

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The Pilgrim Ethic: Applied

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. (1 Peter 2:13–16, KJV 1900)

What is the Biblical role of government? How should a Christian view the government of the country where he lives out his pilgrimage in this world? How do we reconcile passages such as our present study lesson with Jesus' words in the gospel?

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. (Matthew 10:34-35 KJVP)

How do we live in the world—as God would have us live—but remain "...not of this world"? We are liable to extreme behaviors on both sides of this question, extremes that damage our credibility with people who need to hear our message, a kind message that Scripture commands us to preach no less with our feet than with our mouth.

I suggest that the "Family message" of Matthew 10:34-35 has to do with priorities. Jesus commands us to hold our position in His family higher than our own human family. This does not mean that we are commanded to neglect or mistreat our human family. Paul warns against this imbalance in his extended teaching on widows indeed. (1 Timothy 5:8)

Scripture consistently teaches that God has instituted civil government, one of at least three essential foundations of a God-honoring society; 1) Civil government, 2) the family, and 3) the church. While no individual or collective group in any of these three categories will ever perfectly live up to God's commandments and examples in Scripture, He nonetheless remains the author and commander of all three.

Our study passage identifies two specific roles for civil government.

1. **To punish evildoers.** God forbids individuals to take the law into their own hands, but Scripture consistently teaches that the punishment of evildoers is a legitimate role of civil government, including

the death penalty for certain heinous crimes.

2. **To praise or to encourage well-doing.** A wise civil government will foster right thinking and right doing as strongly as it should punish criminals.

Paul corroborates the divine institution and purpose of civil government.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. (Romans 13:1-7 KJVP)

What functions do we find for civil government in this passage?

1. **Civil rulers should so rule as to make their governance a "...terror to the evil."** He is to "...execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Occasionally some folks will try to wrest this passage into a description of the gospel ministry. Read the full passage. Where in Scripture is the preacher of the gospel described as bearing the sword or using a sword to enforce his sermons? No, this passage does not present symbols, but rather literal moral truths. Godly believers

are commanded to live in subjection to civil government "...for conscience sake."

2. **Godly believers are commanded to pay taxes as assessed by the civil government under which they live.** In recent years, I've known a few people who tried to rationalize that Scripture doesn't require them to pay their taxes. Such an idea is pure fantasy. Jesus provided the coin and commanded Peter to pay taxes to Rome. (Matthew 22:21; Luke 20:25) During a conversation with a man who tried to rationalize not paying taxes, the man said that he was not obligated to pay taxes because the government uses tax money to pay for things that were against his moral convictions. Do we think for a moment that ancient Rome complied with Jesus' conscience in all the things it funded with its taxes, including the coin that Jesus gave Peter for His taxes? God commands us to pay our taxes. He holds those in government accountable for how they use the money. Their abuse of their position or their sinful use of tax revenues does not excuse the Christian from paying his taxes.

For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Throughout history, wicked people, sometimes wicked people in high authority, have maligned Christians. It is believed that Nero set fire to Rome and blamed the Christians in the city for the event. Peter reminds us of a central truth to our faith. Despite whatever wicked people may say, the hard evidence of our lives should prove our integrity, so that anyone who falsely charges us appears to be foolish because of the preponderant evidence of our godly conduct.

When the Jews falsely accused Jesus, the local Roman governor gave his official judgment of Jesus.

Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. (Luke 23:4 KJVP)

Eventually Pilate reluctantly allowed Jesus to be crucified, but his official judgment speaks volumes as to Jesus' conduct. Should His followers be satisfied to live according to a lesser rule?

One of my favorite ancient writing appears below. It describes the lifestyle of second century Christians in surprising detail. Some of its points could have been written in our present wicked culture. I urge each of us to print this brief description and keep it close to us at all times. May we live up to this noble description of "Those Christians."

"Those Christians"

From a letter believed to have been written by an anonymous Christian apologist to Diognetus, a Roman government official, probably in the second century.

For Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language or customs; you see, they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect, or have some peculiar lifestyle.

This teaching of theirs has not been contrived by the invention and speculation of inquisitive men; nor are they propagating mere human teaching as some people do. They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food and other aspects of life. But at the same time, they demonstrate to us the wonderful and certainly unusual form of their own citizenship.

They live in their own native lands, but as aliens; as citizens, they share all things with others; but like aliens, suffer all things. Every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country.

They marry and have children just like every one else; but they do not kill unwanted babies. They offer a shared table, but not a shared bed. They are at present 'in the flesh' but they do not live 'according to the flesh'. They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the appointed laws, and go beyond the laws in their own lives.

They love every one, but are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things. They are dishonoured and yet gain glory through dishonour.

Their names are blackened and yet they are cleared. They are mocked and bless in return. They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when punished, they rejoice as if being given new life. They are attacked by Jews as aliens, and are persecuted by Greeks; yet those who hate them cannot give any reason for their hostility.

To put it simply – the soul is to the body as Christians are to the world. The soul is spread through all parts of the body and Christians through all the cities of the world. The soul is in the body but is not of the body; Christians are in the world but not of the world.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor