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Sermon Notes

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The Christian and Government, Part 1

Romans 13:1-7

Introduction: Spartacus and Christ... Two Different Approaches to the Roman Empire

In 73 B.C., a slave from Thrace named Spartacus was being trained at the gladiatorial school in Capua. Spartacus escaped with 70-80 gladiators, seizing the knives in the cook's shop and a wagon full of weapons. They camped on Vesuvius and were joined by other rural slaves, overrunning the region with much plunder and pillage

Over the next two years, he led an astonishing uprising of slaves in the Italian peninsula, defeating one Roman army after another. At its height, the revolt included 120,000 escaped slaves in open rebellion against the Roman Empire.

Initially, the Roman government took Spartacus too lightly... but eventually they realized the threat and recalled in their strongest commanders from the distant shores where they were fighting. Pompey and his legions marched overland from Spain, and Lucullus and his legions landed at Brundisium on the Italian heel and trapped Spartacus and his slave army. They crushed him totally, and crucified 6000 slaves along the Appian Way

There ended Spartacus's open rebellion against Roman authority.

About one hundred years later, a Jewish carpenter stood before Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea... handed over by his own people on the charge of leading a similar insurrection. He was arraigned before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate:

John 18:33-38 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" ³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" ³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." ³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." ³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him.

Jesus spoke the truth that He WAS a King... but He also said “My kingdom is not of this world... if it were my servants would fight for me.”

Jesus’ Kingdom would advance, conquer the Roman Empire and one nation after another for two thousand years

But it would not advance by killing... it would advance by dying

At the core of that would be humble submission to God-ordained authorities like the Roman Empire

Spartacus’s revolt was man’s way

Jesus’ Kingdom is God’s way

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?

I. Government in the Bible: Basic Principles

A. God Actively Rules Heaven and Earth

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth."

Psalms 103:19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

B. God Delegates Some of His Authority to Created Beings

Genesis 1:16 God made two great lights-- the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment with a promise-- ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

C. God Will Judge Both Governors and Subjects

1. God holds created beings accountable for their actions

2. God will judge Kings for how they govern
3. God will also judge subjects of each kingdom for how they lived under the king
4. Clear example of this

Ephesians 6:9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

D. God Sovereignly Rules Over Both Governors and Subjects

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

Daniel 7:23-26 "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. ²⁴ The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. ²⁶ "'But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.

Acts 4:26-28 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.' ²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

E. Good Government is a Blessing

PREAMBLE OF THE CONSTITUTION: WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, IN ORDER TO FORM A MORE PERFECT UNION, ESTABLISH JUSTICE, INSURE DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY, PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE, PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE, AND SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY TO OURSELVES AND OUR POSTERITY, DO ORDAIN AND ESTABLISH THIS CONSTITUTION FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

1. It restrains chaos and evil

Even a bad government does this. When Saddam Hussein, a noteworthy tyrant and dictator, was deposed by the invasion force, anarchy ruled in Baghdad for a period of time.

Washington Post story, May 13, 2003:

“Reports of carjackings, assaults and forced evictions grew today, adding to an impression that recent improvements in security were evaporating. Fires burned anew in several Iraqi government buildings and looting resumed at one of former president Saddam Hussein's palaces. The sound of gunfire rattled during the night; many residents said they were keeping their children home from school during the day. Even traffic was affected, as drivers ignored rules in the absence of Iraqi police, only to crash and cause tie-ups.”

Police officers, prohibited by U.S. forces from carrying anything other than a sidearm, are wary of confronting antagonists who can outgun them. The overall situation is further complicated by a disabled court system and a lack of functioning jails.

Carjackings have become particularly frequent. A furniture salesman, Abdulsalam Hussein, said he watched through the picture window of his store as gunmen chased down a Peugeot sedan on a busy square, ordered the occupants into the street and sped away. "They had weapons," he said. "No one could do anything to help."

The anarchy in Iraq immediately following Saddam's ouster is a clear example of how government restrains evil.

- a. Thus without government, might makes right and anarchy rules

1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

- b. Some intellectuals in the West have openly espoused anarchy based on a utopian view of society and an overly optimistic view of human nature
- c. But Romans has already done a clear diagnosis of the true human condition

Romans 3:10-18 "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. ¹³ "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

- d. Without government, people's sin nature will run wild and loss of life, liberty and property without due process of law will occur constantly

Illus. We saw the looters in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and those with guns ready to defend their meager possessions to the death

- e. Without government, Christians would have to cower in fear and hide in the hills, or organize themselves into roving bands of armed warrior just to obtain food, clothing and shelter

2. Government also demonstrates God's passion for justice

- a. Governments, police, court systems give a daily life picture of future judgment day
 - b. Every night on the local news, there are stories of criminals arrested or tried or convicted for crimes... this puts the fear of God in people who would otherwise be lawless
 - c. Most governments establish similar moral codes to the Ten Commandments... laws against murder, stealing, rebellion, bearing false witness
 - d. Governments are therefore a reflection of God's passion for justice
3. Government promotes order and peace
- a. With the natural tendency of humans to evil checked and restrained, a basic level of peace and order can be established
 - b. This enables people to live orderly and peaceful lives:
4. This order and peace is essential to the spread of the gospel

1 Timothy 2:1-4 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

5. This order and peace is also essential to general productivity
- a. Governments maintain infrastructure... like roads and bridges and ports; also emergency structures like 911 and hospitals and ambulances and fire departments
 - b. Good governments manage economic opportunities in a way conducive to the general welfare
 - c. This enables Christians to obey Paul's command to work hard and mind your own business

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

6. Good government encourages love and good deeds
- a. Most governments use some of their tax money for the relief of the poor

b. Most governments also reward benevolence and good deeds in some way

7. The key passage: Romans 13

Romans 13:4 [The ruler] is God's servant to do you good.

a. Some believe Romans 13 is overly optimistic about human government

b. However, this brief survey shows the truth of what Paul says

F. Bad Government is a Curse

1. It promotes chaos and evil

2. The very fears we have about anarchy become realized with wicked government

Illus. Kristalnacht, Nazi Germany: organized state terror against peaceful inhabitants... Jews, living in Germany

On the nights of November 9 and 10, gangs of Nazi youth roamed through Jewish neighborhoods breaking windows of Jewish businesses and homes, burning synagogues and looting. In all 101 synagogues were destroyed and almost 7,500 Jewish businesses were destroyed. 26,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, Jews were physically attacked and beaten and 91 died

Thus does legally established government become almost exactly like anarchy

Karl Liebman, a Jewish lawyer living in Frankfurt-am-Main, described one particular night:

At night in the building where he and his wife lived he could hear "the tramp of hobnailed boots" and knocks on his neighbors' doors, followed by "the screams and protests of the women" as his neighbors were dragged off by storm troopers to concentration camps. "They came to every door in our apartment house but mine" he recounted, adding "maybe they forgot me".

3. Here there is little difference between anarchy and government

4. The key passage for government gone wicked: Revelation 13

a. The future of bad human government will be the reign of the antichrist... the beast from the sea

Revelation 13:1-2 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. ² The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.

- b. The reign of antichrist is clearly described also in 2 Thessalonians 2... the “man of sin” who sets himself up to be worshiped by all the nations on earth

2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 *For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.*

Summary:

Romans 13: Government is established by God; the government official is God’s servant to do you good

Revelation 13: Government is usurped by the devil... the wicked government is the BEAST FROM THE SEA... the final form of wicked human government is that of the Anti-Christ, whom Christ will destroy

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

II. Command #1: Submit to Human Government

A. What is the Command?

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

1. Submission

- a. Means willingly and gladly to accept a subordinate position
- b. To yield, to put oneself under, to bend the neck under the yoke
- c. Basic concept: Christianity and good citizenship go together
- d. As we’ll see later, it means more than grudgingly acquiescing to laws, rules, regulations
- e. It has a gladness to it... a realization that to submit to God-ordained authority is an act of worship to God Himself

Illus. People tend to have a rebelliousness toward authority that comes out in many ways... bumper stickers like “Question Authority” are evidence of this... even clearer to me is the

grumbling and complaining and angry looks that people at the airport security checks give to the guards doing the security... rolling eyes, sluggish obedience, under the breath comments or even open complaints

True submission means being glad to obey because God commands it

2. Submission is NOT demeaning or insulting

- a. This is the same thing commanded of wives toward their husbands and of children toward their parents
- b. It does NOT mean that God loves the one in authority more than He loves the one that submits

Luke 2:51 Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with [His parents] and was obedient to them.

This is the exact same Greek word... *hupotasso*... and the fact that Jesus submitted Himself gladly to His parents' authority proves forever that God does not love the one in authority more than the one who submits

3. To whom is this command given?

- a. Paul's expression is strong and comprehensive
- b. Lit. "Every soul"... it is a universal command
- c. Obviously since Paul is writing to Christians, it is first and foremost for all Christians
- d. No one is exempt from submission to God-ordained authority

B. Paul's Seven Reasons Listed

1. Government is by divine decree (vs. 1)
2. Rebellion against government is rebellion against God's institution (vs. 2)
3. Those who rebel will be punished (vs. 2)
4. Government serves to restrain evil (vs. 3)
5. Government serves to promote good (vs. 3-4)
6. Rulers are empowered by God to inflict punishment for disobedience (vs. 4)
7. Conscience demands it (vs. 5)

C. Paul's Seven Reasons Explained

1. Government is by divine decree (vs. 1)

Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

- a. All authority originates from God
- b. This is a universal principle... this is something God has done in the world
- c. This is true no matter what the form of government is... what form it takes
 - i) Perhaps a representative democracy like the USA
 - ii) Perhaps a constitutional monarchy like the United Kingdom
 - iii) Perhaps a dictatorship like that of Idi Amin in Uganda

Idi Amin's personal title: "His Excellency President for Life Field Marshal Al Hadji Dr. Idi Amin, VC, DSO, MC, King of Scotland, Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular"

- iv) Perhaps communism or fascism or socialism
- v) Perhaps an absolute emperor like Nebuchadnezzar

All these forms of human government can be and have been perverted by human nature

Yet all these forms of government reflect some aspect of God's delegated authority

- d. Scriptural support for this concept

Daniel 4:17 "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men."

Psalm 75:6-7 No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. ⁷ But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.

- e. What about wicked governments? Even they have been "given" authority

[Concerning Alexander the Great & the Greek Empire:] ***Daniel 7:6 "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule."***

Luke 4:5-6 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to."

f. Even Christ's authority is GIVEN

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

g. we will discuss later whether a Christian's submission to government is absolute... or are there limits

Basic concept: All authority in heaven and on earth comes from God ultimately

2. Rebellion against government is rebellion against God's institution (vs. 2)

Vs. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted

- a. To rebel against government is to rebel against God Himself
- b. The essence of sin is that we have joined Satan's general rebellion against God
- c. The essence of salvation is to restore us back to glad submission to God's rule

Matthew 6:10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In heaven, God is fully, happily, immediately obeyed... He is trusted fully, delighted in totally, obeyed completely

On earth, God is resisted, opposed, murmured against, disobeyed, disrespected, ignored

Rebellion against God-ordained authority is a subset of this overall rebellion

3. Those who rebel will be punished (vs. 2)

Vs.2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

- a. At one simple level, this refers to the fact that government itself will arrest you and bring legal consequences against you
 - i) With every law is established a penalty for breaking the law
 - ii) Parking in a loading zone might get you towed with a \$50 fine
 - iii) Carrying a willfully concealed weapon onto an airplane might be punishable by a prison term of up to five years and a fine of up to \$5000

- b. This is the obvious point when 600 soldiers came armed to the teeth to arrest Jesus; Peter pulls his sword out to fight for Jesus... Jesus made an obvious statement:

Matthew 26:52 "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword."

Imagine a SWAT team surrounding a building where there is a hostage crisis... imagine 600 specially trained Police personnel, pointing their guns at a man who staggers out of the front door... the Police chief screams at him to fall on his face or he'll be shot. What do you think would happen to that man if he quickly reached inside his coat and brought out a gun?

The obvious point is that those who rebel against government will suffer immediate consequences

- c. At another level, even if the rebel is never caught or prosecuted by the human government, God Himself has noted the rebellion and will bring judgment on the rebel as with all other sins

4. Government serves to restrain evil (vs. 3)

Vs. 3 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.

- a. Government functions to restrain evil as we've already mentioned at length
- b. Government brings terror to the wrongdoer, to the criminal, to the wicked man
- c. Living clean and legally makes us free from fear of government
- d. KEY: Paul here is speaking about the general, lawkeeping purpose of the government
- e. AMAZING because Paul himself was the victim of many injustices by the Roman government
- f. I believe Paul is speaking in generalities like the Book of Proverbs
 - i) Clearly the law-abiding Jews whom Hitler and the Gestapo persecuted in the Nazi regime did not experience this...

"Rulers hold no terror for those who do right but for those who do wrong."

- ii) Clearly Christians in Muslim countries who convert from Islam and who then face the death penalty for their faith did not experience this...

"Rulers hold no terror for those who do right but for those who do wrong."

iii) Clearly Jesus had done no evil, but He was crucified

Pontius Pilate repeatedly said “I find no fault in Him”

Yet He condemned Him to the slow, shameful agonizing death on the cross

“Rulers hold no terror for those who do right but for those who do wrong.”

iv) Hermeneutically the Book of Proverbs gives us generalities... things that are generally true

Proverbs 16:12-13 Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness. ¹³ Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.

It is not ALWAYS TRUE that “kings detest wrongdoing”... but it is still a proverb

It is not ALWAYS TRUE that “kings take pleasure in honest lips”... but it is still a proverb

So also it is not ALWAYS TRUE that rulers hold no terror for those who do right but only for those who do wrong... yet Paul’s point remains... Government exists to restrain wickedness and evil

1 Timothy 1:9-10 We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers-- and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

v) For the law-abiding citizen, a surprise road-block and license check holds no terror... but if you are trying to smuggle cocaine into the inner city, your heart rate will skyrocket in terror when you come around the bend and see the flashing police lights

5. Government serves to promote good (vs. 3-4)

Romans 13:3-4 Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good.

- a. Again, Paul is speaking proverbially
- b. Government frequently commends those who do right
- c. Presidential Medal of Freedom is one way the American Government seeks to COMMEND those who do right

At a White House ceremony on Wednesday, June 23, 2004, President Bush honored thirteen recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom... private citizens whose outstanding service to the people of the United States of America was noteworthy to the extreme degree

One of them was Dr. Arnall Patz, one of America's greatest ophthalmologists. Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Patz discovered the cause of infant blindness among premature babies... he also developed the use of the first argon lasers used in the treatment of diabetic eye disease and other retinal disorders

He was honored for his service to humanity by this government award

Rosa Parks was awarded the same Medal of Freedom in 1996 for her courageous role in the Civil Right Movement

So... government has the power to commend people who do right

- d. Also government does us good in more ways than merely giving out commendations and awards
- e. Government enriches our lives with roads, bridges, good hospitals, safe borders, reasonable traffic laws, just rulings, etc.

6. Rulers are empowered by God to inflict punishment for disobedience (vs. 4)

Romans 13:4 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.

- a. As already mentioned, government has been given authority from God to punish disobedience
- b. This power is openly established after the Flood:

Genesis 9:6 Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

- c. The "sword" Paul mentions clearly represents the ultimate penalty the government can inflict: death
- d. Government then becomes "an agent of wrath to inflict punishment on the evil doer"
- e. Much debate on the death penalty in our age, and we will save some of that to the final section... ethical questions concerning government
- f. Amazingly... tradition has it that Paul himself was executed by beheading... as a Roman citizen, he could not have been crucified as Peter was; but sometime lat in A.D. 67, under the authority of the Emperor Nero, a Roman sword flashed through the air and ended Paul's life

7. Conscience demands it (vs. 5)

Romans 13:5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

- a. Paul's final reason for submitting to human government is because conscience demands it
- b. Conscience is that internal part of you that pushes you to do what is right
- c. Therefore, when you run a red light, or cut corners on your taxes your conscience will smite you and convict you and force you
- d. Both conscience and government are general revelation provisions God has made to keep this pressure cooker called human civilization from blowing its lid because of sin before God is finished with His sovereign plan of salvation

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

III. 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
- B. Show Appropriate Respect and Honor
- C. Underlying Attitude: Worshiping God

IV. Six Key Ethical Questions

- A. Limits to Obedience: Is submission to government absolute or are there limitations?
- B. Limits to Opposition: Is organized 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?