

On the Altar: Submit to Authority

(Romans 13:1-7)

I. Introduction

- A. David Lipscomb was prominent voice in C of C during and after Civil War.
 - 1. He stridently opposed the war and discouraged all Christians from entering
 - 2. Lipscomb oppose all participation in government (*sole purpose was war*)
 - a. Christians aren't to serve in military, police, run for office or even vote
 - 1) He saw all government as rebellion against God's rule (**1 Sam 8**)
 - 2) He saw all government focused on use & abuse of power (**Mt 20:24**)
 - b. Lipscomb had what Richard Hughes calls an “*apocalyptic worldview*”
 - 1) Kingdom of God was advancing; it was opposed by kingdom of men
 - 2) Lipscomb denied we can be citizens of 2 kingdoms. *We must choose*
 - c. Lipscomb's view came to be dominant view in C-of-C in the south.
- B. James Abram Garfield was C-of-C preacher contemporary with Lipscomb
 - 1. When the Civil War broke out, he was made a colonel in Union army
 - a. He recruited 250 students of Hiram College (*a preacher training school*)
 - b. He won victories in Kentucky and later fought at Battle of Shiloh
 - c. Also at Shiloh (*for South*) was T.B. Larimore (*became prominent leader*)
 - 2. After war, Garfield went into politics, serving in House of Representatives
 - a. Garfield was elected 20th president of US (*only elected while in House*)
 - b. Garfield saw politics as an extension of faith and a blessing from God
 - 3. So Garfield's view on Christian & government differed from Lipscomb!
- C. So who was right? What is the Christian's relationship to the government?
 - 1. Should we avoid all contact like Lipscomb or be president like Garfield?
 - a. Jesus said, “*Give to Caesar things that are Caesar's*” What is Caesar's?
 - b. Does that mean I can vote? Or must vote? Or must vote a certain way?
 - 2. Paul talks about disciples and government in context of Christian living
 - a. We've been looking at what it means to be “*On the Altar*” (**Rom 12:1-2**)
 - b. He discusses spiritual gifts and Christian love... then the government.
 - 3. Let's see what Paul says on gospel and government (**Read: Rom 13:1-7**)

II. The Christian and the Government (Romans 13:1-7)

- A. **First**, to submit to our government is to submit to God (**Rom 13:1-2**)
1. No surprise Paul mentions government— he is writing to church in Rome
 - a. What is surprising, “*authorities that exist have been established by God*”
 - b. The governing authority over Rome as Paul wrote was Nero Caesar.
 - 1) This was the same Nero who would begin the policy of persecution.
 - 2) Though personally corrupt, Nero represented authority from God
 2. How can that be? Because God is the authority behind all authority!
 - a. God reigns as king over all the earth and over all nations (**Psa 47:7-9**)
 - b. God puts kings on their thrones and deposes them (**Dan 2:20-21**)
 - 1) That is so clearly seen in OT because we have a divine narrator
 - 2) Is there reason to believe God got out of king-making-n-breaking?
 3. **Point:** Authority of governments come from the authority of God
 - a. For Christians to rebel against the authority is to rebel against God
 - b. To respect God’s authority is to obey the authority He places over us
 - 1) But what if the government corrupt and oppressive? Like Nero?
 - 2) When do we rebel against rulers (like *Declaration of Independence*)
 - 3) No revolution (*including our own*) will find its authority in Paul!
 - c. In case you think this is just a Paul thing, notice Peter (**1 Peter 2:13-17**)
 4. Paul and Peter don’t really make much of an **issue** of the issues of the day.
 - a. For example, Paul and Peter have nothing to say against slavery
 - 1) Slaves are to submit to the master (**Eph 6:5-8, Col 3:22, 1 Tim 6:1-2**)
 - 2) If slaves are mistreated and suffer, they are like Jesus (**1 Pet 2:21**)
 - b. Paul and Peter were concerned with the spread of gospel in their culture.
 - 1) To take on these ills of culture would have overshadowed the gospel
 - 2) We have the freedom to participate that Paul and Peter did not.
 - c. But the more we focus on politics, the more the gospel can be obscured
 5. **Point:** Human government gets its authority from God Himself
 - a. We show acceptance of God’s rule by accepting those who rule over us.
 - b. They don’t have to be particularly good rulers. *Nero certainly wasn’t!*

B. **Second**, government is God's instrument of wrath to punish evil (**13:3-5**)

1. Paul's basic rule— you don't have to fear rulers if you do what is good
 - a. What do YOU do when you're driving along and pass a policeman?
 - 1) Immediately take your foot off accelerator? Hit brakes? Scream?
 - 2) Why that reaction? Because at some point you weren't doing good!
 - b. **General Rule**: Do right = nothing to fear (*exception during persecution*)
 - c. Peter points to the exception, but also to the general rule (**1 Pet 3:13**)
2. **Note**: Government does what Christians are expressly forbidden to do
 - a. Paul ends **Rom 12** forbidding vengeance, "room for God's wrath" (**v 19**)
 - b. Not just end-time. The government executes God's wrath on evildoers.
 - c. That is why we pay taxes—authorities are full time servants (**Rom 13:6**)
 - 1) The word for "servant" in **verse 4** is διάκονος (word for "deacon")
 - 2) "Servant" in **verse 6** is λειτουργός, as "liturgical" or priest (**Heb 8:2**)
 - d. The president, parliament and policeman are God's priest for good!
3. So is the only thing that the government does is about wrath or war?
 - a. That's what Lipscomb thought—governments are 100% about war
 - b. But Paul says that the king is "God's servant to do you good" (**13:4**)
 - 1) Homeland security and fighting crime are good. *Is that only good?*
 - 2) Does government have a role in caring for poor or doing other good?
4. **Point**: When government does what supposed to do— it is doing good!

C. **Third**, we are to give our government and officials what we owe (**Rom 13:7**)

1. What do we owe? Taxes are hard, but he also says "respect and honor."
 - a. We need to respect our policeman, our warriors and government leaders
 - b. Is that because they deserve it? No, it's because God deserves it!
2. There is a good chance we will elect a president some of us won't like!
 - a. Whoever he or she may be—you need to respect and honor them
 - 1) You don't have to agree, support their policies or vote for re-election
 - 2) You have the right to openly criticize (*a right Paul didn't imagine*)
 - b. If you follow God over kings, you have no right to disrespect the king

III. Conclusion

- A. What is our responsibility to our government. Paul is plain here--
 - 1. Someone has summed it up with three words—OBEY, PAY and PRAY
 - a. Here Paul mentions the OBEY and PAY (submission and taxes)
 - b. In writing to Timothy in Ephesus, the emphasis is PRAY (1 Tim 2:1-2)
 - 2. The NT focus is always on the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of men
 - a. There is a fundamental difference in those kingdoms (Matt 20:25-28)
 - 1) Rules of the Gentiles (nations) rule by power and force (wrath)
 - 2) That is not the kingdom of God—it is about service and a cross
 - b. Lipscomb was right; there's fundamental tension between kingdoms
 - c. Garfield was right in that God can use his people for good in BOTH
 - 3. *So do we do?* Avoid government and politics? Get involved in the process?
- B. Both choices are legitimate. The church needs both the prophet and the priest.
 - 1. Some (*Lipscomb*) are prophetic voices standing outside kingdom of men
 - a. We need voices among us warning against militarism & nationalism
 - 1) We need prophets calling us to beat our swords into plowshares?
 - 2) We need to hear that brotherhood transcends nationalism/patriotism
 - 3) We need to be reminded that power corrupts and absolute power...
 - b. Those voices are more clear if not blunted by politics (*Mother Theresa*)
 - c. Pacifists can serve God **alongside** those who serve country (*Calvert Ross*)
 - 2. Some (Garfield) will decide to serve (priest) God within kingdom of man
 - a. They will feel called to bring kingdom values to politics/government
 - b. If government is God's servants for good, can't Christians do it better?
 - 1) Who better to administer justice than one following God of justice?
 - 2) Who better to make our laws than those we accept God as Lawgiver?
- C. Church needs both the Lipscomb's and Garfield's among us on the altar
 - 1. We'll spend some time this evening discussing some implications of this
 - 2. **Note:** Lipscomb & Garfield may get along easier with God than each other!
 - 3. Have you accepted God's rule/authority in your life? Will you trust & obey