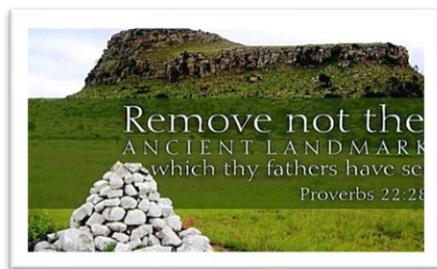


THE RESTRAINTS OF THE REDEEMER (Part 2)



by Phil Sessa, July 7, 2020

In part one of “*The Restraints of the Redeemer*” we looked at the first two restraints God ordained in our lives which are the conscience and the family. Once again there are many groups in this world that purpose to tear down these institutions, without considering G.K. Chesterton words who said, “**before you remove any fence, always first ask why it was put there in the first place.**” We continue with the third restraint of The Redeemer, **civil authority which is the social authority.**

Paul writes, “**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. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For 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, ⁴for 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. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience”** (Roman 13:1-5).

We can look at this in two parts, the first being living under ungodly rule. At the time of Paul’s letter, the civil rulers were the emperor Nero, and the officers of the Roman Empire. Steve Nichols states, Nero was a particularly wicked ruler. In the middle of July 64, Rome burned, and Nero likely caused the fire. His ambitious were to rebuild Rome, but he needed to make room with current buildings blocking his way. The belief of historians is that Nero’s underlings set the fire to help speed along his revitalization plans. The fire, however, spread out of control. It burned for a week and may have consumed as much as 70 percent of the city. As fingers began to point at Nero, he shifted the blame to Christians. He intensely persecuted Christians. Tacitus informs us that he used Christians as living torches to illumine his gardens at night so he could be entertained by chariot races, displaying his cruelty knew no bounds. This was the world of Paul and the early church. As a consequence, Christians were literally enemies of the state—marginalized, ostracized, and persecuted. They could be killed with impunity. Did Paul ever call to abolish the Roman soldiers? Did he protest, or start a movement called, “Christian lives matter”? Their lives did matter, but only according to a biblical worldview. The evolutionary model teaches that no life matters, but only the strong survive.

Even under wicked rule, he pens the words in Romans 13. According to God’s Word, it is ungodly it for anyone to call to defund and dismantle civil authorities. But there is an ungodly cry to get rid of such restraints now. Why, because then evil can go on unrestrained. What would these “geniuses” want to

replace the civil authorities with? Who will they call when crime is carried out upon them? Just as in Paul's day we too have some civil authorities that are themselves wicked and abuse their authorities. When John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness, a group of repentant Roman "Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "**Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.** (Luke 3:14)" John instructs them not to take money from people by intimidation, exerting pressure or violence and all for personal gain. Soldiers had the right to bear arms, and they were under military rather than civilian authorities.¹ There is certainly the reality of some authorities such as soldiers and police officers that abuse their authority. However, to state that all soldiers or police abuse their authority is a generalization. One would not say that every protestor is a rioter, which is also protesting authority. This is to paint with a broad brush by making the actions of one or a few applying guilt to everyone in that group.

The second part is who is to be subject to governing authorities? Paul writes, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities," which is to say every soul. Paul makes no distinction of persons, and the authorities are those that are those in a position to exercise authority. I cannot flash a badge that I won from a gum ball machine and start arresting people, as I do not have the authority to do so. Paul calls believers to "submit" to governing authorities, rather than "obey" them, and his choice of words is key in our application. To submit recognizes one's place of subordination in a hierarchy of roles, not of value, as a general rule that certain people have authority over us. The anarchists that we see in our streets are therefore ungodly, and under Satanic rule because they do not submit to governing authorities, but rather fight against them!

Paul's call to Christians to submit throughout his writings including to our spiritual leaders (1 Cor 16:16), Christian slaves to their masters (Tit 2:9), Christian wives to their husbands (Eph 5:24) and submission one to another, (Eph 5:21). Leon Morris states, However, "the Christian is subordinate in a different way, as the ruler, who is "God's servant" (v. 4), is Christ's representative too"² Douglass Moo writes, "Submission to government is another aspect of that "good" which the Christian, seeking to "approve" the will of God, will exemplify (Romans 12:2)."³ Paul gets right to the point using a well-reasoned, God honoring systematic approach as can be examined in the following:

- **General command:** "submit to the authorities" (v. 1a)
- **First reason** ("for") for submission: they are appointed by God (v. 1b)
- **Consequences** ("so that") of resisting the authorities: God's judgment (v. 2)
- **Second reason** ("for") for submission: rulers are God's servants to reward good and punish evil (vv. 3-4)
- **Reiteration** ("therefore") of general command, with abbreviated reference to reasons for submission (v. 5):
 - "because of [fear of] wrath" and
 - "because of conscience"
- **Appeal to practice:** the Roman Christians are paying taxes (v. 6)
- **Specific command** ("because of this"): pay your taxes and respect the authorities! (v. 7)⁴

¹ Edwards, J. R. (2015). *The Gospel according to Luke*. (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (p. 112). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos.

² Morris, L. (1988). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 461). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

³ Moo, D. J. (2018). *The Letter to the Romans*. (N. B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, G. D. Fee, & J. B. Green, Eds.) (Second Edition, p. 809). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁴ Moo, D. J. (2018). *The Letter to the Romans*. (N. B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, G. D. Fee, & J. B. Green, Eds.) (Second Edition, p. 811). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

The authorities are appointed and established by God, and therefore, resisting them is resisting God Himself. That might sound like a tall order, but all that are in authority are under God's rule, who is the ultimate authority.

Those that resist God's authority incur and invite God's judgment to be poured out upon them because of their rebellion. Secular authorities punish those that do wrong, and reward those who do good (are law abiding), and they do so as they carry out God's purposes in the world. Remember, Paul understood this all in the midst of being personally persecuted. We have rebellious people that oppose God by opposing authority, but they feel justified because they are using their own standards rather than God's standards, which is yet another act, and hypocritically an unjust reason for their rebellion. On the positive side rulers praise the law abiding (v.3v), which should encourage Christians to do what is good (v.4a). Paul writes earlier in Romans, "Vengeance belongs to the Lord ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord (Rom 12:19).

When an injustice is committed are citizens in a position to take vengeance? No! What we see in our streets are people committing more injustice when they feel an injustice has been committed, and certainly there have been some injustices committed, but also the rule of law has also been carried out as well. Many media channels highlight police officers committing injustices, but where are the highlights of them justly punishing criminals? Where is the video footage of an officer handcuffing someone that looted a store, a man that beat up a woman, or someone that abused a child? Why do these acts of good omitted, when don't they receive airtime? Because much of the media is ungodly and wants to paint a narrative of injustice when a few police officers commit an injustice they want to spread the blame to all. However, would they use that same standard to apply to protestors? Would they only show violent protestors that loot, rioting, steal, murder, and even assault God's authorities? Once again, no. It is hypocrisy because it is not part of their narrative.

To attack the civil authorities that God has established is to rebel against God personally. The only time when it is lawful to oppose authority is when authority opposes God. Then we submit to a higher authority, The Lord. When Peter and the Apostles were told to stop preaching, they replied, "We must obey God rather than men (human beings)!" If the authorities commanded Christians to abort their children, endorse homosexuality, stop preaching the Gospel, we are not to submit because these rules would rebel against God.

However, this is not what many are doing in our streets, as they are opposing men with authority and therefore opposing God Himself. Psalm 73 speaks of their acts, their being accountable to God, and their bitter end to encourage God's people that nobody is getting away with anything! It seems that the wicked have no problems, no sickness, no lack of resources, even though they wear pride as a necklace and violence as a garment. They scoff with their malice in their mouths, threaten opposition, and speak against the heavens (God Himself). They do not believe God knows what they are doing, because they are idolaters. Their riches increase, they believe their heart is clean, and as Pilate before Christ that they have washed their hands in innocence. However, God flips the script on them all!

The dread and the hope

“But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end (v.16-17).” The psalmist describes “their end” after having his spiritual envy changed as the Lord opened his eyes. Those groups such as planned parenthood, black lives matter, LGBTQA+, and other false religions, that seem to be “changing society” for the worse will all have their bitter end. Many of these special interest groups that seem have problems with the social ills of their choice, have no problem with their sin against God. They don’t want a savior for their sin, but a champion for social injustices. Their mission statements oppose the conscience, the church, the family, and civil authorities, and God will take vengeance upon all those who do not come to Christ and leave these God opposing groups. This is the only hope, and it is a real hope just as Paul writes in 1 Cor 6:9-11, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Sources

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