblically the framework of how Christ has affirmed and designed government, how governing authorities are to function and how His people are called to relate to governing authorities. Then look at this government and why it’s here and how what we’ve covered affects the government we have here. Then I’ll take a few moments to look at God’s providential intervention that restrains the evil that our hearts would invent and put into reality.

I’d like to first take a few moments to tell you how we’re reliant on the New Testament for this for this particular fact. As God the King of glory is ruling and reigning in this world He has established governments but there is one nation He has put in place in which He entrusted His Kingdom, the nation of Israel. Thus Israel was a theocracy and God was there King until He would have sent His Son as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. God’s sovereign purposes are being filled and the people didn’t want Him as their ruler and king for they wanted a king like the other nations. So they received a king like the other nations and all the problems that come with having a king like the other nations. God uses that moment in the context of His prophetic Word to still accomplish His purposes and through that nation He would bring the King of Kings and Lord of Lords which is Jesus Christ, the Prophet, Priest and King.

As Christ comes into this world the Kingdom of God is now taken from the ethnic kingdom of Israel and it is entrusted to His church to carry that Gospel of the Kingdom to all the nations. It is now a spiritual Kingdom that is being populated by those who have been captured by the weapons of the Kingdom which is the preaching of the Word, evangelism, discipleship and the work of the Holy Spirit with the Gospel bringing people from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of our God but yet they are to live in the kingdoms of this world. We are not insiders for we are outsiders. We are aliens and strangers while we’re in this world but we are outsiders that are supposed to live inside not outside. We are not outsiders that go create a sub culture apart from the culture but we are to be in the world and not of the world and that includes the governing structures of the world. As we are in the world we become good citizens in the kingdoms around us yet our ultimate citizenship is in the Kingdom of God. That King has told us how to live in this world.

He has also told us how the kingdoms of this world are to function. We are outsiders living inside. We are strangers and aliens yet we live in the world with our allegiance ultimately and supremely to Jesus Christ yet we are good citizens, true patriots because we are now free out of our confidence in Christ to live for Christ in the kingdoms of this world and manifest how we ought to live in those systems God has designed and put in place. Now in the New Covenant what about the church and the new kingdoms of this world, the civil governments of this world?

There are basically four views out there. One is that we still have a theocracy that the purposes of God are to be carried out through the state and the state is the instrument to command, to commend and even coerce people to respond to God’s Kingdom. In this view the

church rules the state. That is one view and hopefully you'll dismiss that pretty quickly because we have no such promises of a theocracy as Israel did. The promises of Israel for that have been removed and cut off.

The second view is what we might call a co-dependency between the church and the state. That is the church does not rule the state and the state does not rule the church for they are separate but co-dependent. This was the Constantine model which means the state would do the church favors and the church would do the state favors and the relationship would be one of co-dependency.

The third view is the state controls the church. We have seen this throughout the ages where the state attempted to control the church – statism.

The fourth view is interdependency between the church and the state yet separate from each other and this is the one I lean towards. They speak to one another. The state has valid interests that benefit the church and the church is to be free to speak to the state. How would we arrive at this position? We look at how the New Covenant describes the functioning of the state in this world where believers are found in all of these nations.

I want to look at two passages of Scripture and then give you a distillation of what I believe these texts teach us first about the government and secondly about our relationship to it. I want to look at I Peter 2 and Romans 13. Paul and Peter and men who have had to go in out of prison quite frequently through local and Roman governments so they are not people favored by the government. The state has them on their hit list yet in light of that in their allegiance to Christ this is what they commend to us concerning the state and our relationship with it.

I Peter 2:13–17 says [13] *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, (You can see here in the text that there is one supreme over the emperor. You are being obedient to the emperor because of the supremacy of God who is calling you for the Lord's sake.) [14] or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (The government should be punishing the evil doers and confirming, affirming and protecting those who do good.) [15] For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. [16] Live as people who are free (who are free in Christ), not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. [17] Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (Give to the emperor the honor and respect due to him in that government structure.)*

I want to look at Romans 13 but I want to set a context first. In chapters 1 through 11 of Romans there is an expounding of the Gospel. Chapters 1 through 3 tell you why we need the Gospel and get everybody lost ending with Romans 3:23 which says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Chapters 4 and 6 tell you the result of being lost and the provision God is going to make. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. Then the Christian life of battling sin within you is covered in Romans 7. The Christian life and walking in the triumph of Christ is in chapter 8 and then incidentals in the Christian life are covered in Romans 9 through 11 ending with the doxology in Romans 11:34–36 which says [34] *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” [35] “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” [36] For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* The book doesn't end here though. So now what does the Gospel look like when it is lived out of you which starts at Romans 12:1–2 which says [1] *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of*

your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Then the rest of the book tells you how to think Biblically to live Christ centered and Gospel saturated in roles, responsibilities and relationships.

After Romans 12 you get to the relationship of the believer and the kind of God glorifying life a believer is supposed to have with the government and what God has done when He has given us a government. So how do you as a believer live here and what are these governments supposed to be and do? With that context we get to Romans 13.

Romans 13:1–7 says *[1] Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. [2] Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.* (Then he refers to criminal judgment.) *[3] For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, [4] for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. [5] Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.* (If you are responding appropriately then the conscience is not accusing but if for instance you see a police and you look down at your speedometer then you may need to work on your conscience.) *[6] For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. [7] Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.* Paul ends up like Peter does in this matter of respect, honor and returning the taxes that are before us.

What can we learn here? I want to give you two things here. One is the civil government is a divinely designed institution appointed by God to do something. Now I want to tell you what it is there to be and to do. One is that it exists by the authority of God and the appointment of God. It came into existence at the fall of man and sin – government became necessary. There is no government in Genesis 1 and 2 for there is only a garden and a relationship with God but when sin comes in with man's rebellion against God comes the necessity of government even to the point as capital punishment as is proven out in the Cain and Abel relationship as innocent blood cries out.

In the last study we covered how Christ governs the church. There are three great acts in the Bible through which you begin to work through your Bible – God creates, man sins, God then brings the curse of the fall and then comes God's work of redemption. The institution of Creation is the family. How should the family be governed and we'll look at that in another study. How should the institution of government be governed as a result of man's fall into sin? God has designed it and appointed it in response to man's depravity in sin for the government is here for restraining sin and to promote good, as the church is here to transform sinners. The church is an instrument of God's redeeming grace and the state is primarily an instrument of God's common grace.

Another thing that this tells us is secondly, because they exist by the authority and appointment of God they are to be respected, resourced and honored. He has designed government for the good of humanity. It said seven times in one way or another in the text that governors in the arena of common grace are a service of God, ministers of God. So what if they are not a believer? God still uses them. He turns the heart of the king where so ever He wishes to accomplish His purposes. What if it is a despotic king that stands against the Lord? The Lord holds them in derision and all rise and fall according to the Lord and He ultimately accomplishes

His purposes through them. I want to assure you if Satan is God's Satan then the rebellious tyrants of this world are God's rebellious tyrants and He is sovereign over them as well. He works upon them, in them and through them for His own purposes. That doesn't mean that tyrants don't need to be dealt with by those under authority but it does mean when we look at governors and institutions we see them as something that God has established and appointed and our default as a Christian in a government structure is to respect it, honor it and to resource it.

Even when there are governors or presidents that you don't embrace this call of God does not disappear or if your candidate doesn't get elected then God calls you to pray for those in authority over you. That doesn't mean we can't oppose policies or speak to those issues but it does mean that we live in a respectful and honorable manner and that we pay our taxes appropriately that are brought before us in the context of the government where we live.

Thirdly, governors have authority that God has given and that means all governors and governments have authority but their authority is derived, limited and defined. All governing authorities exist because of God's appointment therefore their authority, because all authority belongs to God who has now designated and given them authority, is limited. It cannot cause the believer to transgress the authority of God. We must obey God rather than man. Governing authorities are not an innate authority for it is given by God so it is defined, limited and derived.

What is their authority been given to them to do? From the text in I Peter and the book of Romans there are three things that they are supposed to do. Number one is to promote good throughout society. You will find this in our governmental founding documents as the general welfare. Two they are to protect their citizens to do good and that they might do good so they promote good, affirm what is good in an atmosphere and environment of peace if at all possible. Thirdly, they are to punish evil doers and deter evil. Clearly the Bible teaches us from both Old and New Testaments that punishments are to be proportionate and they are to match the crime. Perhaps your child has knocked over a glass of milk for the third time and there is some kind of punishment associated with that but that is not the same as cheating on a test or immorality. So punishment should fit the crime. When the Bible says an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth the Bible is not teaching the prescriptions of our punishment but the proportionality of punishment.

The state in its authority has the right to punish certain crimes all the way to lethal punishment. The metaphor used for this in the Bible is that the state has the power of the sword. If the Bible has been written in 2100 it may have said it has the power of the nuclear bomb or something like that. The sword was the lethal weapon of the day. That is a life and death weapon. When the Bible speaks of the authority discipline in the family the parents do not have the power of the sword. If that deterrence hadn't been there I might not have had grandchildren for grandchildren are the reward for not invoking capital punishment upon your children while they were growing up. The parents have the power of the rod and God has provided a nice little spot with no major organs and sensitivity where you can 'rear' your children. That is the extent of the authority and punishment/discipline in the family. The church has the power of the towel. The church disciplines through servant's hearts and lives of sacrificial giving to one another in the love of Christ.

The state has the power of the sword and it's to be proportionate where they are not to bring capital punishment except in those matters that the Bible indicates or of capital offense in a nation that is not a theocracy for we don't have God as our King and Judge. Now we pray in our courts or at least we should pray in our courts for God to give us wisdom but we don't have the promise of the theocracy in the judgments of the courts. We are given certain rules in the Bible

concerning evidence and what's required for the conviction of a crime and then principles in terms of what is appropriate. That can extend to the point of lethal. In this day and time there is some discussion as to whether capital punishment is appropriate or not and I'll go ahead and tell you that I believe in capital punishment because of the sanctity of life where innocent blood cries out to the Lord and that is when the Lord came down to bring judgment.

Then He gives that responsibility to us and if you don't believe in capital punishment then you need to quit arming your police force because in a snap moment with no jury trial the policeman has the authority to take someone's life. They are instructed in what cases they can do that. That is the power of the sword. You probably would have to do away with armies as well because we train our warriors to go out and kill certain people with the power of the sword in order to defend with wars approved by our Congress and not at the whim of a general or a president. Why? It is because we believe there is a point where you have to enact for the sake of life you have to enact a lethal weapon to take lives but the point is that the text here obviously gives to the state a lethal weapon, the one of its day and that was the sword.

That brings us to the second thing from these two texts and that is how we glorify God in our relationship to the civil governing authorities. The text gives us five things that we are to do as Christians in our relationship to the governors and governing authorities. Number one is we are to be in subjection and submissive to them. Here is this call for a wife to be submissive to her husband and a man said to me 'What if the wife is smarter than her husband?' I said 'That is pretty much the norm.' What if she is a better talker? Now I know I'm in the norm for I'm fully aware of that. Submission is not a statement of worth. It is a statement of order, how God has ordered us to function. In the civil institutions citizens are to be submissive to the governing authorities. We are to be in subjection to them. In the church the members are submissive to the elders. In the family it is the wife to her husband and the children to the father and mother. So God has put order in society, not based on IQ or superiority because we are all made in the image of God. We all have the equal, inalienable rights before God but God has an order in the institutions of the state, the family and the church.

Two, we are to be in subjection 'as unto the Lord' looking beyond the civil authority to the Lord who has put them in place. That doesn't mean we are to consider them as the Lord. In other words, our subjection becomes an act of worship to the Lord and not to the worship of the governing authority. What if they are causing us to transgress God's Word? That is a different story for now their authority is limited and we must obey God rather than man. If I am not there then my job is to subject myself to them, not with my confidence in them, but with my confidence in the Lord. They are not in the place of the Lord but the Lord put them in their place.

Three, to do this appropriately we are to honor and respect those in authority, pay taxes and pray for those in authority. I will call them by their titles. I must not lie or cheat but pay my taxes. A person asked me if I would give money to the government beyond what I pay in taxes and my answer is 'no.' I think it is immoral for me not to pay my taxes but I will not give them more than my taxes for I think that is immoral because I think that is a temptation for them to get bigger than they ought to be.

Four, I will do what is good under that leadership and in that government and the authorities should uphold what is good and punish what is bad (based on the laws of God). To do good I am to stand for the sanctity of life, the sanctity of sexuality in marriage, the sanctity of marriage, sanctity of work and rest. The state should set an environment for me to do good and enforce it in the context of what I would identify as the sanctities of the second tablet of the law.

The state should honor the family so that we obey the fifth commandment. The state should honor life so that we do not murder. The state should honor marriage so that we do not commit adultery or fornication or sexual promiscuity or sexual perversity that would not be affirmed in the culture but that would be purity and chastity in the context of marriage. We should speak the truth and not lie. We should not steal. We should be content and not covet and all of those verities. I believe that a good state takes the creation ordinances of marriage, life, work and rest and builds a culture and a law code of simplicity around those under girded by laws five through ten of the second tablet of the law. I do not believe the government is to enforce the first tablet of the law but they must enforce the freedom for men and women in their conscience to pursue the first tablet of the law. These are to worship the Lord your God, hold His Name in reverence, to remember Him on His day, not to make any graven images and to follow Him. Five is that I am called to maintain a good conscience in relationship to those who are governing authorities over me.

I gave you the four dynamics – do we have a theocracy which is the church controlling the state or statism where the state controls the church or a co-dependency where the church and state are doing favors for each other but on the inside track where the church sells out to the state and the state sells out to the church or do we have a state and a church that for the sake of the family have developed three interdependent spheres (church, state and family). It is that framework and the things I've just covered that affected our founding fathers historically. I am using my words carefully for I do not believe our government should ever be anything but a theistic nation and that's why in the Declaration of Independence they didn't identify the God of the Old Testament or the God of the New Testament but the God that is revealed in nature, not that nature is god but the God who reveals Himself in nature, that the verities of His nature are to govern this nation. Therefore it is a nation under God. The nation does not determine how you worship God but the nation is under God so the nation can define what is good and evil properly and then it sets an environment of freedom.

We had this movement of the Gospel where we declared our freedom under God in the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and then won it. Then unlike France, who also declared their freedom, fought it and then went into anarchy, we then ordered our freedom under God with law and that was called the Constitution. In the last study I told how we even borrowed the Presbyterian system of government and even implemented it in our nation and I will mention why in just a moment. Then when they functioned under authority and won it, they ordered freedom with law and then did perhaps the most important thing which was they maintained and matured that freedom with the Bill of Rights. The first amendment with those six freedoms of those Bill of Rights was the most crucial and most notably was the freedom of the church from the coercion of the state and the freedom of the state from the coercion of the church, not from the input and influence of the church. We are under God. The church can speak to the state with the weapons of the Spirit but it cannot use the state and its weapons of the sword. Then there is to be freedom to practice religion – to practice religion in the public square. Freedom to worship is a subset of this.

It was because of that freedom of the church, of conscience, of the practice of religion that we were able to maintain and mature our freedom. So that women came to have appropriate rights in terms of their ability to own property, to function, to vote etc. and so that man stealing would ultimately be destroyed where people would not be looked at as three fifths of a person but as a whole person. It was that functioning church with its preaching and teaching and

movement that not only maintained our freedom but matured our freedom over the coming two centuries that would follow it. That is what was put in place.

Interestingly what we had was this nation under God that existed with three key phrases. Again we drew upon Presbyterian poet warriors who knew Christ and would right such things as the law is king so we didn't become a democracy where mob rules nor did we become a monarchy where individuals rule or an oligarchy where the aristocrats rule. We became a republic by the consent of the people to a covenant that contained our law called the Constitution. So when I read 'honor the emperor' and translate it as to who is my emperor, it is not the president, it is the Constitution. The law is king has been an amazing experiment that freedom could be ordered by law through the consent of the people.

I believe it was the heat of the church's ministry of the Gospel that created the melting pot whereby people from all kinds of backgrounds came into that system to become not hyphenated Americans but Americans. Now we don't have a melting pot but we have a smorgasbord of hyphenated people and I don't believe we bring the same influence because it doesn't influence us. Our Christianity is much more of a hobby than it is life and therefore we don't bring the influence that our forbearers did. So while we were never the majority the church was salt. How much salt does it take to make that grilled corn good? God's people flavor where they are. They restrain the sin. They promote, define and influence what is good. Thus we had a people who by consent of the people, were governed by a law that was the covenant of the people as they entered into it together.

It was a theistic nation but no theocracy. We are under God but no church rules and no state established what the church is or approve what the church is to be. Those freedoms were guaranteed by the Bill of Right that we would mature and maintain our order of the Constitution. Why did they borrow that system of Presbyterian government? It was because our forbearers knew that men and women were sinners so they needed law to restrain but law needed to be simple. I believe if our founding fathers saw these seventy thousand page regulations would utterly drop their wooden teeth out of their mouths. Look at the simplicity of the Declaration of Independence yet its profundity. Look at the simplicity of the Constitution yet its profundity. We keep multiplying it because we have lost their vision of a defined and limited government with defined and limited responsibilities to protect the people, promote what is good and establish peace.

We don't need many taxes to do that. Honor the independence but not the co-dependence of the church and the family. That is why there was no property tax for the earth was the Lord's and not the governments. When you tax something you control it. That is why there was no income tax because the wealth was given by the Lord to individuals and families and not to the government to be distributed or controlled by the government and redistributed by the government. It was just sales tax and tariffs. We don't need a huge government. It was a limited government that defined government. Our founding fathers understood all of this.

Where did the property tax come from? We fought a couple of wars and had this temporary tax on property to pay off the war debt and then we had a temporary tax after the Civil War called the income tax to pay off that debt. Have you ever heard of a temporary tax? Next time you vote for a tax because someone said it was temporary don't believe them. Power corrupts because we're depraved. You have to have power to be in government. You have to have authority to govern. That is why they limited it and had three branches so that they would have to be accountable and nobody is running the show. That is why this group made the law and put this whole thing into place. More probably needs to be said about this but this was just

the basic consent constitution law covenant – agreement of the people for a limited, defined, delineated government to carry out God’s purposes of common grace.

So what has happened in Paris recently? Paris has a theocratic Islamic fascist caliphate and it’s the seventh one. It is doing what the other six did except that it has more advanced weapons and it has adopted different warfare tactics. It came to Europe and it will come here until it is dealt with. How should it be dealt with? What I would share with you at this time is simply this; our families need to give our sons and daughters to the church and the state and in the state our sons and daughters can righteously bear the sword to protect us and in the church they can bear the sword of the Spirit to destroy the ideology that is feeding it. That is the only thing that will destroy the ideology and that is the power of the Gospel.

I love church planting and church evangelism. The untold story of what is happening in the Muslim world and the rate of conversions to Christ is the witness of the persecuted church. They die well and that is why we want to minister to them and uphold them as we care for them also. In the meantime, I am going to pray that my president understands his responsibility and understands how to protect us in common grace while we send soldiers of redeeming grace to nations of the world. One might say they are a closed nation. No nation is closed if we are willing to die. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for this time together in Your Word and for the patience of these people. Please bless them as they serve You. Help us to worship You by having a transformed mind to understand what a government is to be and to understand our relationship to the government we have for I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

Civil Government is a Divinely-designed Institution Appointed by God to...

Our God-glorifying Relationship with the Civil Government and Governing Authorities are...