

Biblical Duty Toward Our Nation

As you know, if we can change a person's mind, we will change their actions. One of the most powerful tools a Christian has is the power to pull down strongholds or change beliefs and thereby change actions of people. I have found that the interpretation of Romans 13 repeated in many Christian circles is not helpful to the cause in America currently. In fact, it doesn't differ much at all from the interpretations used in Germany under Hitler. Hitler considered the following his favorite verse. "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1). He was able to use this belief to influence and eventually control the church. I have also found this belief to be a hindrance when endeavoring to mobilize church leaders against ungodly immoral or unconstitutional acts or laws of the government. Some interpret the following verse as the limits to obedience. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same" (Romans 13:3).

In other words, once a governing power has ceased to terrorize evil works and reward good works, it has become illegitimate and has ceased to require biblical obedience to such governments or laws. This may have been the dominant view of our founders. However, today you will hear this countered with I Peter 2:13, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme." However, one will never hear the following verse, which also echoes the second verse of Romans 13, and tends to strengthen that view. "Or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good" (I Peter 2:14).

Likewise, almost never do we hear one of the most clearly exhibited verses in the New Testament, the apostolic declaration of Acts 5:29: "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'" Once again we find the church in need of the apostolic direction that the early church had on this issue. Today it is predominantly absent. The section I referred to earlier in I Peter 2:13-14 ends with the exhortation in verse 17, "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." This puts the honor of the king on the same level of honoring all people, although it is specifically singled out. This does not say to obey the king that you are honoring any more than it says to obey the people that you are honoring.

This is significant because when this was written, the person was the law since they had no constitution. Much more than now, they had rulers, not governors. This is a significant difference and is the main stronghold that we must take aim upon to set people free from the bondage of incorrect interpretation and application.

Among the nations, and unlike any nation existing at the time the Bible was written, we have a nation with a unique constitution and a legally binding set of documents presenting what our founders said was the line of authority for legitimate governments. Primary to these, and all of our laws, is what the Supreme Court has

called “the organic law of the United States”, known as the Declaration of Independence. It states:

“... to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed....”

This clarifies the interpretation of Romans 13:1, which our Founders held and was different than that of the Europeans. They believed the higher powers receive their God-ordained authority from the Creator (earlier in the same sentence) through the consent of the people! This is an important distinction and echoes Acts 5:29. The Declaration continues, “That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government . . .” thus showing that their interpretation of Scripture is the less heard, but very legitimate interpretation that when a Government ceases to punish the evildoer, but instead punishes the good, it forfeits its right to the authority granted by God. Of course, they did not agree with simply disregarding laws or governments just because they weren’t perfect.

This was also clarified in the document, “Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses....” However, their gift to us did not end with clearly placing before mankind the common sense of the subject in terms so plain and clear as to command our agreement, but they also passed onto us a form of government which is very different than any other on the face of the earth until the time of our Constitution. They presented to us a constitutional republic—a form of government not of men but of laws. In fact, the Constitution even outlaws nobility granted by the government, the root of all man-rule in Europe.

This constitution, with its flexibility to be amended, is still, when applied, the greatest terror to evil and encouragement to good the governments of the world has seen since the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Yet our strongholds keep us from interpreting Scripture in light of the government which we have been given. When Scripture says “submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme” (see I Peter 2:13), we most often think of a man. Yet in our case no man is supreme; the supreme law of the land is the Constitution. This is significant since no man, in our form of government, is ever above the law, and no law is above the Constitution.

I have heard it said that we have a paper king. Our king—or highest earthly governor—is not a person, but a document. Hence, in order to submit to our sovereign, we must judge all laws and all politicians according to our “higher authority,” which is the Constitution, not a man, platform, or a party. All our oaths of office are to “...support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same....” This is because the Constitution is supreme.

At Lexington Green, Massachusetts, April 19, 1775 was set aside as a day of prayer and public fasting, Rev. Jonas Clarke, a local pastor and militia leader replied to the British officer's demand that the Minutemen lay down their arms, "We recognize no Sovereign but God and no King but Jesus." Then followed the shot that would change history and change the course of nations.

Ours is the first nation that effectively recognizes the Creator as sovereign and the people as the wellspring of His authority on earth (see Genesis 1:26, 28). All those who govern in our nation must submit their governance to the supreme law of the land, the Constitution. In our case, clearly, when applying Romans 13:1, the governing authority is that of the Constitution and not a man or men. For Christians to obey the Romans 13 mandate, we must realize that to allow or follow unconstitutional laws is to disobey God by disobeying the supreme law of the land.

We cannot be obedient to submit ourselves to "every ordinance" if we do not submit to the supreme ordinance, which is the Constitution. As Christians, we have a duty to "use our liberty as a bondservant for God" (see I Peter 2:16). In the American Christian context, this means that Christians must get involved in the process of government and insist that our laws and lawmakers are submitted to the Constitution. If we will not do this, then we are obeying man rather than God, which will, and arguably has, brought us under the judgment of God.

The Scriptures tell us that we must honor our fathers and mothers or our land will come under a curse (see Deuteronomy 27:16). Perhaps this is what Charles Finney was thinking when he wrote, "The Church must take right ground in regard to politics . . . The time has come that Christians must vote for honest men, and take consistent ground in politics or the Lord will curse them . . . God cannot sustain this free and blessed country, which we love and pray for, unless the Church will take the right ground. Politics are a part of religion, in such a country as this, and Christians must do their duty to their country as a part of their duty to God."

Finney seemed to recognize that "such a country as this" demanded things of the church that were different than in the days of the early church when men were rulers. Today, we have a supreme law of the land that recognizes the Creator and the source of His authority in the government and through the people exercised through the Constitution and constitutional laws. Obeying the Constitution and requiring our leaders to do the same is the biblical duty of all American Christians