

Authority and Government

Obeying the Law of the Land

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In 1998, I gave a sermonette designed to help a group of sovereign citizens in the church, who felt that they were indeed sovereign and in charge; as such, they were not required to obey the laws of the land. All have since left the church to follow their calling of rebelling against man's law.

Today, we all live in a world where the statement, "Laws are just made to be broken," seems to be the norm rather than the exception. We have people crossing our borders illegally. We have gangs. It was reported in Orange County that there were 209 gangs that rape, kill, and steal. Additionally, the white collar crime is just huge in this country. Man's laws are manipulated by many to achieve their own desires, such as the large example of the Enron case, in which employees were cheated out of their retirement by an unscrupulous employer. Sometimes the breaking of the law is as "small" as breaking the speed limit by most.

What about us, who are called by God? Each of us knows that obedience to the laws of God is of paramount importance. We know the laws of God are designed to produce happiness and build godly character in the individual. We know, as well, that if we let down or refuse to be obedient, we are putting our future existence on the line and may very well miss out on the wonderful kingdom that God has in store for us.

Have we ever stopped to consider some of the training through which God puts us to train us in the habit of being obedient? I do not know that I have often stopped to consider that. He does this by placing us under the governments of men: the governments of the nation, state, and town in which we live; of the job that we possess; and of our home.

Satan, knowing that he that endures to the end shall be saved, has seen to it that this end-time environment is filled with those who state the laws but feel that they are far above the laws and, therefore, set an example of disobedience. This nation had a president who swore to uphold the constitution when he entered office but felt that he was above the law morally and, by his actions, set an example of lying and a perverted sexual immorality without being held accountable. We have all seen or heard of the Watergate situation, in which President Nixon was pardoned though he lost office. I think all of us wonder, "Is there any honesty in our elected officials?" This is something that has to go through our minds.

In the world around us, we continue to have rebellion against authority and the law of the land. Admittedly, some of the leaders of these nations are indeed despots influenced by Satan and need to be removed, but would that action be right for those that are called by God?

Over the years famous individuals have made statements regarding law and government, as we can see by quotes from Elbert Hubbard's *Scrap Book*. Tacitus stated, "When the state is most corrupt, then laws are multiplied." Witness 55,000 new business laws added in one year. That

made me smile as I remember, many years ago, reading a *Business Week* magazine in which was the comment, "This year we added 55,000 new business laws." How can anyone keep track of that?

Socrates stated, "Laws are not made for the good." Coke said, "Reason is the life of the law." William Pitt stated, "Where law ends, tyranny begins."

Emile Fourget on law: "Law should be loved a little because it is felt to be just; feared a little because it is severe; hated a little because it to a certain degree is out of sympathy with the prevalent temper of the day, and respected, because it is felt to be a necessity."

Finally, Thomas Paine, writing to foment rebellion and establish a new country, asserted:

It has been thought a considerable advance towards establishment of the principle of freedom to say that government is a compact between those who govern and those who are governed, but this cannot be true, because it is putting the effect before the cause; for as man must have existed before governments existed, there necessarily was a time when governments did not exist, and, consequently, there could originally exist no governors to form such a compact with.

The fact, therefore, must be that the individuals themselves, each in his own personal and sovereign right, entered into a compact with each other to produce a government: and this is the only mode in which governments have a right to rise and the only principal on which they have a right to exist.

Is that correct? Was there a time when there was no government? Indeed, there was a time when man did what was right in his own eyes. Even then, God had set laws for man to follow, and penalties have always come to man for his disobedience.

Was Thomas Paine correct when he said that each man had his own sovereign right to enter compacts with each other to produce a government? Who, in fact, sets up governments?

Daniel 2:20-21 Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding."

I do not think that we as Americans—or as human beings—begin to realize how much God is involved in the world in which we live. He is producing something here. I do not think that we realize how intricately He works with mankind and the government that He has set up.

Daniel 5:20-21 "But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they

took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses."

Proverbs 16:4 The LORD has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.

We do not realize how much God is in charge. He can make the wicked to produce what He wants in the end.

Revelation 17:16-17 "And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled."

We all truly have to come to understand that it is God who rules over all things.

Thomas Paine was incorrect in his assumption about government. It is God who establishes government and who did so on a broad scale that there might be order and that it might be for man's benefit. As William Pitt stated, "Where law ends, tyranny begins." It is also for the teaching of a vital lesson that we must learn obey the government set over us, with, of course, the exception of when it conflicts with the laws of God. God had His experience with Satan and his rebellion; and for those of us called, God does not want this repeated but wants the understanding of law-keeping firmly in our mind.

Are we Christians to obey the laws of man? This question was put to Jesus Christ that He might be entrapped and turned over to the government.

Luke 20:20-26 So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor. Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you test Me? "Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.

The Caesar at this time was a man of sensual, debasing sins and was certainly not worthy of

respect on any merits of his character. Yet Jesus stated that this wretched man was in authority, and what was due him because of the tax system set up should be paid.

Matthew 17:24-27 When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" Peter said to Him, "From strangers." Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

Here we find a different situation. Adam Clarke comments, "From this reply of Peter, it is evident that our Lord customarily paid all taxes, tributes which were common among the people wherever He came." He goes on to make the assumption that God's people should pay the taxes levied upon them by the governments that are over them. In verse 27, He said, "Lest this be a stumbling block to the priest or the rulers of the Jews, I will pay the tribute." Christ was not opposed to paying tributes.

This question of coming under man's government came in Paul's time and has continued through the centuries even to today, as in the case with the sovereign citizens. Albert Barnes notes:

This was a very important subject. What duty is owed by Christians to the civil government that they find themselves in? There is no doubt that he had express reference in the Christians in Rome; but the subject was of such importance that he gives it a general bearing, and states the great principles on which Christians are to act. The circumstances which made this discussion proper and important were the following.

The Christian religion was designed to extend throughout the world, yet it contemplated the rearing of the kingdom among other kingdoms and empires amid other empires. Christians professed supreme allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ; He was their Lawgiver, their Sovereign, and their judge.

The kingdoms of this world were then pagan kingdoms. The laws were made by pagans and were adapted to the prevalence of heathenism. Those kingdoms had been generally been founded in conquest, blood and oppression. Many of the monarchs were blood stained warriors; unprincipled men; and were polluted in private and oppressive in their public character.

Whether Christians were to acknowledge the laws of such kingdoms and of such men was a serious question.

Romans 13:1 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.

This is the type of submission that soldiers render to their officers. It implies subordination, a willingness to occupy our proper place, to yield to the authority over us—to the higher powers, the magistracy, the supreme government (in this case, the Roman magistrates). There is no power but of God: by God's permission or appointment, by the arrangement of His providence, by which those in office obtained their power. This would include all civil magistrates that exist. Those who have rule over the nations are ordained of God. The word *ordained* here denotes the ordering or arrangement, that exists in a military organization or army. God sets things in order that we might have an orderly society.

Romans 13:2. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Do not resist what God has ordained or appointed. This means clearly that we are to regard government as instituted by and agreeable to His will. Those who object shall receive unto themselves judgment and punishment, certainly by the laws of the land; and if the lesson is not learned, correction by God. God is going to teach that we have to be governed.

Romans 13:3. 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.

The authorities over us, in general, do not punish for good behavior but for unlawful behavior. Paul then asks this question: "If you break the laws of the land, won't you be afraid of the power behind the government?" Just because we belong to God does not mean that we can go do our own thing in spite of the law. We just cannot do it.

Romans 13:4-5. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

The reasons we should be subject are 1) that the government has been placed there by God, and 2) that the violation of the laws would necessarily expose one to punishment. Those are the

obvious reasons.

He says that it is a matter of high obligation on our part to be subject to the civil ruler. We are to be obedient as a matter of conscience or duty to God! God expects us to come under the authority that is over us, because He has appointed it and made it necessary and proper. A good citizen yields in obedience, because it is the will of God. We are to be the light, and we are to represent right living.

Romans 13:6-7 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

For this cause God has set up the government, and we are to pay our taxes to support the government, obey its laws, and show respect to the office, if not the individual.

We have seen the examples of Jesus Christ and the apostles living under the "non-God" government of Rome. We do not see lawbreaking or resisting the leadership of the country, but we do see them giving Caesar what was due him, and we do see Jesus as law-abiding and paying His taxes.

There is a tendency that comes with democracy that is evidenced by the feeling that we as a people can do as we wish, that since we have the vote of the land, if the laws go against our opinions or feelings, we just do not have to obey them. This is an attitude in which we can subconsciously be caught up.

1 Samuel 15:22-23 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."

Rebellion is the same as divination, and stubbornness as the worshipping of false gods. God saw the cost of the insurrection of Satan; thus, God knows that a stubborn, rebellious heart can destroy those being called and keep them from fulfilling His purpose for them in the kingdom of God.

What are we to do when governmental laws conflict with God's laws? God has seen to it that we have the examples of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to give us the information we need to understand the principle of how to conduct ourselves in these circumstances. Here we see these men as a solid part of the Babylonian government, giving all due respect to the king in every circumstance—except when the demands of the government conflicted with the laws of God. In this area they stood rock hard for God's laws and were willing to take whatever punishment the civil government would mete out!

The governors that were around Daniel could not find a thing wrong with him. He was perfect in his job; he was loyal to the king; and he was a wonderful example. They wanted him out of office so they could get power.

Daniel 6: 4-5,7, 10 So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God....All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions"....Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

Not obeying or coming before God was not an option with Daniel. Those that plotted against him were the ones that were punished.

Isaiah 8:13-14 The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be our dread. He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Barnes' *Notes*: "Regard God as Holy and worship and honor Him with pious fear and reverence. Regard him as the source of safety, and the true defense. Let Him be your fear. Do not be alarmed at what man can do but fear and honor God. Be afraid to provoke His wrath by looking for other sources of help, when only His aid should be sought."

God has set up a government to bring order to mankind; and in that bringing of order, He has given each of us the opportunity to learn the lesson of coming under government and of administering government. These are lessons we must learn.

God has given offices in addition to the civil offices to almost everybody here. In the home, the husband leads, and the Mother leads when Dad is away. Ushers have authority to direct us and maintain order. The busman, the mailman, the gardener at the park, the schoolteacher, those directing traffic, and on and on all have the authority in their office. We who go to the theater, ride the bus, or want to pick flowers in the park come under the authority of the one who is responsible.

We are told to observe the fruit that our actions produce. What does proper obedience to government produce? It brings the harmony, unity, order, peace, and the character of

obedience that God wants each of us to have.

Some years back, I had the opportunity to go to Singapore with my wife. It is a beautiful city, about the size of Anaheim, California. The guide on the tour told us that wives could walk anywhere in Singapore and they would not be touched. Her purse maybe stolen, but she will not be touched. The people love the law. On top of the little mini trucks, they had a light that flashed. When the truck went over forty-five miles an hour, inside the truck a beeper went off because the driver was going over the speed limit. Downtown, trucks could go in until 10:00 am, but cars were not allowed. After that, cars were allowed and trucks were not. One would be fined for spitting on the sidewalk. The people were safe and secure, and they loved it.

At times, we are all given authority that we might learn to handle it well, but even here, all of us are placed under authority that we might learn to become submissive and to be governed. This lesson is so important that God will place His people under a heavy hand that they might learn not to rebel and that they might learn to be governed. I hope this is not something that we have to learn.

Nehemiah 9:1-3, 26-29, 34-38 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God..."Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies, and testified against them, that You might bring them back to Your law. Yet they acted proudly, and did not heed Your commandments, but sinned against Your judgments, 'which if a man does, he shall live by them.' and they shrugged their shoulders, stiffened their necks, and would not hear...Neither our kings nor our princes, our priests nor our fathers, have kept Your law, nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, with which You testified against them. For they have not served You in their kingdom, or in the many good things that You gave them, or in the large and rich land which You set before them; nor did they turn from their wicked

works. "Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its bounty, here we are, servants in it!"

Then they go on to say that they are going to make a pact that at least that generation would never do this again. They would come under the government of God at last, and would He please free them at this time? With those with Nehemiah, this was not the final opportunity for them—but this is the final opportunity for us.

All of us know that the father of rebellion is Satan the devil. We know, as well, that he is the prince of the power of the air and that his attitude permeates the world in which we live. Thus, he seeks to trap us into his rebellious attitude. His attitude is all about us on the internet, everywhere. Therefore, let us be conscious of it. Even though we might see others stepping on the laws of the land, we must remember to respect all true authority and develop the attitude and the character that God holds to be of such great value and do our best to obey the laws of the land.