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Introduction

I realize this is quite a lengthy study of these few verses which deal with civil authority: Romans 13:1-5. I procrastinated doing this study because of the length. Yet as I searched it out, I found at probable reason it is so misunderstood today is because few will spend the time to do a thorough study to find out what Paul is talking about. (Tim. 2:15.)

I procrastinated, that is, until three people in a row confronted me with Romans 13 to justify unbiblical submission to civil authority. One even went so far as to say civil government defines what is good and evil, which is a logical modern conclusion of Romans 13. I must give one of the men credit for his consistent stand, though unbiblical.

In searching other authors, I found the treatment herein consistent with the past treatment of this passage from the very earliest of church history, *Anti-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers*, as well as more modern authors, Parker, Barnes', &c. Only our present day Antichrist, Antinomian attitude of "Christianity" finds such heresy as "civil government defines good and evil."

This pastor urges the reader to thoroughly check the Scriptures and their contexts used in the following treatise. Ignoring the context of a passage leads to an abundance of difficulty and misunderstanding.

Furthermore, note that the following does not address the most unique situation of all history: The foundation of our country. Observing the situation in England, our nation's fathers attempted to install safe-guards against similar situations taking place again. Thus to guard against oppressive civil authority, the *Declaration of Independence* says in part:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Notice what the Declaration of Independence not only permits but encourages the people of these united States to do when the government over them becomes destructive to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We must keep "liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in the context of the founding fathers, for both were in terms of the Biblical Christian faith. In other words, "liberty" was not liberty to serve the world, flesh and the devil, but was to serve God according to the gospel of Christ. "Pursuit of happiness" was not "do your own thing," but pursuit of happiness that conformed with the Word of God.

Nor does the following study take into consideration the fact that civil government today, as a whole, is failing to carry out its original purpose: to protect the life, liberty and private property of those who seek to do good and follow after godliness. Rather, far too often, it offers protection to those seeking to undermine everything this independent republic was founded upon; it seems far more interested in "protecting the rights" of those who desire to do evil (good and evil defined by God's Word). Because Americans — Christians particularly — have been asleep in the lap of ease and luxury, civil government and institutions of all kinds have quietly usurped ungodly control they were never meant to have, just as the Lord God promised would happen. (Mt 5:13.) One does not have to read many newspapers nor set in many courtrooms to soon discover that present day civil government has betrayed and is betraying the trust given it by our founding fathers. But, as we will see, it is the American people who have betrayed the trust given to them by the found-

ing fathers. The American people complain against the central government betraying its trust, yet they have no concern that they have betrayed the trust passed down to them by the godly Christian fathers of this nation.

The American War for Independence was fought to preserve the liberties granted by the Crown by feudal contracts. Because of the breach those contracts, the colonies declared them null and void. Religion was a fundamental cause of the American War for Independence, and the religious (Biblical) nature of the states' original charters is evident by reading them. The various states' constitutions retained their Biblical nature until recently.

As Christians, we must keep our priorities straight. Our primary and foremost goal must be freedom to serve God and to do right. This pastor is firmly convinced that if those who claim Christ will exercise what freedom they have left and obediently and humbly serve God with joy and gladness and with all their heart, soul and might, God will increase freedom; but with freedom comes godly responsibility.

The problem is not that we have lost and continue to lose our freedoms; the problem is that Christians have ignored their godly responsibilities and misused their God-given freedom, consuming it upon their own lusts. (Jam. 4:3.) They have lost their determination to have Christ rule over them as their King, (1 Sam. 8) as everyone now does what is right in his own eyes.

Obviously, the original War for Independence contained many "self serving" individuals, but the foundation of that war was for freedom to obey God. As professed Christians lived and acted under the authority of God's Word, God even raised up pagans to help obedient Christians secure the freedom to serve Him. Moreover, God gave men His understanding and wisdom (according to His Word) to stand against tyranny in a manner consistent with His Law-Word. This writer does not believe that, generally, tyranny can be righteously resisted in our present religious climate, a climate that denies the validity of God's total Law-Word over every thought and action.

Here is an interesting statement quote from a local newspaper editorial, "Lack of ethics:"

Contrary to what President Clinton and his advisers seem to think, the campaign finance system is not to blame for the current White House fund-raising scandal.

The revelations of recent days point to a much more troublesome cause - a lack of ethical principles in the highest levels of government. ...

No law in the world can make people act with integrity. No amount of reform can give politicians the sense to recognize unseemly behavior.

The scandal swirling around the White House is an ugly symptom of what's wrong with the entire country. We have witnessed a dumbing down of our moral code that allows politicians to shrug off questions with a new excuse: "My lawyer said it was OK." In the old days, it was "The Devil made me do it."

Just because conduct falls within the law doesn't make it OK. The law is no substitute for the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule or that little voice inside the head.

We can change the campaign finance system all we want, but it won't solve the underlying problem. To do that will require a change of heart.¹

Though not clearly calling for a religious, Biblical revival, this "secular" newspaper recognized what multitudes of average citizens refuse to admit: The problem is a theological, religious problem on the local level, not a federal problem thousands of miles away. The problem is a "Christian" problem, for when Christians refuse to glorify God as God over everything, then the Lord God exalts an ungodly state. (Mat. 5:13; Rom. 1:21; Ezk. chps 8, 20, &c.) Though godly men must be involved in politics, for politics is a part of doing *all things* for the glory of God, (1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 10:5) the answer is not political; it is religious. The answer is the people of God again glorifying God as God over everything as the founding fathers did 400 years ago.

1. *The Indianapolis Star*, March 16, 1997. Nor will the current fascination with "Character Training" courses change the heart. Only Christ can change the heart, and give direction in these troubled days. Any other hope is a false religion.

Thus those who refuse to glorify God with their children (*e.g.*, antichristian education [state] over Christian education), those who refuse to glorify God in their giving (*e.g.*, tithing to godly institutions seeking to advance the Kingdom of God on earth), those who refuse to submit to godly authority (*e.g.*, a local, Christ honoring church), those who refuse to get involved in serving the legitimate needs in their local communities (*e.g.*, meeting the legitimate social needs of people), those who refuse to glorify God as God have no Biblical foundation to stand against *wickedness in high places*. (Ep 6:12.) God dogmatically promised to exalt the ungodly oppressors over those who are in rebellion against Him. Accordingly, rebellion against ungodly men in authority by those under that authority who are in rebellion against God is surely rebellion against God, for He exalts the ungodly over the godly in judgment for their sins against Him. (Je 25:9; 27:6; 43:10; Mat. 5:13, &c.)

This writer's personal experience has generally been that those most vociferous against oppression from high places many times have given the children God has entrusted to their care over to the state's antichrist schools, they refuse to tithe, they refuse to get involved in local social issues and they refuse to submit to godly authority in a local church (assuming, of course, that the church is Christ honoring).

The Word of God is quite clear: Oppressive rulers are an unavoidable result of the general population forsaking the *law of the Lord*. (1 Sam. 8.) Therefore, there can be no ease from oppression until the oppressed people generally exalt the Lord again as their rightful King, recognizing His Law-Word as their law for every area of life and thought. There are no short cuts.

During the height of the persecutions, early Christians recognized the truth that even the ungodly are exalted by God. We find the following statement by IRENAEUS AGAINST HERESIES (A.D. 120-202. Irenaeus was Polycarp's student, who was St. John's student):

CHAP. XXIV. - OF THE CONSTANT FALSEHOOD OF THE DEVIL, AND OF THE POWERS AND GOVERNMENTS OF THE WORLD, WHICH WE OUGHT TO OBEY, INASMUCH AS THEY ARE APPOINTED OF GOD, NOT OF THE DEVIL.

4. Just as if any one, being an apostle, and seizing in a hostile manner another man's territory, should harass the inhabitants of it, in order that he might claim for himself the glory of a king among those ignorant of his apostasy and robbery; so likewise also the devil, being one among those angels who are placed over the spirit of the air, as the Apostle Paul has declared in his Epistle to the Ephesians, [FN, Eph ii. 2.] becoming envious of man, was rendered an apostate from the divine law: for envy is a thing foreign to God. And as his apostasy was exposed by man, and man became the [means of] searching out his thoughts (*et examinatio sententiae ejus, homo factus est*), he has set himself to this with greater and greater determination, in opposition to man, envying his life, and wishing to involve him in his own apostate power. The Word of God, however, the Maker of all things, conquering him by means of human nature, and showing him to be an apostate, has, on the contrary, put him under the power of man. For He says, "Behold, I confer upon you the power of treading upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy," in order that, as he obtained dominion over man by apostasy, so again his apostasy might be deprived of power by means of man turning back again to God."¹

Failing to claim his authority over the wicked one, the enemy has usurped the Christian's place of authority in society. The victory over the world, flesh and the devil was clearly confirmed by the Saviour upon the cross and by the empty tomb. Accordingly, the Christian has no one to blame but himself for the wicked's exaltation to places of oppressive authority. Moreover, the Lord Jesus Himself promised that when His people fail to exercise their Christian duty, they will be oppressed under the feet of the ungodly. (Mat. 5:13.) As Irenaeus said, it is a "falsehood of the devil" that says and believes that the oppressive men are appointed by the devil and not by the Lord God.

We should note that in Hebrews 10:26-39, the Lord Himself calls for fearful judgment and fiery indignation against His people when they depart from His Law-Word as delivered through Moses.

1. *The Anti-Nicene Fathers, The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, I.552-553. WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY, Grand Rapids, Michigan.)

The *vengeance* of the Lord God is against His people, and throughout history, He has used oppressive pagans to extract that *vengeance*.

Let me close this introduction with a quote from King Agrippa's speech as he tried to persuade the Jews not to revolt against Rome.

Had I perceived that you were all zealously disposed to go to war with the Romans, and that the purer and more sincere part of the people did not propose to live in peace, I had not come out to you, nor been so bold as to give you counsel; for all discourses that tend to persuade men to do what they ought to do is superfluous, when the hearers are agreed to do the contrary.¹

How right he was. Men who are persuaded they are right will not be changed regardless of what arguments are used. To those people, the following will be of little or no use any more than was King Agrippa's warning to the Jews.

The purpose of the following long study is to give both Scriptural and historical insight into Paul's words in Romans 13. However, this pastor offers no easy answer for "Where the Line is Drawn." In fact, the more one studies both the Biblical and historical contexts of Paul's words, the more uncertain the answers.

Thus, the final answer for "Where the Line is Drawn" must be with the individual, for each person will answer to his or her own master.

May God give us light and direction in this day of mass confusion and darkness, and see fit to use the following for His glory.

1. *Wars*, Book II, ch XVI.4. Agrippa's complete speech is reproduced and commented on in Appendix B.

Chapter I

America

To properly deal with Romans chapter 13, we need to use the Lord's dealings with the Old Testament nation of Israel. No doubt, those who war against God by desiring freedom from the bands and cords of His Law (Ps. 2) will say, "That was Old Testament Israel, so the Lord's dealings with that nation no longer apply." The purpose of this chapter is to prove that God's dealings with Old Testament Israel are *ensamples* for those this side of Christ. (1 Cor. 10:11.)

Any Nation

Israel was not unique in God's order, as explained by His Word. Any group of people can dwell safely, with God's blessings, in the land in which they find themselves:

herefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. (Lev. 25:18, 19.)

The promise is that if a nation will keep and do God's **statutes** and **judgments**, it will dwell safely in its own land. Conversely, departure from God's Word turns the nation that once dwelt safely over to the pagans.

Blessed [is] the nation [goy] whose God [is] the LORD; [and] the people [whom] he hath chosen for his own inheritance. (Ps. 33:12. See also, Ps. 144:15 and Deut. 28:15ff.)

Psalms 33:12 makes the promise of Leviticus 25:18, *dwell therein in safety*, available to any nation establishing itself upon the foundation of God's Word: *do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them*. Neither race nor strength has anything to do with being established safely in a land. Violation of God's **statutes** and **judgments** causes any nation founded upon them to no longer dwell safely in a land.

According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*:

The term *goy* is used especially to refer to specifically defined political, ethnic or territorial groups of people without intending to ascribe a specific religious or moral connotation. Thus, in Gen 10:5 the writer speaks of defined groups of people according to their territories...

The term (*goyim*) is used in a number of specific ways. When a number of specific nations are referred to, it is this plural form that is used and the translators have rendered it as "nations" (Gen 10:31; Jud 2:23; Isa 61:11) or as "people" (Zech 12:3, KJV)...

Once the descendants of Abraham had become a distinct, recognized, political, and ethnic group of people who were in a specific covenant relationship with Yahweh, the term *goy* and *goyim* increasingly takes the meaning of "gentiles" or "heathen," in reference to the non-covenant, non-believing peoples considered as national groups....

It must not be concluded from the fact that the surrounding nations, the *goyim*, although referred to as gentiles and heathens, are to be considered *per se* as helplessly lost, without God and hope. Rather, they are eventually to participate in all the blessings God promised to give to Abraham and his progeny upon conditions of faith....¹

Thus any nation established upon God's **statutes** and **judgments** is heir to the blessings of God promised in Psalms 33:12, &c. On the other hand, when that nation turns its back upon them, it forfeits its safety in the land. In fact, God uses heathen nations to punish those who are unfaithful to their foundational covenant with Himself:

...In the mean time God will use the nations to punish his unfaithful covenant people (Jer. 4:7; Hab. 1:5ff.); on the other hand they will some day contribute to the glory of Israel (Isa. 11:10; 42:6)...²

Just as sure as God moved His servant, *Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon*, against His people in Palestine (Jer. 25:19, &c.), God is moving foreign national troops, e.g., German and Russian, into His place of

1. *TWOT*, #326e.

2. *Ibid.* The latter day Israel of God consists of all who are in Christ by grace through faith, Gal. 6:16.

judgment against America's anti-Biblical, Antinomian "Christianity." "Christian" groups that profess to love God (e.g., "Promise Keepers," "Dobsonites," "Gothardites," &c.) continue to multiply, and televangelists continue to rake in the money to "convert the world and feed the hungry," yet civil oppression increases, taxes continue to rise and foreign troops enlarge their presence on American soil. Clearly, what is being promoted as Christianity is not Biblical Christianity, or American Christians would not be on the verge of losing every benefit they inherited from their Christian fathers, including freedom within their land. (Lev. 25:18, 19.) One of our young ladies' parents live in California: Her father is a self-employed home repair contractor. They are seriously considering moving back here because they cannot underbid the Mexicans in California. Not only are foreign troops now well entrenched on American soil (as American troops have been for years on foreign soil)], but foreign laborers are now doing the work and getting the pay that Americans once did.

America, a Christian Nation

Only the antichristians deny that the founders of America entered into covenant with the Lord God of the Christian Bible.

America was founded upon and by the Christian God, not the god exalted by Judaism, John 8:54; Christ clearly told the Jews that the god they worshiped, which did not point to Himself, was a false god and not the God of Abraham. Thus the Christian God is defined as the One Who can only be approached through the shed blood of His Son, Christ Jesus; thus He is not the Jewish god nor the god worshiped by the majority of "religious" people today, for their god does not require Christ's blood sacrifice for sin. These United States **do not** have a Judeo/Christian heritage; they have a distinctly Biblical Christian heritage, emanating from the desire to spread the gospel of Christ to every creature. Do not let the "PC" crowd rob us of our Biblical Christian heritage.

It was the Christian God Who established America:

The story of Christianity in America is one of the most astonishing chapters in the annals of the world. The events of Providence in reserving and preparing the country of these United States to be the theater of its development and triumph, constitute one of the most remarkable passages of modern history.

This is a Christian nation, first in name, and secondly because of the many and mighty elements of a Pure Christianity which have given it character and shaped its destiny from the beginning. It is pre-eminently the land of the Bible, of the Christian Church, and of the Christian Sabbath. It is the land of great and extensive and oft-repeated revivals of a spiritual religion,—the land of a free conscience and of free speech,—the land of noble charities and of manifold and earnest efforts for the elevation and welfare of the human race. The chief security and glory of the United states of America has been, is now, and will be forever, the prevalence and domination of the Christian Faith.¹

Observe: "these United States" were to be the theater of the development and triumph of the Christian religion, the gospel of Christ, not the Jewish religion. The fathers of America entered into a covenant with the Christian God of the Bible:

We are entered into covenant with [God] for this work. We have taken out a commission. The Lord has given us leave to draw our own articles; we have promised to base our actions on these ends, and we have asked Him for favor and blessing. Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then He has ratified this covenant and sealed our commission, and will expect strict performance of the articles contained in it. But if we neglect to observe these articles, which are the ends we have propounded, and—dissembling with our God—shall embrace this present world and prosecute our carnal intentions, seeking great things for ourselves and our posterity, the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us and be revenged of such perjured people, and He will make us know the price of the breach of such a covenant. (Written by John Winthrop, 1588-1649,

1. Morris, *Character*, Introduction, p. II.

aboard the flagship *Arabella*. This document spells out what happens to a people when they forsake their covenant with God. Our nation needs to heed its warnings.)¹

The early commitment of this nation, supported by every colony, was to faithfully obey the Law-Word of God, spread the gospel of Christ and advance the kingdom of God on earth. According to F.B. Morris:

Their (the Puritans, ed.) first act was to institute a form of civil government in conformity with the revealed will of God, and under whose benign legislation they were to enjoy all the rights and privileges of civil and religious freedom. The form of government was instituted in the cabin of the *Mayflower*, before they landed on Plymouth Rock, and signed and ratified under the solemnity of prayer and the most sacred sanctions of the Christian religion. The charter of a godly government is as follows:—

“In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, defender of the faith, &c., having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony of the northern part of Virginia, do, by these present, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof, we have hereunto subscribed our names, at Cape Cod, the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth, Anno Domini 1620.”²

The fathers of these united States — gathering in a large barn, June 4th, 1639, at Quinipiak, now New Haven — laid a foundation for America that would today cause antinomian “Christians” to riot in the streets (we suggest that they go somewhere else and form their own country rather than steal the one already established; but, of course, they already have stolen this one—actually, Christians gave them this one by default):

“Forasmuch as it hath pleased the Almighty God, by wise disposition of his divine providence, so to order and dispose of things that we, the inhabitants of Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield, are now cohabiting and dwelling in and upon the river of Connecticut, and the lands thereunto adjoining, and well knowing where a people are gathered together the word of God requireth that, to maintain the peace and union of such a people, there should be an orderly and decent government established according to God, to order and dispose of the affairs of the people at all seasons as occasion should require; do, therefore, associate and conjoin ourselves to be as one public STATE or COMMONWEALTH, and do enter into combination and confederation to maintain and preserve the liberty and purity of the gospel of our LORD JESUS, which we now profess, as also the discipline of the churches, which, according to the truth of said gospel, is now practiced amongst us; as also in our civil affairs to be guided and governed according to such laws, rules, and orders, and decrees as shall be made.

“I. That the Scriptures hold forth a perfect rule for the direction and government of all men in all duties which they are to perform to God and to men, as well in families and commonwealths as in matters of the church.

“II. That as in matters which concern the gathering and ordering of a church, so likewise in all public offices which concern civil order,—as the choice of magistrates and officers, making and repealing laws, dividing allotments of inheritance, and all things of like nature,—they would all be governed by those rules which the Scripture held forth to them. ...

The General Court, established under this constitution, ordered,—

“That God’s word should be the only rule for ordering the affairs of government in this commonwealth.”³

1. DeMar, *God and Government*, III.xi. John Winthrop was a founder of the Massachusetts Bay Company, and was often elected the Massachusetts colony’s governor. He had the greatest influence in shaping the settlement into a Bible Commonwealth.

2. *Christian Character*, 52. King James of the KJV Bible, ed.

Every foundational document of every commonwealth of these United States followed the same theme as presented above. In Exodus 19:8; 24:3, 7, the Hebrews at the mount said, “All the words which the Lord hath said will we do.” (Compare Jn. 14:15 with Ac. 7:30-38: It was Jesus Christ Who spoke to the Hebrews at the foot of the mount.) They, accordingly, agreed to do the Law of God as revealed through Moses. America’s founding fathers, with no thought of whether or not they were descendants of the Hebrews of old, said, “All the words of the Law of God we will do.” The founding fathers of these united States of America entered into a covenant with the Christian God of both the Old and New Testaments (it was not with the Jewish, Hindu nor Mormon, &c., god); they promised to base the laws and actions of their new nation upon Holy Scripture; they promised the Christian God that if He prospered them, they would render strict obedience to His Word; they made it clear that if the nation they founded departed from the covenant they made with the Christian God, that **God’s wrath and vengeance** would be upon the faithless people for breaching their covenant. America’s founding fathers’ agreement with the Lord God placed the following generations of Americans within the covenant-conditions of possessing *the land* that have stood since Abraham. (Lev. 25:18.)

Restoration

Clearly, the original covenant was not between the civil authority and the people under that authority; the covenant was between the people and the Christian God of the Bible Who established their nation. We must all admit that the covenant has been broken, but which covenant? Those looking and hoping for political solutions requiring no repentance and obedience to God’s Word (even antinomian Christians) say the covenant that is broken is between the civil government in Washington, DC, and the people, *i.e.*, the Constitution. However, those of us who believe God’s Word know the covenant that is broken is the one between the people and the Christian God: The people, even before the civil government was established, promised to render strict obedience to God’s Word, and the people agreed to God’s righteous vengeance if they or their children departed from that covenant.

Thus there can be no hope of restoring America to its former glory apart from the restoration of the original covenant between the people and the Christian God of the entire Bible. Without that restoration, the future only holds more foreign troops, more job loss to foreigners and even more violent “acts of nature.” The original men in the covenant agreed to God’s righteous vengeance when they entered into the covenant with the Christian God over nature.

Knowing full well what they were doing, America’s founding fathers clearly turned over the following generations of Americans to wicked civil authorities and foreign powers IF those generations departed from the Law of the Lord.

Chapter II

History

Having established the fact that God’s dealings with Old Testament Israel are according to His Law-Word, and are typical of His dealings with nations throughout history, we will now consider the *ensamples* given for us on this side of Christ. The following *ensamples* contain important promises and workings by the Lord God concerning His people, Israel, that must be considered to properly understand Romans thirteen.

The New Testament age was exceedingly corrupt, maybe even more so than we see in our day.¹ The corruption was reflected in every area, not the least of which were religious and civil governments, not to mention family government. Confiscatory taxes upon the average person were com-

3. *Ibid*, 66-68.

1. See *Ludwig’s Handbook*.

mon—everything imaginable was taxed—with the worse sort of penalty for not paying the taxes (family sold into slavery, and imprisonment until paid, *e.g.*, Mat. 18:21ff.). Civil authorities seemed to have one major overriding goal—to enrich themselves and their friends. The parallel between “Bible” times and modern times are obvious.

Midst all the modern abuse of authority and misuse of funds, we hear many answers to the problem. Among those answers frequently offered is protest in one form or another, even violent, against the abusive authority and the misuse of “public” funds.

The Word of God gives the basic cause of corrupt authority which has the power to force compliance. The corrupt authorities are the thorns and thistles that come from a corrupt root. Certainly, the thorns hurt those who come into contact with them, but what is to be expected of a thorn tree? No matter how much one protests and resists the cutting thorns, they are the natural fruit of the thorn tree. Until the root cause of the thorn is corrected, the thorn cannot be changed. (Mat. 7:16-20.) Efforts to change the unjust and corrupt use of power by those in authority without dealing with the corrupt roots are useless.

God’s Word gives both the cause of and the answer to the abuses of power that prevail in corrupt societies. And only God’s method will work. All other methods are wasted money and effort; they are apostasy and rebellion against God, regardless of the sincerity of those promoting the answers outside of God’s Word.

The laws governing God’s workings in history are established and well illustrated in the Old Testament law and prophets. It is impossible to have a never changing God as revealed in Christ apart from both Old and New Testaments. (Jn. 5:45-47.) All society moves in terms of the revealed truth of God’s Law-Word. (Rom. 2.) God’s law moves in either judgment against sin or blessing for obedience, and the results of neither can be avoided. (Deut. 28:2, 15.) Among the primary teachings of God’s Word is that God gives leaders who reflect the heart of the people, either godly or ungodly. (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:12-15; 6:19; 8:7-12; 9:13-15, &c.) Look around! Obviously, the corrupt leaders we have in office today reflect the attitudes of the people in general, *e.g.*, There is no conscience concerning fornication and adultery among the general population, yet we expect the leaders to rise above compromise and immorality.

Undoubtedly the central passage that reveals the truth of God’s workings concerning corruption in the civil government, its cause and the answer is 1 Samuel chapter eight. Samuel had appointed his sons to help him judge the nation. They judged in Beersheba, which was located on the southern most border of Israel next to the land of the Philistines. However, the boys were corrupt, taking bribes and perverting judgment. The leaders of the people confronted Samuel over his boys’ evil ways. They came to Samuel with their complaint and with their desire for a king to replace the present system of rule and judgment. However, the elders’ concern was not over the corruption of the boys but over their lack of a *king to judge them like all the nations*.

Thus the problem was not that his boys were corrupt nor that the rule of the judges had been bad: God had delivered Israel from all its adversities through the judges as the people cried unto the Lord and turned from sin. Accordingly, in their desire for a king, or a civil ruler, they rejected of the Lord as their King and Ruler. Their desire for a man (a king) to replace the Word of God as revealed through the judges was a rejection of God, and, in fact, it was service of other gods. (1 Sam. 8:7, 8; 10:18, 19; 12:7-13.)

The Constitution

We have heard the Constitution referred to as America’s king; we commonly hear it referred to as the law of the land as well as several other similar terms. Are not those who refer to the Constitution as the law of the land rejecting the Law of God? Is this not denying King Jesus (His Word) and setting up another king (man’s word)? The source of a society’s laws clearly reveals who is the god of that

society:

Law is in every culture *religious in origin*. Because law governs man and society, because it establishes and declares the meaning of justice and righteousness, law is inescapably religious, in that it establishes in practical fashion the ultimate concern of a culture. Accordingly, a fundamental and necessary premise in any and every study of law must be, *first*, a recognition of this religious nature of law.

Second, it must be recognized that in any culture *the source of the law is the god of that society...*

Third, in any society, any change of law is an explicit or implicit change of religion...

Fourth, no disestablishment of religion as such is possible in society... Since the foundations of law are inescapably religious, no society exists without a religious foundation or without a law-system which codifies the morality of its religion.

Fifth, there can be no tolerance in a law-system for another religion. Toleration is a device used to introduce a new law-system as a prelude to a new intolerance...¹

Accordingly, every law is religious in nature, either reflecting the Command-Word of God or the commands of men—that is to say, the god of a culture establishes the laws of that culture. A Christian culture establishes its laws upon God’s Law-Word. Western Law, which was America’s foundation, was Biblical Law as codified in the time of Justin. (Flavius Ancius Justinianus. AD 483-565; Byzantine emperor [527-565]: known for codifying God’s law, *i.e.*, the Justinian code.) On the other hand, pagan cultures use the commands of men to establish their laws — humanistic, or man-centered laws.

Though the Constitution contains basic Scriptural precepts, it is a man-made document. Those who view it as the final authority for law must, consequently, reject the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He rules through His written Law-Word. Some folks quote from the Constitution, “We the people...,” and thus make “the people” the final authority for the nation. “The People” become the god: *vox populi, vox dei*, the voice of the people is the voice of God. The next step is for elected representatives of the people to come along and say, “We represent the people, and we know what is best for the people. Despite what the people say, this is what is best for them.” And the representatives collectively become the gods, the lawmakers, for “We the people.”

Strangely enough, the Constitution makes no mention of the Lord God of Scriptures as the final Authority. Did the framers of the Constitution reject God’s rule over this nation? Though its purpose may have been to protect the freedom to obey God’s Command-Word, if the Constitution is viewed in the place of the Law of God, how else can it be viewed other than rejecting God? Where is America’s final authority in this land since the Constitution was ratified? Where does God require that we look for our final authority?

Furthermore, let us ask in passing: “When a church writes a Constitution as their final authority, has it not rejected God’s rule?” If the church constitution is not the final authority, then why have it? Remove it, and use God’s total Word as the final authority. Or is His Word incomplete?

Give us a king

And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. (1 Sam. 8:5.)

There would have been nothing wrong with the request IF they had continued, *That he might judge us and lead us according to the law of God.* (Deut. 17:14-20.) It follows, therefore, that the Constitution can be considered a “work of God” as it is viewed with, “That it might lead, protect and encourage us to follow after the commandments of God,” which is a purpose of civil government. If God and His authority are absent from that document, then we have the same thing as the elders’ requested of Samuel, “Give us a king.”

1. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, 1:4, 5.

Problem

The problem with the elders' request was the statement, *to judge us*. (See Hosea 13:9, 10). *Judge*— "To act as law-giver, judge, governor (giving law, deciding controversies and executing law, civil, religious, political, social, both early and late)."¹ Complicating the matter, another statement was added: *like all the nations*.

Their request for *a king to judge* them *displeased* Samuel—he felt they had rejected him. He took the request to the Lord, not defending his corrupt boys as many might try to do. The Lord looks past the elder's excuse (your sons are wicked), and sees the truth of the complaint. Up to this point, the Lord had been deciding their controversies and directing all their social, religious, and political affairs as well as giving them their laws to live by through His judges. (He spoke through the Urim and Thummim, Nu 27:21.) But now in place of the Lord God, they asked for a king to act as their law-giver, judge and governor.

Their desire was not for a king to lead them in following God's Command-Word; rather, they wanted one to go out before them and fight their battles, v. 20. They wanted a human authority to make their decisions for them and give them their laws. They wanted the carnal, visible security a human king could give. They were stoutly warned that with human, carnal security comes slavery. They wanted someone to take their responsibility for them, and they said they were willing to pay the price: God and Samuel protested to them that in exchange for their yielded responsibility to a civil ruler, they would lose individual freedom. Three times, the Lord says that the motive behind their desire for a civil ruler was to replace Him and His law-word. The Word of God spoke clearly! They rejected His authority over them:

In the person of Samuel they rejected the Lord and His rule. They wanted a king, because they imagined that Jehovah their God-King was not able to secure their constant prosperity.²

In modern terms, "The problems we face in society are not a result of what we are. The responsibilities for the problems are not on us as sinners. The problems we are having are because we don't have the right kind of leadership in civil government. If we can get the right kind of leadership in civil government, if we can get the right combination of elected representatives (president, congressmen, governor, state representatives, local councilmen, &c.) into office, then we will have our problems solved. If we can get the right set of man-centered (Humanistic) laws, we will have paradise on earth, and we will not have to repent of our sins against the Holy God." God exposes such ungodly thinking throughout His Law-Word, particularly in 1 Samuel eight. The problems faced by any society are because the people have rejected the Lord as King over them by rejecting His Law-Word. ("The source of law is the god of that society.")

Did the people of Israel want a king, civil authority, in order to release them from the responsibility to follow God's law? Up to the time of this request, they had to repent of the sins that led to their bondage to the heathen. It was through repentance, God raised up judges to lead them to victory. Would the king with his standing army release them (in their minds) of the necessity of living a holy, pure lives? (Why didn't the Constitution reflect more of God's law and authority over America? Because the spiritual temper would not permit that. Why do not churches use the Law of God as their Constitution?)

Upset with the people, Samuel takes his complaint to the Lord. The Lord explains what the people are doing — they are serving other gods. Their idolatry is defined as their refusal to allow the Lord God to tell them how to act politically, socially, religiously, civilly and judicially. They wanted a human instrument to take their responsibility rather than be responsible to the Divine God.

God instructed Samuel to tell them what would happen to them if they proceeded with their rebel-

1. *Brown-Driver-Briggs* (BDB), #1046. >

2. *Keil*, 2:84.

lion against His Law-Word as their guide for every action. (V. 9. *See* 1 Tim. 3:16, 17.) “They want a king. They want another ruler of life rather than My Command-Word. Okay, let them have their human instrument, but tell them what will happen.” We should note here that the results listed by the Word of God cannot be avoided—they are the NATURAL RESULTS of rejecting God’s reign over a society or over the individual. They are as natural as night following day. (Deut. 28:2, 15.) The natural results are easily identified for our day.

In rejecting the Lord’s rule over them and demanding a king, Samuel tells them what will be *the manner of the king that shall reign over them*—the right or prerogatives that the king would claim.¹

There are a couple of significant observations from this passage: First, the many times the words **will** and **shall** are used from v. 11 through v. 17. From their many usages, it is quite evident that what he will take and what he will do will not be according to the will of the people. He will make the unjust claims as his rights, then he will misuse his power given him by the people to enforce his unjust claims. Second, what the unjust king will demand is what God has already demanded. *He will take*, and if the people do not agree with his claim, then they will be the law-breakers, incurring the wrath of the king. Whereas the people gave the king the physical power to forcefully *take*, the Lord God requires voluntary giving. The people refused to glorify God as God (Rom. 1:21) in 1 Samuel eight, so the Lord God allows them to become subjugated to a despotic human ruler.

The following points are the God-ordained, natural results of a people’s rejection of His rule through His Law-Word over them. The results will come to pass whether the people believe God’s Word applies or not: *But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.* (Pr. 8:36. *See also*, Pr. 6:32; Isa. 3:9ff.; Jer. 2:17ff.; Jer. 5:25; Hos. 13:9; 14:1; 2 Ki. 17:7ff., &c.)

He will take

First, *your sons*. The first and second *he will take* are, no doubt, the worst of the six *he will take*. They contain the state’s unjust, wicked claim of ownership of the children “for the good of the state.” The king *will take the sons and daughters*, because the people did not give them to God. They will be taken to support the king in the grandeur he feels he deserves. V. 11 speaks of personal grandeur, his personal whims and desires.

If the parents object to the state’s claim over their children, then they will be law-breakers. The state will claim the children to use for its own purpose, to strengthen its power over the very ones who requested men rule over them instead of God. The children will be trained up in the ways of the state for the benefit of the state. Everything will have a single purpose: to strengthen and secure the state in whatever desire it might have.

Notice the *sons* and *daughters* will not be taken as important people in the king’s administration; rather, they will go as servants and slaves to the king and his friends. They will go to kill and be killed in the king’s army, as the king seeks to keep himself in power.

The king (state) will appoint his officers who will answer only to him. Their major concern will be to the one who appointed them, and not to the people they may be over. Their concern will be to further their own cause, secure their own lucrative position. The officers are there to see that the people support the state, not that the state supports the people. “But, ‘We the people are the king.’” However, has God been replaced with “We the people” as the authority over the individual? Such a heinous thing, replacing God’s authority with the voice of the people, must bring judgment against a society. Only as God is seen as the final Authority and the king (state) is seen as protection to serve God can there be blessings from God. (Rom. 13:4.)

The children belong to God, not to the state nor to the parents. (Ezk. 18:4.) When the people turn

1. *Keil*, 5:9.

from the Lord as their King, the unavoidable natural result is the state claims the children are its own. When the state makes an ungodly claim upon God's children who have been entrusted to us, and they will, we must take our stand. Yet in taking that stand, we must remember that ungodly claim is only a result of the society's rejection of the Lord as King. Though Christians must stand against the state's claim upon our children, the final answer is not standing against that ungodly claim; the final answer is conversion. The general consensus of society must change to a desire to glorify God as God over every area of life and thought.

Another aspect of the departure from the Lord as King is found under the first, *he will take*. V. 12, refers to forced labour both in the domestic area (*ground, harvests*), and in the military (*instruments of war*), all for benefit of the state at the expense of the family. Of course, when a people turn from the Lord as their Protector to themselves as their own protector, it will take an unbelievable amount of military defence spending. (All the military spending, however, will be in vain, Pr. 21:31; Ps. 127:1. The true national defense is *glorifying of God as God* over all areas of thought, word and deed, and then He protects from heaven.)

Second, *your fields*. The people do not say, "My, the poor government! Here, take my property." Rather, the state *will take* private property, and not just any property, but the best, *i.e.*,

[E]minent domain. Law. That superior dominion of the sovereign power over all the property within the state which authorizes it to appropriate all or any part thereof to a necessary public use, reasonable compensation being made. The obligation to give compensation is considered by the best authorities as being incident to the right of eminent domain, and not an imposed limitation. The right of *eminent domain* is usually carefully distinguished from that of *taxation* and the *police power*. In Great Britain the compulsory acquisition of land for public or semipublic purposes is governed by statute, and is called *compulsory purchase* in England; in Scotland the transaction is called a *compulsory surrender*. Some consider an analogous right, wider than angary, to exist in international law for one nation to appropriate the territory or property of another as a necessary measure of self-protection.¹

Rushdoony comments:

Eminent domain is thus an attribute of ultimate sovereignty, and therefore it is an attribute of divinity. According to the Bible, "the earth is the Lord's" (Ps. 24:1), and He therefore has total dominion over it. Because "the earth is the Lord's" God requires the whole world to submit to His law and regards all things as subject to total control, confiscation, or regulation by His sovereign power and word (Ex. 9:29; 19:5; Deut. 10:14; Ps. 50:12; I Cor. 10:26, 28). As God declared to Job, "Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine" (Job 41:11). The premise of the Bible is God's assertion of total sovereignty over all creation and all men. The Mosaic law claimed total sovereignty for God, and the jurisdiction of His law over all persons, Israelite and foreigner, within the boundaries of the nation (Deut. 31:12), but those outside the law of the covenant were not thereby outside God's jurisdiction. The judgment of all the nations is repeatedly proclaimed precisely because God's sovereignty extends over all nations. "Under Scriptural law, all property—the whole earth—belongs to God, who is the only owner of property" (H. B. Clark: *Biblical Law*, no. 128, p. 88, Second edition. Portland, Oregon: Binford and Mort, 1944.) in any ultimate and sovereign sense. Man holds title under God.

In the biblical law, the state has no right of eminent domain, and no right to tax the land. "It was impossible to dispossess men of their inheritance under the law of the Lord as no taxes were levied against land." (Howard B. Rand; *Digest of the Divine Law*, p. 111. Merrimac, Massachusetts: Destiny, 1943. For a summary of biblical land laws, see Roger Sherman Gager: *Old Testament Law for Bible Students*, pp. 94-106. New York: Macmillan, 1922.) The tithe was God's tax, not a gift to God. The state was limited to a tax resembling the tithe, a tax on increase, not on the land itself. (Rand, p. 93f.) God as sovereign confiscated the land when the Israelites became apostate, even as He dispossesses and destroys all peoples for their failure to acknowledge His dominion and sovereignty. The marks of a tyrant and a supplanter of God's kingship over a people was specified as oppressive taxation, and the confiscation of land by eminent domain (I Sam. 8)

1. Merriam-Webster dictionary, Second Edition. Quoted by R.J. Rushdoony in *Politics of Guilt and Pity*, 325.

For the state to claim the right of eminent domain is therefore a claim to *divine right*.¹

Real property, the earth, is not “ownerless.” Either man will recognize God’s Sovereign ownership and his own godly stewardship of the property by, among other things, faithful tithing on the increase, or God will exalt the wicked to claim ownership, *e.g.*, terrible property tax. Note that both the individual’s claim of ownership and the state’s claim of ownership of the earth are illegitimate, for the Lord owns the earth and the fullness thereof. Therefore, how can men who are making an illegitimate claim on the earth complain against the state’s illegitimate claim on the earth?

God clearly spoke through Samuel: When people deny God’s sovereignty over the earth, God will exalt the wicked to make the claim of sovereignty over the earth.

Property Tax

In response to man’s rejection of God’s sovereignty over all creation, God raises up an ungodly state that will claim everything for its own, for its own well-being. It will claim the property not only through *eminent domain*, but through *property tax*. The state that has been exalted by God to claim what the people refuse to give to God cannot be expected to use the confiscated property, property tax, in any way except to strengthen itself; hence, the government education system must be entirely self-serving, to strengthen itself. It would be against such a state’s interest to use the education system to strengthen the family, or to even let the students see the Ten Commandments on the school’s property. On the other hand, if God empowered the state in response to the people’s desire to *glorify him as God*, the state’s education will work to strengthen the family.

The state also lays claim to the harvest. This state, being empowered by God because the people rejected His Kingship, will use the harvest to feed its servants and to strengthen its hold over the populace. In our particular situation in America, the harvest is managed in such a way to strengthen the state, even buying the votes of the “needy.”

This pastor and his family live in the country, surrounded by fields of corn and beans. When we first moved there several years ago, we attempted to visit all the surrounding neighbors. One farmer we visited told of taking the past year’s harvest to market. That harvest had not been as good as normal, being off about 40 bushels an acre in yield. However, after he took his crop to market and he read the official statistics, he found that the Agriculture Department had credited him with a much larger harvest than he actually had. I asked him if the elevator paid him for the harvest he was credited with, and he said, “No.”

The point is that if the state claims the *fields* and *vineyards*, it can be expected to say anything needed to strengthen its hold over the people who refuse to recognize God’s authority over those same *fields* and *vineyards*. Farm policies and land-use policies will be established by the state with one goal in mind—to strengthen the state. In the farmer’s case just cited, the state manipulates the harvest statistics, and, hence, manipulates the price: higher yield reported, lower prices paid to the producer.

He will take clearly speaks of lies, oppression and confiscation, violent if needed, through laws that are enacted for the state’s benefit. Then resistance to the unjust laws makes one a law-breaker and sinner against the “sovereign” state.

Thus we see the confiscation of property without due process of law; we see the state’s claim of prior ownership of all property, which can only be used at the state’s convenience. The individual does not own his property; the state owns it all and permits individuals to use it at the state’s convenience, *e.g.*, “wetland” laws, “public recreation” areas (but the public is forbidden access to the areas), “noise” control over the Grand Canyon, vast tracts of land confiscated in America to be turned over to United Nations’ control, &c.

1. *Ibid*, 325f.

Third, *your seed*. When men refuse to *glorify God as God* over their finances, not only does He exalt wicked rulers to take the children and the property, but the rulers will take a large portion of what the people retained. An unbelievable tax burden will be required by the state to retain its power. Those taxes will confiscate the individual's property; they will require selling the property itself, *your seed*, for payment. *He will take* the taxes. *He will take the tenth of the seed*, claiming the right and authority over even the planting.

The confiscated funds will not be used for the “good of the people,” but used to enrich the king (civil authority) and his friends. Not just any piece of land will be good enough for his friends, but he will take the best. The state will confiscate the funds from its citizens through the misuse of its power. The confiscated, misused funds will finance the “Belt-Way Bandits,” who will make themselves extremely rich with their \$600.00 toilet seats, wrenches and hammers and their million dollar study and consulting contracts. The king (state) will be far more interested in the well-being of his own servants than he will be of his subjects, as he redefines sin in terms of what he says. *He will take*: Everything is for the benefit and security of the king (state), who will meet any threat to his well-being with the most vicious hostility.

Judicial Blindness

Those who are faithful to the king (state) will receive what is confiscated from the citizens, and the king will see no problem with his policy of confiscation. The king (all powerful state) is exalted because the people turned from the God of the Bible. Therefore, God blinds the “king,” so he cannot see what he is doing—he is there in judgment against the people's rejection of the Lord God as their rightful King.

Fourth, *your servants*. Whatever the king (civil ruler) sees that appeases his desire, he will take it. *Your servants* could easily speak of employees. With heavy taxation and regulation (e.g., OSHA), one wonders just who the employee is working for, the “king” or the employer.

Fifth, *your sheep*. He will take even the means of support the individual has. His vicious and many various regulations and his confiscatory laws and regulations make it clear: he does not care whether the individual businessman remains in business or not. The only thing this ruler cares about is his own security and well-being. Everything will be claimed for the good of the king (state).

Today, we see an all-out war against the individual, small businessman. Even in the small rural area where this pastor lives, small, independent farmers are being pinned against the wall by government regulations and taxation (property), and large corporate farms are taking over.

Servants

The most distressing thing is the conclusion the Lord gives to the matter: *and ye shall be his servants*—the people themselves become servants to the ungodly rulers, v. 17. They no longer have freedom to serve the Lord God as required by His Word, but, willingly departing from the Lord's Kingship, they became servants of the civil authority. If men and nations do not make the Lord King, then the Lord will make evil men kings. Either we have freedom under God as the Law-Giver and King or we have slavery and socialism under man as law-giver and king. (Isa. 33:22; Ja. 4:12.) It is impossible to serve two masters. Either man will serve Lord God, his Lawgiver, with joyfulness and gladness, or he will serve oppressive rulers. Israel refused to serve God:

Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee: And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all

things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. (Deut. 28:45-48.)

Either man will *glorify God as God* and serve Him as such, or he will serve fallen men.

The Real Reason

Let us keep in mind that the high confiscatory taxes that are then misused almost totally, are only a result—a thorn tree must bear thorns. When people refuse to *glorify God as God*, God exalts a king (state) who will confiscate the funds by force. The king will consider everything as belonging to him, and will treat it as such.

The strengthened state is not the problem; the problem is that the people strengthened themselves against the God of Scripture.

Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.
(Mat. 22:21, &c.)

The problem is that men refuse to give what belongs to God to God, so God exalts evil men to take from men what they refuse to give to Him.

The Lord God will exalt oppressive rulers when men reject the Lord's rule over them. Those rulers will confiscate whatever they please: people, property and money. Nothing will be beyond the reach of the wicked men who delight in misusing their power for "fun and profit." He will enforce his evil desires through armed might, and confiscate funds at his pleasure to finance his evil desires. We can rest assure that those finances will not be used to glorify God, to establish His Kingdom nor for the benefit of the people. Everything will be used to establish the kingdom of men and to strengthen fallen men's hold over people (oppression).

God's natural laws concerning civil authority are clearly established in 1 Samuel 8. Either men and nations will use their freedom to serve God according to His total Word, or they will be forced to serve those who desire to break the bands and cords of that Word. Civil authority is clearly established by God, (Deut.16:18-20; 17:14-20) and that authority is bound by the bands and cords of God's law. (Ps. 2.) Moreover, it is the people's responsibility to see that godly authority is in place. (Ho. 8.) However, when the general consciences of the people is to be free from the bands and cords of God's Law-Word, sinful rulers will be exalted who will oppress the people. In situations where the people chose their own leaders, their desire to be free from God's Law-Word blinds them, so that rulers fitting Samuel's description will be exalted. (Ja. 1:22.)

God continues on with the result in v. 18. The people do not weary of their sin of rejecting the Lord God as their King; rather, they weary of the works of the oppressive ruler. They cry out to God because of the oppressive, unjust and wicked practices, *and the LORD will not hear you in that day.* They protest against the oppressive ruler's claims over their children, property, money, servants and even over their herds, but their protests go unheeded by the Lord.

Why will the LORD not hear? Because the ruler's unjust practices are only a result of the problem. The problem is that they *rejected* the LORD'S righteous *reign over them* (v. 7; Rom. 1:21); they rejected the Lord as their King over their individual lives, as well as over their social, religious, political, civil and judicial activities.

Not until v. 7 is made right can the rest be made right, and only the Lord God can change the type of ruler that is over the people. (Pr. 21:1.) The unjust demands of wicked rulers, whether through taxes, laws which confiscate property and remove children from their parents, as well as every other imaginable area of oppression, are only the natural result of rejecting Christ's authority over these areas. The results cannot be avoided anymore than darkness can be avoided when light is removed.

Samuel said, "This will happen because you are refusing to let the Lord rule over you." The people said, "We don't care. We want a king over us like all of the heathen nations around us have." Samuel

took the sad news to the Lord, and the Lord said, “Go ahead, and do it.” So Samuel sent the people home, no doubt with a promise that he would find them a king.

Conclusion

First, we hear of the Constitution referred to as the king in America. As a man-made document, if it is so viewed, it displaces the Lord as King. Are we living in and experiencing the results of a decision to replace the Lord as King with a document as king, as we see the civil authority growing more and more oppressive? We are hearing of some mighty strange things in the name of the Constitution, and folks say, “That’s the law.”

Second, what we are experiencing today (nothing being safe from the civil ruler—land, cattle, even children) is only a result of a much deeper problem: the rejection of the Lord as King.

Third, protests of any and every kind are useless without a return by the individual (and society) to the Lord as King and His Word as foundational law. Protest against the unjust practices of the state will do no good; protest to the Lord God about the unjust practices of the state will do no good. The unjust practices, whether in high taxes, misused funds or confiscated children are only the result of the problem.

He Will Take

It is the Word of God Who said this. It is impossible for society to reject King Jesus as Lord and His Word as law, and then avoid the *HE WILL TAKE*. How much clearer could it possibly be? The inconsistent application of God’s Word to life and to the church has a result. That result is *HE WILL TAKE*, and *HE* is the civil authority, the state. When the Lord and His word is reduced to just directions on the road to heaven and how to be more spiritual, oppressive socialism follows closely.

Religious Problem

We have experienced a tremendous shift in the attitude of the American people, a shift from self-sufficiency and freedom to dependence upon the central government for all things. The shift, however, is a religious shift. It is a change in gods, from the Lord God as man’s Lawmaker and Lawgiver to man as his own lawmaker and lawgiver.

Undoubtedly, people desire security. The Lord God provides security, only His security is conditional: As people and nations serve God according to His total Word, He will provide all of their needs. (Ps. 1; Mat. 6.) Only as the self-controlled (through Christ) individual serves God will he have freedom.

Man’s rule promises security, but his security requires slavery. People seem to have lost the ability to see that with all the increased promises of security from men (a “king”), we have a tremendous requirement of servitude. People willingly trade their freedom and responsibility under God for men’s security and slavery.

When God is rejected by a people, oppressive government WILL take over. Socialism is the result of the people looking someplace other than to God and His law for their needs. (Josh. 1:7,8.)

The issue is not a political nor a social issue; the issue is a religious issue:

Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them. (Deut. 7:9-11.)

Chapter III

Taxes

One of the basic premises for understanding any passage of Scripture is to have an insight into the social conditions of the day in which that passage was written. In this chapter, we want to give an overview of the conditions of Christ's and Paul's day, for what they said (Christ, *render unto Caesar*; Paul, *render tribute*) was not said in a vacuum.

Obviously, everyone likes to think the time in which they live is unique. Read Christian authors from any period of history, and each one feels his time is unique in its wickedness. But there is nothing new under the sun, and some of the most common things done by fallen men is to misuse their civil authority and power and to enforce oppressive taxation.

Jewish Taxation

Clearly, what is faced today concerning corruption in high places and oppressive taxation is not unique in history. The following is Dr Edersheim's account of Jewish taxation at the time of our Lord (and of Paul). It is worth reproducing:¹

In such places (houses of public entertainment, ed.) the secret police, whom Herod employed, would ferret out the opinions of the populace while over their cups. That police must have been largely employed. According to Josephus (*Ant.* xv. 10, 4) spies beset the people, alike in town and country, watching their conversations in the unrestrained confidence of friendly intercourse. Herod himself is said to have acted in that capacity, and to have lurked about the streets at night-time in disguise to overhear or entrap unwary citizens. Indeed, at one time the city seems almost to have been under martial law, the citizens being forbidden "to meet together, to walk or eat together,"—presumably to hold public meetings, demonstrations, or banquets. History sufficiently records what terrible vengeance followed the slightest suspicion. The New Testament account of the murder of all the little children at Bethlehem (*Matt.* ii. 16), in hope of destroying among them the royal scion of David, is thoroughly in character with all that we know of Herod and his reign. There is at least indirect confirmation of this narrative in Talmudical writings, as there is evidence that all the genealogical registers in the Temple were destroyed by order of Herod. (*Hamburger, Real Enc. P.* ii. p. 293; *Jost, Gesch. d. Jud.* I. p. 324.) This is a most remarkable fact. The Jews retaliated by an intensity of hatred which went so far as to elevate the day of Herod's death (2 Shebet) into an annual feast-day, on which all mourning was prohibited. (See the *Meg. Taan.* or roll of fasts, xi. I. Compare on this date *Derenbourg, Hist. de Pal.* p. 164, 165; and *Gratz, Gesch. d. F.* iii. pp. 426, 427.)

But whether passing through town or country, by quiet side-roads or along the great highway, there was one sight and scene which must constantly have forced itself upon the attention of the traveller, and, if he were of Jewish descent, would ever awaken afresh his indignation and hatred. Whithersoever he went, he encountered in city or country the well-known foreign tax-gatherer, and was met by his insolence, by his vexatious intrusion, and by his exactions. The fact that he was the symbol of Israel's subjection to foreign domination, galling though it was, had probably not so much to do with the bitter hatred of the Rabbinites towards the class of tax-farmers (*Moches*) and tax-collectors (*Gabbai*), both of whom were placed wholly outside the pale of Jewish society, as that they were so utterly shameless and regardless in their unconscientious dealings. For, ever since their return from Babylon, the Jews must, with a brief interval, have been accustomed to foreign taxation. At the time of Ezra (*Ezra* iv. 13, 20; vii. 24) they paid to the Persian monarch "toll, tribute, and custom"—*middah*, *belo*, and *halach*—or rather "ground-tax" (income and property-tax?), "custom" (levied on all that was for consumption, or imported), and "toll," or road-money. Under the reign of the Ptolemies the taxes seem to have been farmed to the highest bidder, the price varying from eight to sixteen talents—that is, from about £3,140 to about £6,280—a very small sum indeed, which enabled the Palestine tax-farmers to acquire immense wealth, and that although they had continually to purchase arms and court favour. (*Jos. Ant.* xii. 4, I, 3, 4, 5.) During the Syrian rule the taxes seem to have consisted of tribute, duty on salt, a third of the produce of all that was sown, and one-half of that from fruit-

1. Dr. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in The Days of Christ*, 51-58. London: The Religious Tract Society, 56, Paternoster Row; 65, St. Paul's Churchyard; and 164, Piccadilly. Pardon and Son, Printers, Paternoster Row, London. ND, but he dated his *Preface*, 1876.

trees, besides poll-tax, custom duty, and an uncertain kind of tax, called “crown-money” (the *aurum coronarium* of the Romans), originally an annual gift of a crown of gold, but afterwards compounded for in money. (*Ibid*, xii. 3, 3.) Under the Herodians the royal revenue seems to have been derived from crown lands, from a property and income-tax, from import and export duties, and from a duty on all that was publicly sold and bought, to which must be added a tax upon houses in Jerusalem.

Heavily as these exactions must have weighed upon a comparatively poor and chiefly agricultural population, they refer only to civil taxation, *not to religious dues*. (Comp, my *Temple: its Ministry and services at the Time of Jesus Christ*, p. 334.) But, even so, we have not exhausted the list of contributions demanded of a Jew. For, every town and community levied its own taxes for the maintenance of synagogue, elementary schools, public baths, the support of the poor, the maintenance of public roads, city walls, and gates, and other general requirements. (For a brief general *aperçu* of these taxes, see Hamburger, *u.s.* p. 431.) It must, however, be admitted that the Jewish authorities distributed this burden of civic taxation both easily and kindly, and that they applied the revenues derived from it for the public welfare in a manner scarcely yet attained in the most civilised countries. The Rabbinical arrangements for public education, health, and charity were, in every respect, far in advance of modern legislation, although here also they took care themselves not to take the grievous burdens which they laid upon others, by expressly exempting from civic taxes all those who devoted themselves to the study of the law.

But the Roman taxation, which bore upon Israel with such crushing weight, was quite of its own kind—systematic, cruel, relentless, and utterly regardless. In general, the provinces of the Roman Empire, and what of Palestine belonged to them, were subject to two great taxes—poll-tax (or rather income tax) and ground-tax. All property and income that fell not under the ground-tax was subject to poll-tax; which amounted, for Syria and Cilicia, to one per cent. The “poll-tax” was really twofold, consisting of income-tax and head-money, the latter, of course, the same in all cases, and levied on all persons (bond or free) up to the age of sixty-five—women being liable from the age of twelve and men from that of fourteen. Landed property was subject to a tax of one-tenth of all grain, and one-fifth of the wine and fruit grown, partly paid in product and partly commuted into money. (Northern Africa alone [exclusive of Egypt] furnished Rome, by way of taxation, with sufficient corn to last eight months, and the city of Alexandria to last four months [*Jewish Wars*, ii. 16, 4].) Besides these, there was tax and duty on all imports and exports, levied on the great public highways and in the seaports. Then there was bridge-money and road-money, and duty on all that was bought and sold in the towns. (Compare, among others, Hausrath, *Neutest. Zeitg.* I. p. 167, etc.) These, which may be called the regular taxes, were irrespective of any forced contributions, and of the support which had to be furnished to the Roman procurator and his household and court at Caesarea. To avoid all possible loss to the treasury, the proconsul of Syria, Quirinus (Cyrenius), had taken a regular census to show the number of the population and their means. This was a terrible crime in the eyes of the Rabbis, who remembered that, if numbering the people had been reckoned such great sin of old, the evil must be an hundredfold increased, if done by heathens and for their own purposes. Another offence lay in the thought, that tribute, hitherto only given to Jehovah, was now to be paid to a heathen emperor. “Is it lawful to pay tribute unto Caesar?” was a sore question, which many an Israelite put to himself as he placed the emperor’s poll-tax beside the half-shekel of the sanctuary, and the tithe of his field, vineyard, and orchard, claimed by the tax-gatherer, along with that which he had hitherto only given unto the Lord. Even the purpose with which this inquiry was brought before Christ—to entrap Him in a political denunciation—shows, how much it was agitated among patriotic Jews; and it cost rivers of blood before it was not answered, but silenced.

The Romans had a peculiar way of levying these taxes—not directly, but indirectly—which kept the treasury quite safe, whatever harm it might inflict on the taxpayer, while at the same time it threw upon him the whole cost of the collection. Senators and magistrates were prohibited from engaging in business or trade; but the highest order, the equestrian, was largely composed of great capitalists. These Roman knights formed joint-stock companies, which bought at public auction the revenues of a province at a fixed price, generally for five years. The board had its chairman, or *magister*, and its offices at Rome. These were the real Publicani, or publicans, who often underlet certain of the taxes. The Publicani, or those who held from them, employed either slaves or some of the lower classes in the country as tax-gatherers—the publicans of the New Testament. Similarly, all other imposts were farmed and collected; some of them being very onerous, and amounting to an *ad valorem* duty of two and a half, of five, and in articles of luxury even of twelve and a half per cent. Harbour-dues were higher than ordinary tolls, and smuggling or a false declaration was punished by confiscation of the goods. Thus the publicans also levied import and export dues, bridge-toll, road-money, town-dues, etc.; and, if the peaceable inhabitant, the tiller of the soil, the tradesman, or manufacturer was constantly exposed to their exactions, the traveller, the caravan, or the pedlar encountered their vexatious presence at every bridge, along the road, and at the entrance to cities.

Every bale had to be unloaded, and all its contents tumbled about and searched; even letters were opened; and it must have taken more than Eastern patience to bear their insolence and to submit to their “unjust accusations” in arbitrarily fixing the return from land or income, or the value of goods, etc. For there was no use appealing against them, although the law allowed this, since the judges themselves were the direct beneficiaries by the revenue; for they before whom accusations on this score would have to be laid, belonged to the order of knights, who were the very persons implicated in the farming of the revenue. Of course, the joint-stock company of Publicani at Rome expected its handsome dividends; so did the tax-gatherers in the provinces, and those to whom they on occasions sublet the imposts. All wanted to make money of the poor people; and the cost of the collection had of course to be added to the taxation. We can quite understand how Zaccheus, one of the supervisors of these tax-gatherers in the district of Jericho, which, from its growth and export of balsam, must have yielded a large revenue, should, in remembering his past life, have at once said: “If I have taken anything from any man by false accusation”—or, rather, “Whatever I have wrongfully exacted of any man.” (Dean Alford’s translation.) For nothing was more common than for the publican to put a fictitious value on property or income. Another favourite trick of theirs was to advance the tax to those who were unable to pay, and then to charge usurious interest on what had thereby become a private debt. How summarily and harshly such debts were exacted, appears from the New Testament itself. In Matt. xviii. 28 we read of a creditor who, for the small debt of one hundred denars (about £3 6s. 8d.), seizes the debtor by the throat in the open street, and drags him to prison; the miserable man, in his fear of the consequences, in vain falling down at his feet, and beseeching him to have patience, in not exacting immediate full payment. What these consequences were, we learn from the same parable, where the king threatens not only to sell off all that his debtor has, but even himself, his wife, and children into slavery (ver. 25). And what short shrift such an unhappy man had to expect from “the magistrate,” appears from the summary procedure, ending in imprisonment till “the last mite” had been paid, described in Luke xii. 58.

However, therefore, in far-off Rome, Cicero might describe the Publicani as “the flower of knighthood, the ornament of the state, and the strength of the republic,” or as “the most upright and respected men,” the Rabbis in distant Palestine might be excused for their intense dislike of “the publicans,” even although it went to the excess of declaring them incapable of bearing testimony in a Jewish court of law, of forbidding to receive their charitable gifts, or even to change money out of their treasury (*Baba K.* x. 1), of ranking them not only with harlots and heathens, but with highwaymen and murderers (*Ned.* iii. 4), and of even declaring them excommunicate. Indeed, it was held lawful to make false returns, to speak untruth, or almost to use any means to avoid paying taxes (*Ned.* 27 b.; 28 a). And about the time of Christ the burden of such exactions must have been felt all the heavier on account of a great financial crisis in the Roman Empire (in the year 33 of our era), which involved so many in bankruptcy, and could not have been without its indirect influence even upon distant Palestine.

Of such men—despised Galileans, unlettered fishermen, excommunicated publicans—did the blessed Lord, in His self-humiliation, choose His closest followers, His special apostles! What a contrast to the Pharisaical notions of the Messiah and His kingdom! What a lesson to show, that it was not “by might nor by power,” but by His Spirit, and that God had chosen the base things of this world, and things that were despised, to confound things that were mighty! Assuredly, this offers a new problem, and one harder of solution than many others, to those who would explain everything by natural causes. Whatever they may say of the superiority of Christ’s teaching to account for its success, no religion could ever have been more weighted; no popular cause could ever have presented itself under more disadvantageous circumstances than did the Gospel of Christ to the Jews of Palestine. Even from this point of view, to the historical student familiar with the outer and inner life of that period, there is no other explanation of the establishment of Christ’s kingdom than the power of the Holy Ghost.

Such a custom-house officer was Matthew Levi, when the voice of our Lord, striking to the inmost depths of his heart, summoned him to far different work. It was a wonder that the Holy One should speak to such an one as he; and oh! in what different accents from what had ever fallen on his ears. But it was not merely condescension, kindness, sympathy, even familiar intercourse with one usually regarded as a social pariah; it was the closest fellowship; it was reception into the innermost circle; it was a call to the highest and holiest work which the Lord offered to Levi. And the busy road on which he sat to collect customs and dues would now no more know the familiar face of Levi, otherwise than as that of a messenger of peace, who brought glad tidings of great joy.

The Publicans

Christ, in Matthew 9:9, called Matthew, a *publican*, to follow Him.

[The publicans were, *ed.*] *men* of the worst characters, and who were most hateful to the Jews, upon many accounts; partly because of their business, which was to collect the Roman tax, and carry it to the proper officers appointed to receive it, and of whom they sometimes farmed it. Now the Roman yoke was very grievous to the Jews, who boasted of their being a free people; nor did they willingly pay their tribute money; and some of them would refuse to do it, under a pretence of religion; wherefore those publicans, or tax gatherers, which were oftentimes men of their own nation, as appears from the instances of Levi and Zacchaeus, were very odious to them; because they looked upon them as joining with the Romans, in oppressing them, and abridging them in their liberty: and partly because of their character and conduct, being men of great improbity, rapine, and covetousness: hence, as in the New Testament, they are frequently joined with “sinners”, as being notorious ones themselves; so in the Talmudic writings, with thieves {a}, and are reckoned as thieves, with murderers, and robbers {b}; they were not allowed as witnesses {c} in any of their courts of judicature; nor were they to be kept company {d} with in private houses. Now our Lord instances in these men who were the most profligate part of the nation, and had in greatest contempt by the rest; and yet these, by the very dictates of nature, loved such as loved them: wherefore it must be shameful and scandalous in the Pharisees, and others, who pretended to great sanctity and religion, to do no more than these persons did.

The “publicans”, or gatherers of the Roman tax, toll, or tribute of any sort, whether Jews or Gentiles, were persons of a very infamous character... (They, *ed.*) had houses, or booths built for them, at the foot of bridges, at the mouth of rivers, and by the sea shore, where they took toll of passengers that went to and fro: hence we read {k} of bridges being made to take toll at, and of publicans being at the water side {l}, and of ... {m}, “the tickets”, or “seals of the publicans”; which, when a man had paid toll on one side of a river, were given him by the publican, to show to him that sat on the other side, that it might appear he had paid: in which were written two great letters, bigger than those in common use {n}. Thus Matthew was sitting in a toll booth, near the seashore, to receive the toll of passengers that came, or went in ships or boats.

And he saith unto him, follow me; notwithstanding the infamous employment he was in, as accounted by the Jews: this was no bar in the way of his call to be a disciple of Christ; and shows, that there was no merit and motive in him, which was the reason of this high honour bestowed upon him; but was entirely owing to the free, sovereign, and distinguishing grace of Christ, and which was powerful and efficacious: for without telling him what work he must do, or how he must live, and without his consulting with flesh and blood, at once, immediately...¹

It should be noted that when the publicans came to John the Baptist, and asked him, *Master, what shall we do?*, John told them simply to be honest. He did not tell them to get out of the tax collecting business. (Lk. 3:12.)

A “Taxing” Situation

Spies were everywhere, making sure subversion was not being planned against the civil powers. The tax man was everywhere, *e.g.*, import-tax, export-tax, road-tax, bridge-tax, manufacturing-tax, income-tax, property-tax, occupation-tax, value-added-tax. Nothing escaped taxation as every package and letter was opened to see if they contained anything taxable. The value of the goods for taxation was arbitrarily fixed, and no appeal was possible; the courts were corrupt, being part of the tax-gathering scheme, so the poor, overtaxed individual had no chance for justice when it came to the civil authorities’ claim on the fruits of his labour.

Into this “taxing” situation, the Lord Jesus Christ came, and chose His key men through whom He would establish His righteous Kingdom on earth. The Jews desired someone to free them from the oppressive Roman tax-man, but the Lord came to free them from the oppression of sin.

The once free and proud nation under God was now in bondage not to Rome, but to sin. The tax man everywhere one looked reminded him of that bondage.

Who can deny that the once free and proud united States of America is now in bondage to sin, and the tax man everywhere is a sad reminder of that bondage.

1. John Gill on Mat. 5:46, 9:3, 11, *Online Bible*.

Chapter IV

Purpose of Romans

Every generation of Christians since Christ has, no doubt, felt it lived in a unique time in history, a time of exceptional vileness, debauchery and unbridled degeneracy. The purpose of this chapter is to show that our time at the beginning of this millennium is not unique. This chapter will give a lot of dates and details concerning the popular temper in which the New Testament was written. Even a superficial examination of New Testament times will show that though rebellion and seemingly unrestrained evil of all kinds fill the modern air, the popular climate of New Testament time was worse.

Any serious student of Scripture must consider the social, political and historical climate of any passage he examines. We want to examine both Paul's and Peter's writings. As Peter urged the first Christians to *submit to every ordinance of man* (1 Pet. 2:13ff.), even in the midst of persecution, he reminded them that: 1) vengeance against wickedness in high places belongs to the Lord (4:5, 19); 2) Christ suffered unjustly at the hands of wicked men, and He is our example (2:19ff.); 3) Christ is now seated in the heavens with all *angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him* (3:22); 4) since God permits unjust suffering of His righteous people, consider how much more terrible it will be for the ungodly (3:12; 4:18, 19); and 5) the Lord hears the prayers of His people who obey His Word, suffer under unjust *governors* as their Lord did, and continue in the faith (3:12; 4:5-7). In fact, unjust suffering results in *praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*. (1 Pet. 1:7.) It is interesting that after the Lord says to His faithful people, *who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good*, He said, *But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled*. (1 Pet. 3:13, 14.)

Understanding a little of social and political climate from Christ's resurrection to the destruction of Jerusalem should help us appreciate the conditions in which the New Testament was written, and make it more meaningful. It was not written in a vacuum.

Rome

From the start, the Roman Empire specialized in organization. (Tradition says the city of Rome was founded in 753 BC. However, a more accurate date would be 509 BC when the patrician families of Rome set up a quasi-representative form of government.) As Rome expanded, a very key factor in keeping control of its subjected peoples was the paved roads it built to every corner of the empire—53,000 miles worth into parts of more than 40 different nations. Thus though the Romans meant the roads for a means of controlling the empire, the roads actually paved the way for the very rapid spread of Christianity all over Europe. Rome normally showed enormous tolerance toward religion; however, Christianity was excepted. The problem with Christianity was that it would not recognize that Cæsar was over the Lord Jesus Christ.

Caligula (AD 37-41)

In our consideration of the social climate in which Paul and Peter wrote, we will start with the reign of Caligula, AD 37-41:

Some emperors were so deranged that they are remembered to this day. There was Caligula, who murdered his brother (among countless others) but loved animals so much he named his horse, Incitatus, to be consul—roughly the equivalent of (President, *ed.*) Bill Clinton's nominating Socks to the Supreme Court.¹

Caligula was followed by,

1. *National Geographic*, July 1997.

Claudius Caesar (AD 41-54)

Claudius Caesar married his fourth wife, Messalina (16), at the age of 48. Messalina was far from beautiful, and she was highly immoral; reportedly, disguised, she even worked in a brothel after she was queen. After committing bigamy by marrying Caius Silius, Claudius ordered her death. A very wicked woman, Agrippina, then determined to marry Claudius. Agrippina was an extremely cunning and deceitful niece of Claudius—she had lived in incest with her brother Caligula, and had been widowed twice. Her last husband had been Caius Crispus, who was extremely wealthy. After his will was made out in Agrippina's favor, he mysteriously died, leaving her one of the wealthiest women in the world.

Agrippina had four major goals. She was determined to marry Claudius, get rid of his son and heir Britannicus, persuade Claudius to adopt her red-headed son Nero, and to make Nero heir to the Empire.¹

Though a marriage between Cladius (57) and Agrippina (32) was clearly incestuous, after much hugging and kissing from Agrippina, Claudius persuaded a group of senators to insist he marry her in the public interest. Extremely jealous, Agrippina had a former, very wealthy lady in whom Cladius had been interested, murdered.

Generally stern against corruption, Claudius apparently never learned of Felix's corrupt rule in Judea. Though he killed his share of people, Claudius was not as bloody as other Roman emperors—his death warrants accounted for the deaths of at least thirty-five senators and 300 knights.

The Edict of Claudius

The first historic trace of Christianity in Rome we have in a notice of the heathen historian Suetonius, confirmed by Luke, that Claudius, about A.D. 52, banished the Jews from Rome because of their insurrectionary disposition and commotion under the instigation of "Chrestus" (misspelt for "Christus").

This commotion in all probability refers to Messianic controversies between Jews and Christians who were not yet clearly distinguished at that time. The preaching of Christ, the true King of Israel, would naturally produce a great commotion among the Jews, as it did at Antioch, in Pisidia, in Lystra, Thessalonica, and Beroea; and the ignorant heathen magistrates would as naturally infer that Christ was a political pretender and aspirant to an earthly throne. The Jews who rejected the true Messiah looked all the more eagerly for an imaginary Messiah that would break the yoke of Rome and restore the theocracy of David in Jerusalem. Their carnal millennarianism affected even some Christians, and Paul found it necessary to warn them against rebellion and revolution. Among those expelled by the edict of Claudius were Aquila and Priscilla, the hospitable friends of Paul, who were probably converted before they met him in Corinth.

The Jews, however, soon returned, and the Jewish Christians also, but both under a cloud of suspicion. To this fact Tacitus may refer when he says that the Christian superstition which had been suppressed for a time (by the edict of Claudius) broke out again (under Nero, who ascended the throne in 54).²

Fearful that Claudius would make his son, Britannicus, Emperor, Agrippina arranged for Claudius to be fed poisoned mushrooms. He died twelve hours latter.

Nero's reign (AD 54-68) followed Claudius Caesar, covering most of the period of New Testament authorship.³ Nero set the social and political climate in which much of the New Testament was writ-

1. Charles Ludwig, *Ludwig's Handbook of New Testament Rulers & Cities*, 59. For the complete account of Nero's mother's actions and Nero's rise to power, see Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book XX, Chapter 8—"AFTER WHAT MANNER UPON THE DEATH OF CLAUDIUS, NERO SUCCEEDED IN THE GOVERNMENT; AS ALSO WHAT BARBAROUS THINGS HE DID."

2. Schaff, *History*, I. 367-369.

ten. He also set in motion the war against the Jews that resulted in razing Jerusalem.

Nero Caesar

The first of these imperial persecutions with which the martyrdom of Peter and Paul is connected by ecclesiastical tradition, took place in the tenth year of Nero's reign, A.D. 64, and by the instigation of that very emperor to whom Paul, as a Roman citizen, had appealed from the Jewish tribunal. It was, however, not a strictly religious persecution, like those under the later emperors; it originated in a public calamity which was wantonly charged upon the innocent Christians.¹

The fiendish persecution of Nero (54-68) was intended as a punishment, not for Christianity, but for alleged incendiarism (64). It showed, however, the popular temper, and was a declaration of war against the new religion. It became a common saying among Christian that Nero would reappear as Antichrist.²

Bad Emperors

No roster of bad emperors would be complete without the infamous Nero (54-68). He was a thoroughly evil man...³

Nero became Emperor of Rome with the help of his mother, Agrippina. Nero was born Lucius Domitianus Ahenobarbus, a name he kept till his mother married Emperor Claudius Caesar. Nero's natural father was noted for his incest, brutality and adultery, marrying Agrippina when she was thirteen. Determined to see her son emperor, Agrippina married Claudius, and upon adoption, Lucius' name was changed to Nero Claudius Drusus Germanicus. Agrippina poisoned her sixty-four year old husband, Claudius, keeping his death secret until she had made final arrangements to place seventeen year old Nero on the throne.

Nero's first speech to the Senate aroused great enthusiasm. "He set forth, wrote Tacitus, "the principles and models by following which he hoped to administer the affairs of the Empire in the best manner.... In his house, he said, there should be no bribery nor corruption, nor anything to the wiles of ambition, and his family concerns should be kept distinct from the affairs of state..."⁴

In order to assure himself of the throne, Nero poisoned Britannicus, Claudius' son and Nero's rival. Upon becoming convinced that rumors he heard that his mother was against him were true, Nero arranged her murder. He poisoned the aunt who had raised him, tore up her will, and took her estate. When Nero was sixteen, Agrippina had persuaded Cladius to give his thirteen-year-old daughter, Britannicus' sister, Octavia, in marriage to Nero. Nero then banished Octavia, and married his mistress, Poppaea. He later ordered Octavia to commit suicide. In honor of Poppaea, he constructed

3. The first preachers recognized wickedness in high places, but rather than dealing with that wickedness, they dealt with the wickedness in the individual believer's heart. The result turned of the world upside down, from the bottom up. Judgment must begin in the house of God, and that judgment must be according to God's word, or wickedness will only increase. There are no short-cuts. 1 Pet. 4:17.

1. Schaff, *History*, I.377ff.

2. *Ibid*, II.44.

3. *National Geographic*, July 1997, p 37. *National Geographic* gives this time line for Rome's Emperors: 27 B.C.-A.D. 14, Augustus; A.D. 14-37, Tiberius; 37-41; Caligula; 41-54, Claudius; 54-68, Nero; 68-69, Galba; 69, Otho; 69; Vitellius; 69-79, Vespasian; 79-81, Titus; 81-96, Domitian; 96-98, Nerva; 98-117, Trajan; 117-138, Hadrian; 138-161, Antonius Pius; 161-180, Marcus Aurelius; 177-192, Commodus; 193, Pertinax; 193, Didius Julianus; 193-211, Septimius Severus; 198-217, Garacalla; 209-212, Geta; 217-218, Macrinus; 218-222, Elagabalus; 222-235, Severus Alexander; 235-238, Maximinus; 238, Gordian I & II; 238-244, Gordian III; 244-249, Philip; 249-251, Decius; 251-253, Trebonianus Gallus; 253-260, Valerian; 253-268, Gallienus; 268-270, Claudius II; 270-275, Aurelian; 276-282, Probus; 283-284, Carinus & Numerian; 284-305, Diocletian & the Tetrarchy; 306-313, Constantine & the later Tetrarchy; 313-324, joint rule of Constantine & Licinius; 324-337, Constantine sole ruler. *Ibid*, p 11. "Emperor Trajan's greatest games, continuing for 123 straight days, offered the spectacle of 5,000 humans and 11,000 animals murdered in cold blood. The crowds screamed for more." *Ibid*, p 37.

4. Charles Ludwig, *Ludwig's Handbook of New Testament Rulers & Cities*, 64. Accent Books, Denver, Colorado 80215. 1983.

the enormous and extremely lavish Golden House. In this palace, Nero engaged in the most vile practices, with no attempt to keep his activities secret.

Too soon Nero forgot Poppaea for a new passion. “Having found a youth, Sporus, who closely resembled Poppaea, he had him castrated, married him by a formal ceremony, and ‘used him in every way like a woman’; whereupon a wit expressed the wish that Nero’s father had such a wife” (Will Durant in *Caesar and Christ*).¹

Nero also murdered pregnant Poppaea when he booted her in the stomach for displeasing him; he murdered his teacher, Seneca, and murdered many eminent Romans. His own suicide took place when he was only thirty two years of age. There has probably been no parallel to this monster in all history.²

In the tenth year of Nero’s reign (64), Nero appointed Florus, an extremely wicked and violent man, over Judea:

1. NOW Gessius Florus, who was sent as successor to Albinus by Nero, filled Judea with abundance of miseries. He was by birth of the city of Clazomene, and brought along with him his wife Cleopatra, (by whose friendship with Poppea, Nero’s wife, he obtained this government,) who was no way different from him in wickedness. This Florus was so wicked, and so violent in the use of his authority, that the Jews took Albinus to have been [comparatively] their benefactor; so excessive were the mischiefs that he brought upon them. For Albinus concealed his wickedness, and was careful that it might not be discovered to all men; but Gessius Florus, as though he had been sent on purpose to show his crimes to every body, made a pompous ostentation of them to our nation, as never omitting any sort of violence, nor any unjust sort of punishment; for he was not to be moved by pity, and never was satisfied with any degree of gain that came in his way; nor had he any more regard to great than to small acquisitions, but became a partner with the robbers themselves. For a great many fell then into that practice without fear, as having him for their security, and depending on him, that he would save them harmless in their particular robberies; so that there were no bounds set to the nation’s miseries; but the unhappy Jews, when they were not able to bear the devastations which the robbers made among them, were all under a necessity of leaving their own habitations, and of flying away, as hoping to dwell more easily any where else in the world among foreigners [than in their own country]. And what need I say any more upon this head? since it was this Florus who necessitated us to take up arms against the Romans, while we thought it better to be destroyed at once, than by little and little. Now this war began in the second year of the government of Florus, and the twelfth year of the reign of Nero. But then what actions we were forced to do, or what miseries we were enabled to suffer, may be accurately known by such as will peruse those books which I have written about the Jewish war.³

Florus’ wickedness played a large role in motivating the Jews to revolt against Rome, leading to Jerusalem’s destruction.⁴

The Jewish Rebellion

Under the last governors, Felix, Festus, Albinus, and Florus, moral corruption and the dissolution of all social ties, but at the same time the oppressiveness of the Roman yoke, increased every year. After the accession of Felix, assassins, called “Sicarians” (from *sica* a dagger), armed with daggers and purchasable for any crime, endangering safety in city and country, roamed over Palestine. Besides this, the party spirit among the Jews themselves, and their hatred of their heathen oppressors, rose to the most insolent political and religious fanaticism, and was continually inflamed by false prophets and Messiahs, one of whom, for example, according to Josephus, drew after him thirty thousand men. Thus came to pass what our Lord had predicted: “There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall lead many astray.”

At last, in the month of May, A.D. 66, under the last procurator, Gessius Florus (from 65 onward), a wicked and cruel tyrant who, as Josephus says, was placed as a hangman over evil-doers, an organized rebellion

1. *Ibid*, 67, 68.

2. Schaff, *History*, I.378.

3. Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book XX, 11.1.

4. See King Agrippa’s speech where he mentions Florus’ evil against the Jews, Appendix B.

broke out against the Romans, but at the same time a terrible civil war also between different parties of the revolted themselves, especially between the Zealots and the Moderates, or the Radicals and Conservatives. The ferocious party of the Zealots had all the fire and energy which religious and patriotic fanaticism could inspire; they have been justly compared with the Montagnards of the French Revolution. They gained the ascendancy in the progress of the war, took forcible possession of the city and the temple and introduced a reign of terror. They kept up the Messianic expectations of the people and hailed every step towards destruction as a step towards deliverance. Reports of comets, meteors, and all sorts of fearful omens and prodigies were interpreted as signs of the coming of the Messiah and his reign over the heathen. The Romans recognized the Messiah in Vespasian and Titus.

To defy Rome in that age, without a single ally, was to defy the world in arms; but religious fanaticism, inspired by the recollection of the heroic achievements of the Maccabees, blinded the Jews against the inevitable failure of this mad and desperate revolt.¹

Accordingly, the spirit of rebellion against Roman rule burned extremely hot in Jerusalem during New Testament times, for the final Roman siege of Jerusalem took place before AD 70. Throughout *Wars*, Josephus says that Rome moved against Jerusalem because of the Jews' rebellion against God.²

Nero's reign can be divided into two sections, 54-59-68. For the first five years, Nero was guided by the wise counsel of Seneca and Burrhus. Moreover, Poppaea was a religious lady, and perhaps privately a Jewish proselyte. With their deaths, Nero changed dramatically.

A fire broke out in Rome in the night of July 18th, 64. It burned for a total of 9 days, doing incalculable damage. The public rumor was that Nero started the fire, so he could rebuild Rome on a more magnificent scale, to be called Neropolis.

To divert suspicion from himself, he cast the blame on the Christians, who had been effectively painted publicly with a very black brush—they despised the Roman gods (and thus were considered atheists), and claimed total allegiance to a higher authority, the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. And thus started the terrible persecutions under Nero, which included covering Christians with pitch, oil or resin, and nailing them to pine posts to light Nero's gardens. Burning alive was Rome's punishment of those accused of setting fires.

According to Schaff, scarcely another period in history is so full of vice, corruption and disaster as the six years between Neronian persecution and the destruction of Jerusalem. Even to earnest heathen minds, the period seemed as dark as midnight, as it was filled with depravity of every description.

Dates

Understanding some of the historical context in which much of the New Testament was written, we should be able to better appreciate what men such as Peter, Paul and Jude said as they spoke of wickedness in high places and how Christians must respond in the face of oppressive civil authority. We will start with Peter.

Peter

- I. Jerusalem activities, 29-35 A.D., when James eventually succeeded to leadership of the Church.
- II. Palestinean mission, 35-44 A.D., during which he remained for a while at Lydda and Joppa. He received a call to Caesarea, and in the house of Cornelius opened the door of privilege to the Gentiles.
- III. Syrian mission with Antioch as a center, 44-61 A.D., during which he was accompanied by his wife, who became the pioneer Zenana missionary.

1. Schaff, I.393-394. See also, Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, i. 237, 238-242. *Josephus, Wars*, iv. iii, 9, 13, 14; c. iv, sec. 5 &c; c.v, sect. I, 5; and vii, viii, I.

2. Josephus records King Agrippa's speech to the Jews on the eve of their rebellion leading to their total destruction, trying to dissuade them from revolting against Rome. The speech sounds like one that might be given today to any group of Nationalists intent on revolting against an oppressive civil power. Agrippa pointed out that the Jews did not stand against the small things that brought about their bondage to Rome when they had the freedom and power to do so. Now, Agrippa said, it is foolish to try to do what they refused to do when they had the chance. *Wars*, Book II, xvi, 4, 5. The entire speech is reproduced in Appendix B.

IV. Rome, 61 A.D. It would seem as if Peter reached here before Paul's release from his first imprisonment, and a few years later suffered martyrdom by crucifixion, as Christ prophesied he would. Legend has it that Peter deemed himself unworthy to die in exactly the same way as his Lord had, and so begged his crucifiers to crucify him upside down.¹

According to Schaff:

The time of Peter's arrival in Rome, and the length of his residence there, cannot possibly be ascertained. The above-mentioned silence of the Acts and of Paul's Epistles allows him only a short period of labor there, after 63. The Roman tradition of a twenty or twenty-five years' episcopate of Peter in Rome is unquestionably a colossal chronological mistake. (For particulars see my *H. Ap. Ch.* pp. 362-372. The presence of Peter in Rome was the universal belief of Christendom till the Reformation, and is so still in the Roman Catholic communion...) Nor can we fix the year of his martyrdom, except that it must have taken place after July, 64, when the Neronian persecution broke out (according to Tacitus). It is variously assigned to every year between 64 and 69...²

Thus Schaff assigns Peter's martyrdom after Nero's great persecution, which started with the burning of Rome, July, 64.

Paul

According to Schaff, Paul's time line goes something like this:

The public life of Paul, from the third year after his conversion to his martyrdom, A.D. 40-64, embraces a quarter of a century, three great missionary campaigns with minor expeditions, five visits to Jerusalem, and at least four years of captivity in Caesarea and Rome. Some extend it to A.D. 67 or 68. (I would say 68 is closer to the actual date, *ed.*) It may be divided into five or six periods, as follows:

1. A.D. 40-44. The period of preparatory labors in Syria and his native Cilicia, partly alone, partly in connection with Barnabas, his senior fellow-apostle among the Gentiles...

2. A.D. 45-50. First missionary journey...

This period closes with the important apostolic conference at Jerusalem, A.D. 50...

3. From A.D. 51-54. Second missionary journey...

During this period he composed the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, which are the earliest of his literary remains excepting his missionary addresses preserved in Acts.

4. A.D. 54-58. Third missionary tour...

During this period he wrote the great doctrinal Epistles to the Galatians, Corinthians, and Romans, which mark the height of his activity and usefulness.

5. A.D. 58-63. The period of his two imprisonments, with the intervening winter voyage from Caesarea to Rome...

In the Roman prison he wrote the Epistles to the Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon.

6. A.D. 63 and 64. With the second year of Paul's imprisonment in Rome the account of Luke breaks off, rather abruptly, yet appropriately and grandly. Paul's arrival in Rome secured the triumph of Christianity. In this sense it was true, "*Roma locuta est, causa finita est.*" And he who spoke at Rome is not dead; he is still "preaching (everywhere) the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness, none forbidding him."

But what became of him after the termination of those two years in the spring of 63? What was the result of the trial so long delayed? Was he condemned to death? or was he released by Nero's tribunal, and thus permitted to labor for another season? This question is still unsettled among scholars. A vague tradition says that Paul was acquitted of the charges of the Sanhedrin, and after travelling again in the East, perhaps also into Spain, was a second time imprisoned in Rome and condemned to death. The assumption of a second Roman captivity relieves certain difficulties in the Pastoral Epistles; for they seem to require a short period of freedom between the first and a second Roman captivity, and a visit to the East, (Namely, to Ephesus, 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:13, 20; to Crete, Tit. 1:5 and to Nicopolis, Tit. 3:12.) which is not recorded in the Acts, but which the apostle contemplated in case of his release. (Phil. 1:25; 2:24; Philem. ver.22...) A visit to Spain, which he intended, is possible, though less probable. (Rom. 15:24, 28...) If he was set at

1. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Men of the Bible*, 273. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1958.

2. Schaff, *History*, I. 252.

liberty, it must have been before the terrible persecution in July, 64, which would not have spared the great leader of the Christian sect. It is a remarkable coincidence that just about the close of the second year of Paul's confinement, the celebrated Jewish historian, Josephus, then in his 27th year, came to Rome (after a tempestuous voyage and shipwreck), and effected through the influence of Poppaea (the wife of Nero and a half proselyte of Judaism) the release of certain Jewish priests who had been sent to Rome by Felix as prisoners. (Jos. *Vita*, c. 3. Comp. Plumptre, *l.c.*) It is not impossible that Paul may have reaped the benefit of a general release of Jewish prisoners.

The martyrdom of Paul under Nero is established by the unanimous testimony of antiquity. As a Roman citizen, he was not crucified, like Peter, but put to death by the sword. The scene of his martyrdom is laid by tradition about three miles from Rome, near the Ostian way, on a green spot, formerly called *Aquoe Salvioe*, afterwards *Tre Fontane*, from the three fountains which are said to have miraculously gushed forth from the blood of the apostolic martyr... As to the year of his death, the views vary from A.D. 64 to 69. The difference of the place and manner of his martyrdom suggests that he was condemned by a regular judicial trial, either shortly before, or more probably a year or two after the horrible wholesale massacre of Christians on the Vatican hill, in which his Roman citizenship would not have been regarded. If he was released in the spring of 63, he had a year and a half for another visit to the East and to Spain before the outbreak of the Neronian persecution (after July, 64); but tradition favors a later date. Prudentius separates the martyrdom of Peter from that of Paul by one year. After that persecution the Christians were everywhere exposed to danger. (See note at end of this chapter, *ed.*)

Assuming the release of Paul and another visit to the East, we must locate the First Epistle to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus between the first and second Roman captivity, and the Second Epistle to Timothy in the second captivity. The last was evidently written in the certain view of approaching martyrdom; it is the affectionate farewell of the aged apostle to his beloved Timothy, and his last will and testament to the militant church below in the bright prospect of the unfading crown in the church triumphant above. (2 Tim. 4:6-8.)

Thus ended the earthly course of this great teacher of nations, this apostle of victorious faith, of evangelical freedom, of Christian progress. It was the heroic career of a spiritual conqueror of immortal souls for Christ, converting them from the service of sin and Satan to the service of the living God, from the bondage of the law to the freedom of the gospel, and leading them to the fountain of life eternal. He labored more abundantly than all the other apostles; and yet, in sincere humility, he considered himself "the least of the apostles," and "not meet to be called an apostle," because he persecuted the church of God; a few years later he confessed: "I am less than the least of all saints," and shortly before his death: "I am the chief of sinners." His humility grew as he experienced God's mercy and ripened for heaven. Paul passed a stranger and pilgrim through this world, hardly observed by the mighty and the wise of his age. And yet how infinitely more noble, beneficial, and enduring was his life and work than the dazzling march of military conquerors, who, prompted by ambition, absorbed millions of treasure and myriads of lives, only to die at last in a drunken fit at Babylon, or of a broken heart on the rocks of St. Helena! Their empires have long since crumbled into dust, but St. Paul still remains one of the foremost benefactors of the human race, and the pulses of his mighty heart are beating with stronger force than ever throughout the Christian world.¹

The note at the end of 2 Timothy 4:22, appears to require a later date for Paul's death, for he appeared before Nero twice.

Bishop Lightfoot

Lightfoot dates Paul's writings thusly:

(a) First Group: 1 and 2 Thess, from Corinth, 52-53 AD...

(b) Second Group: 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Rom, 55-58 AD... The dates of these epp. are not perfectly clear...

(c) Third Group: Phil, Philem, Col, Eph. Date 61-63, unless Paul reached Rome several years earlier... But even so, the order of these epp. is by no means certain.

(d) Fourth Group: 1 Tim, Tit, 2 Tim. ... (For which he assigns no date, *ed.*)²

1. Schaff, *History*, I.322-331.

2. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, IV.2265, 2266.

Chronology

Keep in mind the dates: Claudius Caesar, 41-54, and Nero Caesar, 54-68. Schaff gives this chronology of the Apostolic Age:

37, Stephen martyred. 44, persecution of the church in Jerusalem, James beheaded, and Peter imprisoned and delivered. 50, Paul's first missionary journey, and the Epistle of *James* written (variously dated from 44-62). 51, Paul's second missionary journey, and Europe Christianized. 52-53, Paul writes *First* and *Second Thessalonians* from Corinth. 54, Paul's fourth missionary journey. 56, Paul writes *Galatians*. 57, Paul writes *First* and *Second Corinthians*. 58, Paul writes *Romans*, appears before Felix, and is imprisoned at Caesarea for two years. 60, Paul appeals to Caesar, and is shipwrecked on his way to Caesar. 61, Paul arrives in Rome as a prisoner. 62-63, Paul writes *Philippians*, *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, *Philemon* from prison in Rome. 62, James, the Lord's brother, martyred at Jerusalem. 63, Paul released from prison (?). 64, *Hebrews* written. 64-67, *First* and *Second Peter*, *Jude* written. 64-67, Paul visits Crete and Macedonia, and writes *First* and *Second Timothy* and *Titus* (?). Those who deny Paul's second imprisonment place these Epistles 54-57, and 2 Tim 63 or 64). 35-69, Paul's and Peter's martyrdom in Rome (?). 68-69, *The Revelation* (?). Those who deny an early dating of *The Revelation*, as required by the internal evidence of the book, place it as late as 96). 70, Jerusalem destroyed. 80-90, John writes his *Gospel* and *Epistles* (?).¹

Using Schaff's dates, observe:

First, *First* and *Second Thessalonians* were written in 51, three years before Nero came to the throne; therefore, *Second Thessalonians* chapter two could be the Spirit's warning of the coming of Nero to the throne of the whole earth. See Schaff's note at end of this chapter.

Second, *Romans* was written in 58, four years INTO Nero's evil reign; therefore, *Romans* was written under probably the most vile, wicked and depraved civil authority of all times, and those appointed by him as civil authorities.

Third, James, the Lord's brother, was martyred in 62, which was before Peter's Epistles.

Fourth, *First* and *Second Peter* and *Jude* were written in 64-67, during the very hottest persecution of Christians in history—the second half of Nero's reign. We also must remember that the Jewish nationalists, the zealots, were standing strong against Roman rule, and were gaining many followers. In fact, the Jewish-Roman war started before AD 67, so Peter wrote in the midst of rising civil strife and feeling against oppressive Roman rule under *Nero*.

Fifth, *The Revelation* was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, making it a message of warning the new church what was about to take place. Certainly, there has been much discussion concerning *The Revelation's* date, but internal evidence requires an early date, before AD 70. But that is not the topic of this present discussion.²

Note what both Peter and Jude said:

Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? (1 Pet. 3:9-13) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts,

1. Schaff, *History*, I.221, 222.

2. See *The Parousia*, James Stuart Russell, 1887. Republished by Kingdom Publications, 122 Seaward Ave, Bradford, PA 16701. [1997] This is the most popular introduction to and defense of the preterist view of Bible Prophecy in print today.

made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; (2 Pet. 2:9-13.)

No doubt those living between 54 and 68 and who loved God and hated evil were convinced that the Devil himself was ruling in Rome through the body of Nero Caesar. Notice that Peter not only delivers wicked Nero and his vile appointees to God's judgment, but he also delivers to God's judgment those who spoke and did evil against those in civil authority, e.g., Nero. Jude worded the warning thusly:

Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. (Jude 8-10.)

Jude tells the Christians living under vile Nero that though Nero might well be the Devil incarnant in the flesh, especially as he used burning Christians to light his gardens, they were not permitted to rail against him.

Conclusion:

First, many New Testament books dealing with proper civil authority were written during the reign of Nero Caesar, who had obtained and secured his rule through murder.

Second, both Paul and Peter wrote their exhortations to Christians in the midst of Rome's wicked, vile rule over the whole earth. The evil of our day cannot match the vileness that took place in and under Nero, who put both Paul and Peter to death.

The *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* places Paul's death, AD 67. Accordingly, Paul lived through thirteen of Nero's fourteen year reign. Paul wrote the Book of Romans while wicked Nero was on the throne, so, obviously, Paul was not under "righteous" civil authority when he exalted the office of civil authority. It is equally clear that the taxes and *tribute* collected during New Testament times went to support not only foreign armies on Judah's soil, but the funds went to finance the totally vile and debauched life style of Nero and most of those in authority.

Third, in the midst of Nero's horrible persecution, Paul taught that the church would triumph.

Fourth, both Peter and Paul wrote in a religious climate that eagerly anticipated an imaginary Messiah who would break the yoke of the hated Romans (especially Nero), and establish His millennial kingdom over the whole earth, sitting upon the throne of David. No doubt, the Jews looked forward to Nero having to bow before the Lord Christ.

Fifth, both Peter and Paul wrote to warn against railing, rebellion and revolution against civil authority, though that civil authority was one of the most depraved and vile in all history. No doubt, those who loved God and who were living under the national bondage that sin had led their nation into, felt that Satan himself was the one ruling from Rome. Accordingly, Satan possessed all the civil offices appointed by Rome.

Our day is not unique with its evil in high places.

Schaff makes an interesting observation: "After that persecution the Christians were everywhere exposed to danger." Schaff saw Rome as the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7:

... Peter and Paul, like a new Romulus and Remus, laid the foundation of a spiritual empire vaster and more enduring than that of the Caesars. The cross was substituted for the sword as the symbol of conquest and power.

But the change was effected at the sacrifice of precious blood. The Roman empire was at first, by its laws of justice, the protector of Christianity, without knowing its true character, and came to the rescue of Paul on several critical occasions, as in Corinth through the Proconsul Annseus Gallio, in Jerusalem through the Captain Lysias, and in Caesarea through the Procurator Festus. But now it rushed into deadly conflict with the new religion, and opened, in the name of idolatry and patriotism, a series of intermittent persecutions, which ended at last in the triumph of the banner of the cross at the Milvian bridge. Formerly a restraining power that kept back for a while the outbreak of Antichrist, (In 2 Thess. 2:6, 7, [...] is the Roman empire, [...] the emperor as its representative. This is the patristic interpretation to which some of the best modern commentators have returned. Mediaeval seats and many Protestant writers found the great apostasy in the Papacy and the restraining power in the German empire; while papal commentators took revenge by fastening the charge of apostasy on the Reformation which was restrained by the Papacy. I believe in a repeated and growing fulfilment of this and other prophecies on the historic basis of the apostolic age and the old Roman empire.) it now openly assumed the character of Antichrist with fire and sword. (It is so represented in the Apocalypse (ch. 13-18) after the Neronian persecution.)¹

We cannot even imagine the social and political climate in which the New Testament was written. Rome's tax collectors (extortioners) were everywhere, and the money extracted, many times by brute force, was used, among other things, to finance the oppressor's army, the evil men in civil authority and to finance the murders of untold numbers of Christians.

Chapter V

To Obey or Not to Obey

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. (Rom. 13:1-5.)

We will open this chapter with some remarks from both the Old and New Testament context of Romans 13:1-5. We will examine Romans thirteen's New Testament context and a few New Testament points before we go back to its Old Testament context.

First, it is important to note that Romans thirteen is placed after Romans twelve where the Christian is exhorted to present himself to God. In Romans 12:1, 2, the Christian is exhorted to present his body as a living sacrifice and to not be conformed to this world. There are several methods which the world uses to get us to conform to its image: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life, as well as civil laws to force conformity. Man is always trying to make himself and others after his own image rather than God's, and he uses laws to obtain his goal. Paul, in Romans 12:2, clearly tells us we are to resist anything, laws included, used by the world to conform us to its image. God's laws show us how to conform to the image of Christ. The two sets of laws will conflict regularly, each trying to conform us. Romans 12:1, 2, make the decision for us as to which law to obey.

Blatant Inconsistencies

Upon confronting folks over the issue of proper authority, many who flee to Romans 13:1-5 bla-

1. Schaff, *History*, I.376.

tantly violate v. 8 (debt prohibited), and say they are “doing God’s work.” (In reality, they are doing the lender’s work as they struggle to keep him in business, Pr. 22:7.) Is it not amazing how we can be so dogmatic on a passage right to a point we want to avoid. Furthermore, many of the same people also avoid vv. 9-14 where Paul enforces the Ten Commandments upon God’s people after Christ.

One should be suspicious when people will live and die by what they want to believe a passage teaches, *e.g.*, Romans 13:1-7, yet completely ignore a precept included in the same passage, *e.g.*, vv. 8-14. If one refuses to face the truth in one passage, are they facing the truth in the other passage? Obviously, they are using Scriptures to defend the city they have built upon the sand. What has happened to a consistent study of the scriptures? Not only is inconsistency astounding, but it has God’s wrath against it.

Human nature will holler loud and fight long to support a Scripture that might justify personal beliefs, but it will remain strangely silent over Scripture within the very same passage which goes contrary to the natural desire.

Second, we should remember that the Roman church Paul wrote to, as did all the early Christian churches, contained a very large percentage of Jewish population. The Jewish hope of that time was for the Messiah to establish His physical kingdom upon David’s literal throne in Jerusalem. (Ac 1:6.) Thus the vast portion of New Testament books, *e.g.*, Galatians and Hebrews, deal extensively with the Hebrew influence upon the early Christian church. Therefore, we can assume that one of the purposes of Romans 13 was to counter the Hebrew influence upon the early church: That influence sought to establish a physical Kingdom of God with the sword. Rather than placing the individual Christian over the “state,” Romans 13 placed him under the state.

Third, Romans 13 was also written to counter the attitude that all civil government is corrupt, *e.g.*, “Since all civil government is corrupt, as a Christian, I cannot support it.” It is not hard at all to read of Rome’s corruption during Paul’s time.¹ Hence, the tendency of Paul’s day would have been to refuse to support the state’s wickedness in any way, *e.g.*, “As a Christian, do I owe allegiance to such a wicked civil government, and should I pay taxes to it?”

A Kingdom

Fourth, Christians are members of a kingdom, the *Kingdom of His dear Son*. The Son’s kingdom exists within the kingdoms of men (Col. 1:13); it has its laws (God’s laws, the Scriptures), and it has priorities regarding responsibilities. (Mat. 6:33.) The Kingdom of God and the kings of this world are at war with each other as the powers of darkness seek to crush out the Kingdom of Light. (Ps. 2.) The conflict is real, and the goal of both is to subvert the other. (2 Cor. 10:3.) The goal of the kingdom of darkness is to get the individual to obey or live by its laws; on the other hand, the goal of the *Kingdom of His dear Son* is to get the individual to live by its laws. Notice Romans 13 ends with the exhortation to avoid, at all costs, living after the laws of the flesh, laws of this world’s system which conflict with the laws of God’s Kingdom. Thus there will be continued open and hostile conflict between the physical laws reflecting living after the flesh and the physical laws reflecting living after the Spirit.

Fifth, in Romans 12:14, 18, Paul instructs on how to respond to those who persecute Christians. We should take special note that Paul says ***If it be possible, as much as lieth within you, live peaceably with all men*** as he talks about how to respond to our enemies.

Therefore, as we look at Romans 13, we must keep in mind that: 1) Paul takes for granted that those he is addressing have presented their bodies to God as a living sacrifice; 2) those of 12:1 (and 13:1) are not conforming to this world, but rather they are conforming to the image of Christ and seeking His will (as revealed in His Word) first and foremost, and 3) it will not be possible for those living according to the Law-Word of God to live peaceably with all men at all times. (2 Tim 3:12.)

1. *Ludwig’s Handbook*, Accent Books, Denver, Colorado 80215.

There will be conflicts between the world's system and the image of Christ that His people are seeking after. Because Romans 13 is built upon the above three premises, it only applies to those who meet the above conditions. It cannot apply to nor can it be claimed by those in rebellion against God and His Law-Word.

Old Testament context

Remember, only the Old Testament scriptures were possessed by the early churches: Genesis through Malachi. Therefore, any "new" doctrine presented to the new church would have had, of necessity, to have been built upon the Old Testament law and prophets. Not one thing presented by the New Testament authors contradicted in any way anything already established in the Old Testament. Therefore, Romans 13 must be viewed in the light of the Old Testament, for its doctrine is built upon the foundation of the prophets. (Eph. 2:20.) The New Testament was not written in a vacuum.

Of the several Old Testament books developing the precepts of proper authority, we will mention only two:

Daniel & Jeremiah

One of the major themes of Daniel is that all power belongs to God alone, and He uses it as He pleases. No one will usurp His power. If all power belongs to Him, what will the rebellious use for power?

Thou, O King, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. (Da. 2:37, 38.)

All will agree that Nebuchadnezzar was not a godly man, yet God established his civil government, and instructed His people to serve that pagan king. (Jer. chs. 25-29.) In fact, Jeremiah establishes the penalty for refusing to serve the pagan civil ruler whom God had established — death. (Jer. 27:8-22.) Thus God established Nebuchadnezzar's rule; God commanded His people's obedience to the pagan king, and then God threatened them with the sword if they did not submit to the heathen king. The Lord also warned the people about false prophets who would come in the Lord's name telling the people they did not have to submit to Babylon, e.g., Hananiah.

Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD. For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence

I caused you to be carried away captive. (Jer. 29:1-14. See 28:10-17.)

An objection against using Jeremiah's instructions to God's people of old (Jer. 27:1-17) as an example today might be: "But God's people were given to Babylonian bondage for a specific reason and for a specific time—violating the sabbath and for seventy years. (2 Chron. 36:20-23.) That is not the case today, so what Jeremiah said does not apply." The answer to that objection is found in the Law:

If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD. These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses. (Lev. 26:40-46.)

Long before Jeremiah and Nebuchadnezzar appeared in history, the Lord warned His people in the law, the psalms and the prophets. The law is quoted above. A Psalm of warning is the Fiftieth Psalm: He warned that if they turned their backs on His Word (*statutes, judgments and laws*), He would tare them in pieces. (Lev. 26:16-23.)

Among the many prophets, we find Hosea saying that the Lord Himself is the One Who teares His people like a wild beast—a lion, leopard and bear *bereaved of her whelps*. The Lord is the One Who exalts oppressive kings, civil authorities. In other words, a people destroy themselves when they turn from the authority of God's Word. (Ho. 13:1-11.)

The Word of God clearly states that His people were in bondage because *they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes*. The promise contained in the "curse" of bondage is that *If they shall confess their iniquity and their uncircumcised hearts and accept the punishment of their iniquity*, the Lord will free them from their bondage. Their bondage to oppressive civil authority, e.g., Babylon, was not because that authority was stronger. The bondage was brought upon themselves because they forsook their God when they turned from His statutes, judgments and laws.

The fact that the Lord God is an everlasting, unchanging God shows that He does not change in His dealings with mankind: He has always dealt with man in mercy, grace and according to His everlasting, never changing Law-Word. (We will not go into serious errors of "dispensationalism" at this time.)

One finds little difference between Jeremiah 25-29 and Romans 13:1-5. Paul reduced Jeremiah 25-29 into just a few verses, and that agreement is not coincidental: Jeremiah said that resistance to Nebuchadnezzar was resistance to God Himself, for the Lord God had exalted Babylon. The Lord said that He would seek vengeance upon those who resisted the authority of the one He established over them, Babylon. God told Nebuchadnezzar that he was established at God's pleasure, yet Nebuchadnezzar, like every other heathen civil authority, paid no attention. He moved to place unbiblical, unlawful demands upon God's people. (Dan. 2 & 3.)

The three Hebrews in Daniel had been commanded by Jeremiah to serve and obey Nebuchadnezzar's authority, yet they refused to bow to the image. They refused to bow because they had clearly *yielded their bodies* to their God: They could not allow their bodies to act in any manner inconsistent with God's Law-Word. Their resistance to God's appointed civil authority was based upon their

yielded bodies to the Lord God:

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. (Dan. 3:28.)

It follows, therefore, that if one will exercise Godly resistance, any resistance to God's appointed civil authority of Romans 13:1-5 must be based upon the *yielded bodies* of Romans 12:1, 2.

The Hebrews were servants of the most High God. Though their resistance against the king's command appeared contrary to Jeremiah's instructions to obey and serve Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, they could do nothing inconsistent with their "servanthood." The three did not seek to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar's authority, yet they stood firm when the civil authority demanded they violate God's law.

[Question: How much modern resistance to civil authority is because those resisting are determined to obey Romans 12 & 13:10-14 regardless of the consequences? If the motive for resistance is not obedience to Romans 12 & 13:10-14, as was the Hebrews', then resistance has God's curse against it.]

Observe that Jeremiah instructed God's people to settle down in the kingdom of Babylon and not rebel against Babylon's authority. (Isa. 13:1-22; Isa. 24; Jer. 50:14-29.) They were there as servants because they had turned from God; therefore, God had established Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom to judge them. (Jer. 25:1-11; 26:3.) Jeremiah tells them to build houses, plant gardens, have children and prosper; he tells them to *seek the peace of the city...*, wherever they might find themselves living. (No doubt this command included their getting involved in politics. See Esther.) Furthermore, Jeremiah tells them to pray for the peace of that city. It sounds like Jeremiah had read Paul's instruction to Timothy. (1 Tim. 2:1, 2.)

Then Jeremiah says, "Don't let the prophets dwelling among you tell you any differently because God has not sent them, and you will be in trouble with your God." (Jer. 29:7, 8.) Again, it sure seems like Jeremiah studied the New Testament, for his response is easily found there. (Eph. 5:6; Rom. 13:1-5.) Jeremiah warns them not to get involved in an attempt to overthrow the civil authority over them.

The American War for Independence

It is not uncommon to hear America's war for independence referred to as a "Revolutionary War," and thereby justify revolution against civil authority. But rather than a revolution, it was a war waged under proper civil authority (elected/appointed) rather than a mad mob set about to overthrow the crown; it was civil authority standing against an oppressor who had violated its contract. Actually, the South had the right idea as those people, under proper civil authority, stood against the industrialized North's oppressive central government. The "Civil War" issue was over state's rights, for the slave issue was dead. Slavery was an excuse to start the war to bring under subjection those opposed to strong centralized government and to enforce the 14th amendment upon the South. Every Christian who loves this country should read *The Separation Illusion*.¹

According to R.J. Rushdoony:

The question of legality was an important one to colonial Americans, but their spirit was not one of barren legalism but a concern over establishing a righteous cause by righteous means. The Westminster Confession of Faith, in its chapter on "Of the Civil Magistrate," in common with other religious affirmations on the subject, made civil obedience a Christian duty. Both obedience and disobedience had to be founded on fundamental law, on God's law, and anything else was sin. Legality was thus a

1. John Whitehead. Mott Media, 1000 E. Huron St., Milford, Mi. 48042.

necessity, since it had reference both to civil law and God's law. New England theology in the 17th Century formulated "the control principle of the American Revolution—rebellion against an unlawful act is not rebellion but the maintenance of law." (Andrew C. McLaughlin: Foundations of American Constitutionalism, p. 119. New York: Fawcett, 1961.)

The American Revolutionists were by no means perfect men, nor was their cause at all times waged in conformity to principle. But the principles were nonetheless real and on the whole determinative. They were thus, on the one hand, opposed to the deliberate disruption of law and order which later characterized France, and, on the other hand, equally hostile to the temper apparent today in oft repeated assertions that, because the Supreme Court of the United States has spoken, good citizens have no alternative but to obey. Both attitudes were anathema to them and seen as hostile to the spirit of laws...

...Important in this context of legality of revolution was the influence of *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579), held by John Adams to be one of the most influential books in America on the eve of the Revolution. *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* held, among other things, to these doctrines: First, Any ruler who commands anything contrary to the law of God thereby forfeits his realm. Second, Rebellion is refusal to obey God, for we ought to obey God rather than man. To obey the ruler when he commands what is against God's law is thus truly rebellion. Third, since God's law is the fundamental law and the only true source of law, and neither king nor subject is exempt from it, war is sometimes required in order to defend God's law against the ruler. A fourth tenet also characterized this position: legal rebellion required the leadership of lesser magistrates to oppose, in the name of the law, the royal dissolution or contempt of law. All these doctrines were basic to the colonial cause...

The Federalist recognized the right of revolution against unlawful acts of government as itself obedience to law, reflecting here *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*. (Dietze, *The Federalist*, pp. 58, 60f., 72, 130, 157-160.) ...

Justice was thus on the side of the colonies. Parliament's position was implicitly illegal: *power invalid in the king did not become valid in parliament's hands, being fundamentally invalid...* (Those powers are not anymore valid in Congress's hands or in the court's hands, *ed.*)

The American Revolution was thus legal, and it was a move to reestablish law, and illegality and its onus rested on king and parliament...

The colonials were concerned with a *legal* situation...¹

I am certain that our enemy realizes what is involved; therefore, he keeps all local civil governments deep in debt to the central government. Local governments are so dependent on "revenue sharing" that they dare not stand for the lawful rights of their citizens. Note the call for Christians to get involved in local governments. By taking places of service to the community, they can soon be exalted to places of authority, maybe even by popular vote. Then when in places of authority, they can cut off the "revenue sharing," and take Biblical, lawful local stands against oppressions from above, *e.g.*, county council, county commissioners, local sheriffs.

Let us not think for a moment that situations such as our "public" schools are not planned. Education was much better in the small, local "paid for" schools before consolidation. Since all of the new schools have been built, they are so deep in debt and dependent on "Uncle Sugar" that they dare not take a stand for right, or even for the local parents' wishes for their children. They must submit to the central governments demands for their textbooks, &c., or lose their funding.

Thus keeping Jeremiah 25-29 in proper perspective, peacefully dwelling in Babylon was not a call for peace within the country at the cost of compromising God's Law-Word. Of this fact, Daniel is very clear.

The State as lord

Those who obey unlawful (according to God's Law-Word) commands of *the powers* that be, clearly have not *yielded their bodies* to God according to Romans 12 & 13:10-14. They are just as much in violation of the Law of God as were the Hebrews who bowed before Nebuchadnezzar's image (recognizing the state as the ultimate authority, *i.e.*, the "sovereign state") for fear of their lives. (Dan. 3:6ff.) Thus the use of Romans 13 to justify obedience to ALL the desires of *the powers* that be is as wicked as using it to justify all resistance to *the powers* that be.

1. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 24-29. The Thoburn Press. 1978.

There are clearly times when the Child of God will be faced with the choice of whom to obey: the Command-Word of God or the commands of men. Men hold the temporal power to enforce obedience, but man's threats of harm against the body will not release men from God's justice against honoring men above Himself, *i.e.*, having other god's before Him. (Lk. 12:1-9; Ac. 5:28.)

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mat. 16:24).

"Take up the cross" Each one has "his" cross, some point in which the will of God and self-will come into direct opposition. To the Captain of our salvation the conflict came in its very darkest and most dreadful form. Its climax was in the Garden, when after the great agony He cried: "Not My will, but Thine be done." Our conflict will not be nearly so severe: it may even be on a point that may seem small, — whether or not we will give up some besetting sin, whether or not we will do some disagreeable duty, whether or not we will surrender something which stands between us and Christ, — but whatever that be in which the will of God and our own will are set in opposition, there is our cross, and it must be taken up, and self denied that we may follow Christ.

"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh." Gibson 231¹

Come after me; follow my directions. Deny himself; abstain from all indulgences which stand in the way of duty. Take up his cross; resist the pleadings of carnal policy and appetite, and submit to whatever may be needful, in order to obey God. The life of disciples of Christ is one of self-denial. They must make sacrifices, and it is wise to do so, for it is the way to avoid the greatest loss and obtain the greatest gain.²

No men do more harm to themselves, than they that love themselves more than God.³

Evil Defined

Who to obey? The questions are, "Who is Lord? Who has the right to define good and evil—the Lord God through His Divinely given Law-Word, or the state through its fiat word?"

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding. (Job. 28:28.) *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil...* (Pr. 8:13.) *By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* (Pr. 16:6.)

The one we recognize as the final authority is our lord, whether it is the state or the Lord God. The Lord God reveals Himself as Lord of heaven and earth through His Law-Word; when we obey His Word above every other claim upon us, we recognize His claim as Lord. The state, on the other hand, claims to be lord and owner of all things when it demands obedience to its multitude of rules, regulations and opinions despite the Word of God. Everyone who bowed before Nebuchadnezzar's image said the state was sovereign, having the right to define good and evil by its fiat word; those bowing said the state was lord, and fear of their lord caused them to depart from evil as defined by the state. In the Daniel chapter 3 case, evil was defined by the state as not bowing before the image, though the bowing was clearly a violation of the First and Second Commandments

There is no avoiding the fact: The Hebrews (God's people) who bowed before the image at the state's command, fearing what would happen to their bodies if they did not, worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator; they feared another god, the state, by letting it determine what was good and evil.

The God-established results of His people's worshiping and exalting other gods before Himself is social vileness of all kinds, including open sodomy. (Rom.1:21-32.)

We can safely assume that those who served that other god, the state, justified the service in their own minds, maybe even fleeing back to Jeremiah's instruction. (Jer. chs. 25-29.) However, even the

1. Online Bible.
2. Family notes, *Online Bible*.
3. Geneva.

pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar, recognized that the Hebrews who bowed before his fiat word had not yielded their bodies to the Lord God.

On the other hand, three of God's people said that the state did not have the right to define good and evil, so they refused to obey when the state-issued decrees that clearly violated God's Law-Word.

Fear of the Lord causes people to depart from evil. We know who a person's lord is by who that person allows to determine what is evil and what is good: If the state is the final authority, then the state is the lord of that person; if the Law-Word of God is the final authority (even in spite of the threats from "Nebuchadnezzar"), then the Lord God is the Lord of that person. One should find it saddening that a pagan king could recognize something that many modern professed Christians cannot recognize today:

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. (Dan. 3:28.)

Bodies yielded to the Lord God will not follow any command contrary to the Law-Word of God.

Those who refuse to yield their bodies to Christ and who refuse to get involved have no Biblical, legitimate right to complain against oppression, for their problem is rebellion against the Lord God.

Chapter VI

The Heart of the Matter

As we saw, the purpose of many of Paul's epistles was to warn Christians "against rebellion and revolution." Romans thirteen is clearly one of those warnings. Here Paul instructs concerning proper response to the kingdoms of this world that are at war against the King and His Kingdom.

Romans 13:1, **Every soul...** Paul is quite clear here in the word *every*. Paul, in chapter 12, has already told us that the Christian's supreme allegiance belongs only to God, so now he will explain what is owed to the earthly powers. Staying within the context of the Scriptures of Paul's day (OT, of course), there were situations requiring resistance to the civil authorities' laws. (Paul wrote most of his letters from prison.) Any time the civil authority required idol worship (*e.g.*, looking to the state for salvation), immorality, or any compromise upon Christ's authority, it is the Christian's responsibility to resist. (Ac. 4:7-22; 5:40; 15:29.)

This writer sees quite a bit of hypocrisy in those who speak with determinant resolution against an oppressive civil government, yet send their children to the same government for training in its schools.

Where is the Line Drawn

It is probable that the Christians at Rome, seeing the unbridled wickedness and idolatry, would err by refusing any and all submission to civil authority, even when it was proper. So Paul gives the essence of proper submission in chapter 13.

Be subject... *subject* is also used in 1 Corinthians 14:34,

*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but [they are commanded] to be under **obedience**, as also saith the law.*

[A]s also saith the law. The law placed the woman under the authority of the man—her father and then her husband. (Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim, 2:9ff.) The command is explained in Numbers chapter 30, where the

woman's *vow unto the Lord* could be disallowed by her father if she was unmarried, or by her husband.

Obedience to authority is always according to God's revealed Law-Word. Though Paul appears to say in 1 Corinthians 14:34 that no woman can say the slightest word in church, we cannot take it literally. Paul said that the woman must speak from under proper authority, not usurping authority over the man in the house of God. (1 Tim. 2:11, 12.) We should point out that the man is also required to speak from under authority, subject to Christ. (1 Cor. 11:3.)

The words *be subject* speaks of the submission a soldier gives to his officers. The implication is subordination: a willingness to occupy our proper place, to yield to the proper authority over us. Notice the extent of submission is not established; rather, submission in general is called for. Thus the essence of godly submission is to submit in all things which are not contrary to God's Law-Word.

The higher power... The magistrate or the civil government. (Tit. 3:1.) *Power* is the same word our Lord used in Luke 12:11, *And when they bring you unto the synagogue* (before the religious leaders), *and unto magistrates, and powers* (civil rulers), *take no thought how or what ye shall answer, or what ye shall say*. The Lord took it for granted that His hearers would not be able to please Him and the civil powers at the same time all the time. When the civil authority goes contrary to His authority, then His people will end up in trouble with the civil authority, as did the three Hebrew children.

A word closely related to *power* is used in Acts 9:14, *authority*. Because Saul had authority (the *power* was from God, for all power is from Him), did this mean that the Christians were to submit to him to be bound and taken to Jerusalem for prison and death? (Ac. 26:10, 12; 9:14.) If we say that the *powers* of Romans 13:1 are to be obeyed regardless of the circumstances, we must also say that those who resisted Saul's authority sinned against God.

Obedience to Satan?

Furthermore, Satan is called *the prince of the power of the air* (a related word to the one above). (Lk. 22:53; Eph. 2:2.) Satan receives his power from God, (cf., Rev. 13:4, 7; 17:17) yet I do not suppose that anyone will say that to resist this power of Satan is to resist God:

Whosoever therefore resisteth [436] the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist [436] shall receive to themselves damnation. (Rom. 13:2.) Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist [436] the devil, and he will flee from you. (Jam. 4:7) Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist [436] stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (1 Pet. 5:8, 9.)

Yet in our resistance to Satan, we cannot *rail* against him. (2 Pet. 2:10, 11. *Rail*, 989, speaking evil, slanderous, reproachful, railing, abusive. John Gill:

[B]ring not railing accusation against them before the Lord; either "against themselves", as the Arabic version and one of Beza's copies read; against one another, against those of their own species, that are in a higher or lower class or office than themselves; and therefore men ought not to despise magistracy, or the higher powers that are over them: or else against the fallen angels, the devils, as should seem from Jude 1:9, or rather against civil magistrates, kings, and princes of this world, who, though so much below them, they vouchsafe to take under their care, and protect them, even Heathen princes, Da 10:20; and though there may be oftentimes many things unbecoming in them, yet they do not accuse them, or rail against them before the Lord; and even when, by his orders, they inflict punishment on their persons, as on Sennacherib, and Herod, and others, yet they do not speak evil of their office; and therefore, since angels, who are so much above men, even above the most dignified among them, behave in this manner, it must be an aggravation of the sin of these persons, who are so much below them, to speak evil of them.¹

Jude 9, *rail*, 988, slander, detraction, speech injurious, to another's good name:

1. Online Bible.

An argument of comparison: Michael one of the chiefest angels, was content to deliver Satan, although a most accursed enemy, to the judgment of God to be punished: and these perverse men are not ashamed to speak evil of the powers who are ordained of God.¹

If the messengers direct from God had to leave the enemy of God to God's judgment, how much more must we?

Maintaining that every soul must be subject to the higher powers in all things without taking into consideration the total of Scripture, presents the distinct possibility (and probability) of having to side with Satan himself in his wicked, futile efforts to overthrow God. (Ps. 2.) Furthermore, the word *power* and its derivatives refer to godly power (Mat. 28:18; Lk. 5:24; Jn. 17:2), the magistrates power (Lk. 12:11; 20:20; Rom. 13:1-3; Titus 3:1), or to the devil himself. Yet no matter who has this power, it comes from one source, the Tri-Une God (Dan. 4:26, 32, 35).

The source of power and authority

For there is no power but of God... Here we again have the same word, *power*. *For...* gives us the reason for obeying the *power*. The doctrine that all power originates with the Tri-Une God is supported throughout Scripture. Our Lord told Pilate that all power belongs to God alone, Who gives it to whomsoever He will. (Jn. 19:8-12.) Paul makes the same point: All power is of God; therefore, the Christian is not to seek its overthrow. (Rom. 13:1; Ps. 75:7.)

Authority yields Obedience

The commander's orders that are to be obeyed are the lawful orders. Accordingly, if the commander rebels against the lawful authority over him and orders those under him to rebel against the proper authority over him, then his order is not to be obeyed. Thus Nebuchadnezzar was rebelling against the authority over him (God) when he gave the command to bow before his image. His rebellion against the authority over him released the Hebrews under him from obedience to his unlawful command to bow before the idol. Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar was in trouble with the Higher Authority when he passed his unrighteous decree.

Another clear example of authority forfeiting obedience: The owner of a maidservant had no power to sell her to a strange nation. Hence, if he sold her to a strange nation, she did not have to obey the authority over her, Exodus 21:8.

Therefore, any order by any authority inconsistent with God's law is no law, and must not be followed. (Isa. 40:22, 23.) Rebellion is against God, not against man. All sin is in relationship to the law of God. (1 Jn. 3:4.)

Justice, Rightness

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament gives an important observation concerning the words, *justice* and *rightness*:

The forensic aspect of *sedeq* applies to the equality of all, rich and poor, before the law. The righteous one, the *saddiq*, is not to be put to death (Ex 23:7) for the law does not condemn him. The man who has the position of right (the righteousness of the righteous, ..) in litigation must not be turned aside, (Isa 5:23). It should be emphasized that in Israel's law the judge was not considering a man's innocence with regard to breaking a human law, but a man's righteousness in regard to God's law. Today a man may transgress a statute but be innocent before God. In the OT law, to be innocent and to be righteous were one and the same. The maintenance of righteousness is frequently expressed by the Hiphil stem. This construction refers to making righteous or to declaring righteous.²

1. Geneva.

2. *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, 753.

Accordingly, one's guilt before God is always according to God's law, not according to man's. Men may have temporal power to enforce unrighteous decrees, but that power does not make the men nor the decrees right. Obviously, the *higher power* of Romans 13 must be God, as recognized by Daniel and the three Hebrew children. Right is not according to decrees by civil authority; right is always in terms of God's Law-Word. God only holds man accountable to obey civil laws as far as man's laws do not conflict with God's. When they conflict, we sin before God and serve other gods when we follow anything contrary to His Word. Conversely, we may be innocent before civil law, but clearly guilty before God's law (e.g., sodomy, abortion), or innocent before God but guilty before man (e.g., seat-belts). Regardless, our standard must always be the law of God.

A Conclusion

In reality, what we have covered thus far, combined with Jeremiah chapters 25-29 and Daniel chapters 1-6, is sufficient to give a proper understanding of Romans 13:1-5. We have covered adequate ground to safely reach the end conclusion of v. 5, yet we will proceed with a study of the rest of this passage for those who wish to follow it through. The following will confirm and develop what is already presented, and will reinforce the conclusion at the end of v. 5. We will then proceed to vv. 6 and 7.

We will also attempt to address some things as we proceed: "If the civil government says to do it, then to be right with God I must do it." "Submitting to man's laws is submitting to God." "Government defines good and evil." "When and why did God give the power of the sword?" "What about I Peter 2:13, *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man?*" "Should we pay taxes (tribute) to wicked a wicked civil government?" And several other points.

Chapter VII

Setting in Order

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. (Rom. 13:1.)

Ordained of God speaks of God's arrangement or setting in order. God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar shows that: First, God establishes civil rulers according to His Own sovereign will; second, His establishment does not mean that He approves of their conduct—that they always do right, nor that it is our duty to always obey them; and third, when their requirements are contrary to God's law, our bodies are not ours to do with as we please—they belong to God, and we must serve Him, not men. (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 7:23.) Furthermore, when civil rulers misuses their God-given power, they will answer to God for that misuse as will God's people for their obeying them in their misuse. (Jer. 15:4; Hos. 5:11.) Gods' people will also answer to Him for any resistance to the lawful use of that power, though the use is by evil men in high places.

When civil authority misuses power, it does so at its own peril. In its abuse of power, it also loses the obligation of obedience by those under him. The ruler will be "rewarded" for his refusal to correctly use the power and authority given to him by God. The pagan nation, Babylon, was judged because she did not honor the law (authority) of the Lord God of heaven. (Dan. chp. 4; Jer. 25:12-14.)

Paul's Context

Paul is writing to those who would be appalled at the idea of obeying a magistrate's command which was contrary to God's law. From the time of the Maccabees, Rome and Israel had clashed over Rome's attempt to interfere with Israel's obedience to the Law of Moses. Therefore, Paul is dealing

with the thought, “Is it right to obey the magistrate at all.” The new Christians realized that they were in another kingdom now, the Kingdom of God. (Col. 1:13.) The new Christians had submitted all to Christ; they had been told by Christ and the apostles that there would be conflicts between the two kingdoms as they obeyed the Son’s Kingdom’s laws.

Many times, the pagan civil magistrates were tyrants who had usurped their offices through murder and foul deeds of all kinds. In Paul’s and Peter’s time, crimes by the civil authorities and revolutions against civil authorities were prevalent.¹ Paul warns the new members of God’s Kingdom on earth not to get involved in the wicked political affairs, that is, the murders, plots, schemes and even hopes for political solutions for society’s ills. He did not tell them to “stay out of politics,” and places of civil authority; he did tell them, however, to stay out of the corruption associated with those areas of endeavor.

V. 2, **Whosoever therefore resisteth** [498] **the power** speaks of desiring to replace, and comes from the word used in Matthew 2:22, *Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room [473] of his father Herod*; Matthew 5:38, *An eye for [473] an eye, and a tooth for [473] a tooth...*; 1 Peter 3:9, *Not rendering evil for [473] evil, or railing for [473] railings*. It is found also in 1 Thessalonians 5:15, *...none render evil for [473] evil unto any...* Romans 13:2, **whosoever therefore resisteth**..., or seeks to overthrow and replace the civil authority without proper authority as mentioned previously. (See *Introduction*.) A modern reference point can be found in nations where armies gather their groups together and seek to overthrow the established governments.

The temptation for the Roman Christians would have been to pick a good side to join in a violent overthrow of their current corrupt civil authority, replacing it with one more to their liking. Paul says, “You can’t do that.” God established, or raised up, even the wicked into His place of authority, even as He did Nebuchadnezzar. To seek anything but peace for him while under him is wrong; we are peace makers, yet peace cannot be made at the expense of God’s laws. Remember, the American War for Independence did not attempt to overthrow the crown; rather, it broke with the Crown because the Crown did not fulfill its contract with the people, though the people fulfilled the contract with the crown.

Before moving on, let us mention two things: First, the early Christians obeyed Paul’s instructions to avoid the “political” turmoil, yet they overthrew Rome. However, the feat was not accomplished by choosing a side in the political or civil conflict; rather, it was by obedience to the commands of Christ. (Ac. 17:6.) Second, the situation America faces at the start of a new century with a very oppressive civil authority is not a result of the civil government breaking its contract (*i.e.*, the Constitution) with the people. It is the direct result of the people breaking their contract with the Christian God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.² Certainly, it is easy and convenient to accuse the civil government of breaking its contract with the people, for then the people are relieved of responsibility to repent of their sins, as revealed in His total Law-Word. The people broke the contract with the civil government in America.

V. 2 **resisteth** [436] **the ordinance of God**. Being different from the previous *resist* (attempt to overthrow), *resist* here implies resistance against or to be in opposition. Let us include the next word, *ordinance* [1296] *of God*. This *ordinance* [1296] does not refer to God’s Law-Word; rather, it refers to “disposition.” (Ac. 7:53.) The Jews received the law, being influenced by the “disposition” of the angels (the office they held as God’s servants) involved in delivering the law. (Dt. 33:2.) Furthermore, *ordinance* finds its roots in a word [1299] meaning “to arrange, appoint, ordain, prescribe, give order,” *e.g.*, Paul uses this word as he talks about the *different officers* he established in the churches (1 Cor. 7:17); he says he will set things *in order* when he comes (1 Cor. 11:34), and he uses it referring to the instructions he gave concerning a matter, *have given order* (1 Cor. 16:1).

1. See *Florus*.

2. See chp 1.

In other words, Paul tells the Roman Christians not to resist the office of the civil magistrate, for God established the office to provide social order. Accordingly, we have Paul warning against getting involved in revolts against civil authority. God established their order (position), and attempts to overturn that order *resisth the ordinance of God*. Paul makes not the slightest reference here to resisting ungodly laws. The situation he is addressing deals with the Christians at Rome seeing the murders, fights and corruptions of those in civil offices, and thus were ready to dismiss the office of civil authority as being contrary to God's Law-Word. Paul says that God ordained the civil office, and we resist, or ignore, this fact at our own peril.

All things considered, we must say that the Lord God would rather have despotism than open anarchy, for despotism will provide more social order than will anarchy.

V. 2 **and they that resist** [436] **shall receive to themselves damnation**. *Resist*, the same word just discussed—it refers to resistance against the office of civil government that is ordained by God; it refers to refusing to submit to that office as being from God. Paul is not referring to *resisting* Anti-christ laws that might proceed from the office.

Damnation

[2917, from 2919] **2. Judgment; i.e.** condemnation of wrong, the decision (whether severe or mild) which one passes on the faults of others: Mt. vii.2. In a forensic sense, the sentence of a judge: with a gen. Of the punishment to which one is sentenced, Lk. xxiv. 20; esp. The sentence of God as judge: [Greek word], the judgment (in which God declared sin to be punishable with death) issued in condemnation, i.e. was condemnation to all who sinned and therefore paid the penalty of death Ro. v. 16; esp. Where the justice of God in punishing is to be shown, [Greek word] denotes *condemnatory sentence, penal judgment, sentence*, 2 Pet. ii. 3; Jude 4; with gen. Of the one who pronounces judgment, [Greek word], Ro. ii. 2 sq.; [Greek word], Mt. xxiii. 13 (14) Rec.; Mk. xii. 40; Lk. xx. 47; Ro. xiii. 2; Jas. iii.1...¹

Thus *damnation* speaks of a decree, or judgment used in juridical sense. Accordingly, if we disrespect or resist the office of civil magistrate, we face the judgment of God according to Jeremiah's warning. (Jer. 27:8-22.)

A Choice

Obeying God, we respect the office, but what about ungodly requirements that might proceed from that office? How do we face that difficult situation when the office has the power of the sword to use to enforce ungodly laws? On the other hand, if obey the ungodly laws, we will face the judgment of God. At this point a choice must be made: face the *sword* or face the wrath of God.

Let us consider the Lord's instructions to the disciples in Matthew 10:16-42 (Mk. 13:9-13). Regardless of the differing views of its context, the substance remains: As God's people stand for Him according to His Law-Word, it will bring them before the civil authorities just as sure as the three Hebrews' stand brought them before Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord does not hint at overthrowing kings nor governors (nor did He in Daniel), but He clearly says that when His people refuse to obey ungodly demands, civil authority will misuse its power to persecute God's people. Then our Lord gives what is to be the proper response by His people to the king or governor who misuses his power: *Fear not them which kill the body...: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Hard Choices

When the choice comes to obey an ungodly order, even in the face of death, there really is no choice. The choice was made when we were baptized into the body of Christ: Our Lord said we must

1. The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon.

obey the laws of the One before Whom we must appear in judgment. (2 Cor. 5:10.) Our earthly purpose is not to please the civil magistrate, but to please the One Who purchased us with His own blood, and Who called us for His praise, honour and glory. (Jn. 8:29-31; Ga. 1:10; 1 Thes. 2:15; 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:4; 1 Pet. 1:7.)

Thus resistance against or disregard for the office of the king or governor is resistance against what God has established, and defiance will bring judgment against the resistor. God's judgment (*damnation*) may come from that office or from God. On the other hand, resistance against ungodly law which might proceed from that office is not only pleasing to God, but required of His people. Yet resistance could bring the wrath of the misused office upon us, *e.g.*, Nebuchadnezzar and the three Hebrews. Remember what Paul is dealing with here: "The men holding the offices are so corrupt and wicked, should we even recognize these offices of civil government?"

Paul's warning is clear: Dismissing, or resisting, the office of civil magistrate will receive God's judgment.

V. 3, ***For rulers are not a terror to good work, but to the evil.*** First, *rulers*—the word is used for *rulers* in general, and includes religious, civil, *rulers of darkness* and princess. (Mat. 9:18; 20:25; Eph. 2:2.) Obviously, *rulers of darkness* are *a terror to good works*.

When we consider Matthew 20:25 (*Ye know that the **princes** of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them.*) with Psalms 2, we must fully expect wicked rulers to misuse their offices (the power of the sword) in their vain attempts to overthrow God and His authority, as defined in His total Law-Word. Their nature is to attempt to overthrow His laws, *break His bands asunder*. Thus they use laws, religion, science, education, ridicule, entertainment, anything to cast a disparaging light on God's total Law-Word. By doing so, they feel His laws can be broken with immunity. God's people can have no part of any ungodly law which might be designed to undermine His authority, or they will be part of fallen man's vain attempt against the Lord and His Christ. Obedience to laws designed to overthrow God and His authority makes one a partaker in the evil deeds. Such efforts will bring the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. We cannot join with them. (Ps. 50:16-22; Pr. 1; Isa. 5:23; Rom. 1:32; Eph. 5:1-17; 1 Tim. 5:22.)

Terror, fear, that which causes fear. God did not establish the office of civil authority to cause fear to those who do good. Evil men, however, can be expected to misuse their offices and its sword to try to cause fear in those who refuse to obey their ungodly laws, but that was not the purpose of God's establishing that civil office. Again, our Lord warned us of evil men's hatred of His gospel of peace, and of their foolish, vain attempts to stop it. (Mk. 13:9-13.)

Terror is used in 1 Peter 3:14, dealing with a godly person obeying God in the face of oppression from properly ordained authority:

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. (1 Pet. 3:14-17.)

Out of an abundance of material on the passage, we will only look at a small portion. Peter encourages individuals to obey God in the face of the ungodly demands placed upon them by the misused authority. In fact, we are told that suffering under ungodly demands are according to *the will of God*. When His people obey their God according to His Law-Word, persecution will come. When persecution comes, He tells how to respond *in order to bring glory to God* as well as to be on HIS side. (1 Pet. 3:8-16.) The Lord will see those in authority misusing their God-ordained office's power, and *the face of the Lord is against them that do evil*. The Christian God, the Creator of heaven and earth, is against

them.

Peter continues by telling the ones under authority not to be afraid of the terror which the ones in authority will use to try to get them to violate God's Law-Word. He says not to allow ungodly demands, backed up by the *sword*, control our lives and ruin our conscience toward God. We only have two effective weapons of Christian warfare: a clear conscience toward God and faith in His Word. (1 Tim. 1:19.) All ungodly demands from all authorities must be resisted with the *meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price*. (1 Pet. 3:4.)

Peter goes on to point out that resistance will cause shame in the ones misusing their God-ordained offices, v. 16. Resistance to ungodly demands is to the death if necessary, *e.g.*, the three Hebrews. But for death to be pleasing in God's sight, it must be for obeying His laws over the Antichrist laws of man, and not for trying to usurp or overturn the God-ordained office of authority. We cannot allow their threatened terror to make our decision. God did not establish civil authority to cause fear to those doing good, yet fallen man will naturally protect evil and persecute good. They will misuse their power to cause terror to those who refuse to submit to their unlawful demands.

"But I have properly submitted to authority, and I am still being persecuted. I see no progress, so I might as well do it my way." If one does right according to God's Law-Word, both in spirit and action, and still suffers, then it is the will of God. (1 Pet. 3:17.) The oppressors will mean it for harm, but God will turn it into His own praise, honour and glory. (V. 13.) We should not think it strange that a godly response to ungodly requirements results in more oppression. Furthermore, there is no Scriptural justification for *rendering evil for evil* nor *railing for railing*. Peter clearly establishes the means for inheriting God's blessing. (1 Pet. 3:9; 4:12-19.)

Good refers to what is upright, honorable and acceptable to God. (Rom. 12:2.) God ordained the office to protect His people, so they could do *the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*. As the office holder does this, he is a minister of God doing what God raised him up to do. The obvious implication is that when God's people quit doing the *good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God* and start living for self according to their own imaginations (not the law of God), then the civil authorities *will abuse* their office and abuse the godly few who still seek to be *doers of the work of God*. (Ja. 1:25. The book of 1 Peter covers this, as does a multitude of other passages. Compare Romans 12:9 with 1 Peter 3:11. Note that the good works that are pleasing to God [His Word] are to be *cleaved to* even to the death at the hand of those who hold the sword.)

We should point out that a major cause for the wicked being exalted is God's people's refusal to glorify God as God—they refuse to be *transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*. (Dt. 28:1, 2 & 15; 1 Sam. 8; Jer. 5:31; Rom. 1:21.)

Evil, base, wrong or wicked as in Matthew 21:41 (Phl. 3:2; Rev. 2:2), contrasted with good. (2 Cor. 5:10.) We will answer to God for every action according to His revealed Law-Word.

"But if the civil government says to do it, then to be right with God, I must do it." Observe: Paul is not defending the laws that civil government might try to enforce; rather, he defends the office of civil government. There is a tremendous difference. He is not saying all of laws emanating from the offices are to be respected as being from God. When man's laws run contrary to the nature of God's laws, they must be appealed; when appeal fails, they must be trampled under foot as though they were no law at all — to the death if needed.

Price Paid

We have been bought with a price, and civil government did not pay that price. Never are we told by the Word of God that we are to glorify civil government with unrestrained obedience in our bodies and spirits, *which are God's*. Furthermore, we are the servants of the One Who paid the price for our

redemption, and that was not civil government, though it might make the claim of ownership. We are the Lord Christ's servants, to do His will as revealed in His Word. We are commanded not to be *the servants of men* though they might be men in high places of human authority. Our first responsibility is always to the Lord Christ, and we "serve" men only as that service does not compromise our service to our Lord and Master. (Ps. 49:7; Mat. 23:8-11; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 7:23.)

God established civil government not as a terror against those seeking to do good, but as a terror to those seeking to do evil that others might fear. (1 Tim. 5:20.) Therefore, He does not hold His people accountable to fear something not operating within the parameters of His total Law-Word:

But He also teaches us, that "He is rather to be feared, who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell," that is, the Lord alone; "not those which kill the body, but are not able to hurt the soul," that is to say, all human powers. Here, then, we have a recognition of the natural immortality of the soul, which cannot be killed by men; and of the mortality of the body, which may be killed: whence we learn that the resurrection of the dead is a resurrection of the flesh; for unless it were raised again, it would be impossible for the flesh to be "killed in hell."¹

Fear

Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? *Afraid:* to fear, to be seized with alarm, used of those who fear harm or injury. To the casual reader, Paul apparently urges fear of what civil authority can do, so one will not go against man's laws. (13:3.) However, both the author of Hebrews and the Lord Jesus tell us *not to fear* men and what they can do to the body. (Mat. 10:31; He 13:6, where the word is identical to Paul's.) Though Paul condemns resistance against the office of civil authority, both Paul and Christ command resistance against Antichrist laws that might emanate from the office.

In Paul's use of the word *fear*, we see that we must not allow fear of what those in places of authority can do to the body influence our obedience to God's total Law-Word. (Dan. 3:16-18.) When one disobeys God, then God has the office of civil authority to punish the evil doer, and the evil doer should fear. It should go without saying that not all of God's laws carry civil punishment against their violators, *e.g.*, tithing. One's fear, though, must be fear of the Lord God. Our responsibility is to *Fear God, and keep his commandments*, and we are prohibited from allowing any fear of man, including civil authority, to make our decision for us.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ec. 12:13, 14.)

The Wise man defines *fear of God* as keeping *his commandments*. (Job 28:28; Pr. 3:7; 16:6.) Fear of man over fear of God means, accordingly, obeying the commandments of men though they militate against the commandments of God. More specifically, allowing the fear of man to cause us to obey man's laws over the Law-Word of God clearly violates the First Commandment: We establish another god as sovereign over us.

Doing Good

Do that which is good, acceptable and perfect in God's eyes, according to His total Law-Word, *and thou shalt have the praise of the office.* But the praise of the office is not the reason for doing good. The reason for doing good has already been stated — our bodies have been offered as a living sacrifice to God.

And thou shalt have praise of the same: If the civil authorities are fulfilling God's purpose for their office, then those who are doing the good, acceptable and perfect will of God will be *praised* by

1. Tertullian, *On The Resurrection of the Flesh*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, III.570. A.D. 208. WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

them. (Rom. 2:29; ; 12:2; Eph. 1:6.)

It has been this pastor's general experience that the ones having the least dedication toward doing the good, acceptable and perfect will of God are the most vocal against the oppressive and ungodly activities of those in civil authority. I personally know of, and have heard speak, a very popular, respected, and widely traveled "Patriot" speaker who traveled the country with another man's wife, "with her husband's permission." (They stayed in the same motel room "to save money.") His message was very strong and persuasive against oppression and abuse of power by those in civil authority, even using many Bible texts to condemn the abusers of power (including Rom. 13), yet he exhibited no motivation toward *doing the good, acceptable and perfect will of God* as defined in God's Law-Word. With the kind of attitude this man showed toward *doing* the Law of God, what kind of attitude can we expect from those in civil authority (whom he was so vocally against) toward the Law of God? "The pot calls the kettle black," and God condemns them both. Moreover, God judges those who not only tolerate but support speakers who militate against His Word. God is not as we are, as we overlook blatant militancy against God's Word by a speaker because his message is appealing. (Ps. 50:16-22.)

Note 1 Peter 2:12-14: v. 12, *your good works*, beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life and hence praise worthy; morally good, noble. (1 Tim. 5:10; 25; 6:18; Tit. 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14; Heb. 10:24; 1 Pet. 2:12; Ja. 3:13.) Undoubtedly, the Lord God's use of the word *good* confirms that it clearly means *good* according to His revealed Law-Word as found in the prophets. (Mat. 5:16, 17.) Furthermore, not only does Peter use the same word, *good*, but he quotes the same thought in which our Lord used this word. (See 1 Pet. 2:12 & Mat. 5:16.) Therefore, we must reach the same conclusion as did both the Lord and Peter: *Good* is defined by the law and the prophets, not by civil authority.

Apparent Conflict

Now we seem to have a conflict: "If God's word defines good and not the civil government, what will we do with Peter's instruction to *submit to every ordinance*, when the *ordinance* is contrary to God's definition of good?"

There are a couple of answers: First, Peter's word *submit*, in which he commands submission to civil authority, is the same word used by James to tell us to *submit* ourselves to God. (Ja. 4:7.)

"But," you say, "When I submit to every ordinance of man, I am submitting to God." Peter gives us the answer because when man and God conflicted in their claims upon him, he said we ought to obey God rather than man. (Ac. 5:29.) Clearly, Peter did not consider submission to ungodly laws submission to God. Therefore, Peter says that as long as submission to man's laws hinders not our submission and obedience to God, we must submit to man's laws. (1 Pet. 2:13) It is impossible to please both man and God all of the time, and when they part company, we must follow God. (Lk. 16:10ff.)

Second, Peter's *ordinance* is not the same as Paul's. (Rom. 13:2, a disposition, arrangement, ordinance.) Peter's *ordinance* comes under the general meaning of "the act of founding, establishing, building, such as in creation," and is only used by Peter in 2:13. Peter is referring to God's establishment of different institutions of men: family, church, occupation, civil government, telling us to submit to these areas of authority: *every ordinance of man*. Accordingly, Peter is dealing with the same situation as is Paul in Romans 13. Peter tells Christians they are to be subject to all areas of man's authority when they do not conflict with the clear teachings of God's Law-Word. The offices, including civil, were established by God for our welfare to punish the evildoer and to praise those who do well. There is nothing that destroys one's testimony for Christ more than rebelling against God-ordained areas of authority.

Evidently, Peter was writing to Christians who were either already facing tremendous persecution

and death or were being prepared to face it for their stand upon God's Word. Probably the tendency was, as with Paul's readers at Rome, to dismiss all human authority as being of the devil. So rather than resisting the evils coming from the human offices of authority, the people were resisting the offices themselves. Peter tells them to still submit to and respect the offices because they were an *ordinance*, a human institution established by God for man's well being. Obviously, however, as long as there are sinful men, there will be sinful attempts to overthrow the Lord and His Christ in every area of God-ordained institution of human government. There will always be Antichrist laws and actions from fallen men who possess human authority, at which time those who love God must obey His Word even to the death. (Cf., Mat. 10:34.)

God established the civil rule of kings and governors to punish evil doers and for the praise of them who do well. We can fully expect sinful men to usurp the God established offices, but this does not permit His people to resist or rebel against the offices. The spirit of Antichrist has attempted to control places of authority for years, and will continue to until the Lord says "NO MORE." (1 Jn. 2:18; 1 Cor. 15:24-26.)

Moreover, we should mention that a rebellious, Antichrist attitude of those in authority does not permit a rebellious, Antichrist attitude from those under that authority. Godly resistance against ungodly requirements must be done in God's way, for an attitude of rebellion will only make matters worse and cost one the power of God. (2 Tim 2:19-26.)

Peter points out several things of major importance: 1) as men choose to obey God's laws rather than man's when the two conflict, God is glorified (1 Pet. 2:12; Mat. 5.); 2) he warns that there will be false teachers among God's people who will teach a responsibility to another authority other than to the Lord for their own personal benefit (2 Pet. 2:1-3.), and 3) as God's people hang onto their faith in God's Word (obedience to God over man) in spite of the terror of evil men, their faith is tried for His praise and honor and glory. The end of this faith is the salvation of the lost around us. (1 Pet. 1:6-9.)

Peter and Paul essentially say the same thing: The office of civil authority is established by God to praise good and punish evil, and as far as this purpose is accomplished, God's people are required to obey their laws. However, when ungodly men endorse and enforce Antichrist laws, godly responsibility to their laws stops. Ungodly laws must be appealed, ignored, and then resisted to the death when all else fails.

Christ defines those good works that are to control us as the commandments given in the law and the prophets. (Mat. 5:16-20.) The precepts He established are to be our rule for every action today.

I had a "Christian" man tell me as we discussed the issue of *obedience* to the civil government, that the civil government defines what is good and evil. It is indeed sad that Christianity has sunk so low. He implied that if civil government would make everything legal it would be good and man would no longer be a sinner in need of a Saviour. However, God's law alone defines good and evil, sin and righteousness. (1 Jn. 3:4.)

V. 3, ***Thou shalt have praise of the same...*** Same what? The same *power* as mentioned above: the magistrate or the civil government. God gave power to the office to praise good and punish evil (symbolized by the *sword*), yet God's power is frequently misused to praise evil and punish good. In that case, the one in power ceases to be a minister of God for good and no longer deserves obedience, nor is obedience to unscriptural commands required by God. Though we cannot stand against the office, we must stand against the spirit of Antichrist in the laws emanating from the offices.

V. 4, ***For he is the minister of God ...*** *Minister*, one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master: a servant, attendant, or minister. Specifically, those through whom God carries on His administration on earth—as magistrates. The word *minister* refers to something like an errand boy. Accordingly, *minister* here is no more than a servant of God placed there by God to do God's will. (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 6:4; 1 Thes. 3:2.) Part of his ministerial duties before God is to institute Godly

laws into civil law.

The fact that civil ministers were *ministers of God* was recognized by our founding fathers. Civil government, and really civil institutions of all kinds, in America was founded upon the fact it is a servant of God and that the law of God as revealed in His Word is its law also. The godly foundations of America are reflected in all the charters of the original colonies and in most of the state constitutions. Of course, the spirit of Antichrist is working hard and successfully to remove all godly influence, with the help of many “Christians,” who have believed the lie that Christianity and civil affairs should not mix. The philosophy that civil institutions were ordained by God to carry out His will as revealed in His Word was prevalent in the founding of all our states, as well as most of our colleges. There were still laws on the books in several states well into the twentieth century requiring candidates for public offices to swear their belief in the Christian God. Furthermore, civil laws, probably up to the 14th amendment, closely followed scripture. Since WW II, laws have departed rapidly and radically from God’s Law-Word.¹

Paul said that when one resists Biblically based laws, he resists God Himself. This foundational belief still affects society today, as some see civil authority as the final authority, no matter how ungodly the civil authority’s laws are. Sadly, many good people fail to realize that many civil laws today are totally contrary to God’s law, requiring God’s people to ignore and/or violate them.

Much of civil law today reflects the desires of sodomites, whoremongers, thieves, murderers, the covetous, socialists, one worlders, special interest groups and antichrist groups of all kinds - especially if they have money, which God’s people apparently do not have. To say that laws instituted by Antichristian groups are representative of God’s will for us, as they might have been 100-300 years ago, is ludicrous. The laws not reflecting God’s nature must be appealed, overturned, and, last of all, ignored, or we will be destroyed with the rest of the Antichrist crowd. We cannot look upon our present Antichrist laws with the same attitude held at the founding of this country when laws reflected the will of the Christian God.

V. 4, **For good.** V. 3, *good*. Thus we see that as the man in this office praises good and punishes evil, he is God’s minister. He is servant to the one whose requirements he reflects, whether they are his own, the Antichrist crowd’s or God’s. When his requirements no longer praise good and punish evil, he is no longer a minister of God for good in that area. Antichrist laws emanating from the office do not mean the office is not of God, for it is. His purpose for being in that office is to praise those who do good and restrain, punish evil doers, and when he ignores his purpose, we must obey God. Moreover, as long as evil, self-serving men fill those places of authority, we must expect them to act accordingly.

But if thou do that which is evil... *Evil*, see v. 3. *Evil* is always defined by God’s Word. *Evil* is that which is contrary to either Divine or human law, yet not always does human law reflect divine law. If one says that man (whether in civil, family, church or any other context) defines what is *good* and *evil*, he falls into Satan’s first lie: “You, Eve, can decide for yourself what is good and evil.” (Gen. 3:5.)

Evil: Paul dogmatically says that *evil* is in terms of the truth of God’s word: *tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.* (Rom. 2:9.) Thus one of the godly purposes of civil authority is to see that *tribulation and anguish* does indeed come upon the evil doer. (Rom. 13:4.) When civil authority does not accomplish Romans 2:9, a couple of things will happen: First, God will accomplish *tribulation and anguish* upon the evil doer as the Avenger of all evil. (Heb. 10:30.) Man may hide in the dark to avoid the eyes of the law or the eyes of men to do his evil, but God sees, him and will repay him accordingly. (2 Sam. 12:12; Ec. 12:14.)

1. See *The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States*, B.F. Morris, Philadelphia PA. — G.W. Childs, 1864. *God and Government*, Vol. I. American Vision Press, P.O. Box 720515, Atlanta, Ga., 30328. At the very least, one should read the Mayflower Compact, which should not be too hard to find.

God's tribulation will be accomplished *upon every soul of man that doeth evil* whether that soul is in a God ordained office or under the God-ordained office. Moreover, *glory, honour, and peace* is promised to every man who *worketh good*. (Rom. 2:10.) This is the same *good* as used in Romans 13:3, 4. God is the One who makes this promise; therefore, He is the One who defines evil and good, and He will be the One Who sees that the just rewards come to pass with no respect of persons. His reward will be *according to the truth*, which is His Law. (Ps. 119:142, *thy law is the truth*.) Yet because of His *goodness, forbearance and longsuffering* which waits for men to repent, men harden their hearts and store up for themselves even greater wrath in the day when God's patience expires. (Rom. 2:5; Ec. 8:11, 12.)

Consequently, if we do evil, as defined by God's law, we need to fear. He has established civil government to bring HIS *tribulation and anguish* upon the evil doer. (Rom. 13:4.) He has given the power of the *sword*, life and death, to the civil authority for use against the evil doer. Yet at times, He permits the *sword* to be totally misused so that it might bring more praise, honour and glory to Christ. He alone knows why He allows the evil to prevail. And "why" is not a question Christians may ask.

The sword: God gave the power of the *sword* to the civil authority in Genesis 9:6. Not having the power of the *sword*, *i.e.*, life and death, before the flood, man did as he pleased with no restraint, and violence filled the earth. (Gen. 6:1-7.) After the flood, God gave the power of the *sword* to prevent uncontrolled violence from again overtaking the world. Consequently, no matter how corrupt civil authority might be, we must admit that as a whole, the violent, evil doer is still restrained.

Illustration

The "collapse" of the Soviet Union: The many small nations controlled by the Bolsheviks with an iron hand of oppression degenerated into civil war when that iron hand was removed. With the iron hand of oppression removed, violent crimes (rapes, murders, drugs, beatings, thefts, &c.) escalated dramatically. Clearly, evil was better restrained under the anti-god, antichristian, totalitarianism of the former "Eastern-Bloc" nations than we now have in Western nations who have the motto, "In God we trust." I am fearful that "God" is one of the many false gods being worshiped today.

I do not wish to be an alarmist, but past history, as well as scriptures, proves that God will turn His people over to Antichrist, anti-god, tyrannical governments that will enforce His moral codes when God's people themselves will not enforce them. When God's people refuse to glorify God as God by respecting, honoring and obeying His laws under freedom, then they must expect to lose that freedom.

Romans 13:4, **for he beareth not the sword in vain**. *Sword*, quite simply, means to have the power of life and death. God gave the *sword* to civil authority, not to the individual, family, nor to the church. However, under the old Hebrew economy, the family was to avenge the death of one of its members, *i.e.*, the blood avenger. But even that was done under civil authority, for the "killer" had to appear before the elders of the closest city of refuge to plead his case. Then they had to investigate, and act accordingly: If the "killer" was indeed not a murderer, he was protected; if he was found to be a murderer, he was delivered to the blood avenger.

When the civil authority uses its power according to God's law, it is godly use. When they use it contrary to His law, it is ungodly, usurped use.

Vain, without purpose, without just cause, without reason. (Col. 2:18; Ga. 3:4; 4:11.) Note Matthew 5:22, *But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of hell fire*. There is just cause and just anger according to God's Word, but *vain* anger, anger *without a cause*, has God's judgment against it.

Application

Romans 13:4—if the civil authority is exercising its power according to the Law-Word of God, it is not in vain, and is God’s judgment against the lawless. It has God’s blessing upon it. However, if that authority is used contrary to the truth as established in God’s Law-Word, the misusers are in danger of the judgment of God against them, for they are now the lawless ones. The true Lawmaker determines what laws are just, and which citizens are law-abiding or lawless. (Isa. 33:22; Ja. 4:12.)

For he is the minister of God. Minister, the same word as above. God’s minister’s job is to act in the place of God, *to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil*. When he departs from God’s standard of good and evil, he is no longer carrying out God’s commands. He is no longer a minister of God; rather, he is a minister of the spirit of Antichrist. To resist his ungodly requirements, accordingly, is no longer resisting God—that resistance is resistance to the spirit of Antichrist, which has been at work for 2000 years. (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 1:7.) Resisting antichrist laws is not the same as resisting the office, for the office is still of God for our good. Though evil emanates from the evil men of the office, we cannot seek to overturn the office or even dismiss it as being of the devil.

A **revenger** to execute **wrath** upon him that doeth **evil**. *Revenger*, one who exacts a penalty, avenger. *[H]ow ye ought to walk and to please God... the Lord is the avenger of all those who go against the principles of HIS Word whether they are in authority or under authority.* (1 Thes. 4:1-6.) God has established civil authority as His avenger against those who refuse to walk pleasing to Him. There are many things the civil authorities are appointed by God to do, but their responsibilities can be summed up thusly: to protect life, liberty, freedom to serve God, and protect private property. As long as they act in that basic capacity, they are ministers of God, acting for God. **Wrath**, anger exhibited in punishing. Romans 1:18, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.* The office of civil authority has been established by God, which is one method of executing His wrath against the evildoer—base, wrong, wicked, contrasted with good. If the office which He has ordained will not accomplish this wrath against evil, then God will.

Therefore, only as the rules, regulations, requirements and/or laws which proceed from the God-ordained office of the civil magistrate reflect the principles of His Word, are the people holding this office ministers of God for good. When civil laws do not reflect God’s laws of life, a choice must be made. The choice is not whether or not to overthrow the office, but whether to obey man or to obey God. Even “bad” laws are for our good, which we cannot go into at this time.¹

Romans 13:5, **Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for** (on account of or because of) **wrath but also for conscience sake.** *Subject* is used in 1 Corinthians 14:34 (& Rom. 13:1), “to be under obedience” or willing to take our proper place under authority. We are required to be subject only as the requirements do not go against the laws of life as given in God’s Word. When man’s laws violate God’s laws, we must be subject to the Higher Law. **Wrath**, the same word as above. **Conscience** is also found in 1 Corinthians 10:28, warning against ignoring the conscience of those watching us.

From v. 5 then, we see that we must be subject to the office of civil authority, not only because of our duty to honor God-ordained institutions, but for the sake of others who may be watching us. The civil magistrate has God’s permission to enforce those laws which do not violate His Higher Law; he has been given the power of the sword.

Furthermore, if the civil authority does not execute proper wrath against the ungodly, God will execute His wrath against both the ones He placed in authority and the lawless ones under authority—they are both acting lawlessly. Not only must we obey laws (which are not contrary to God’s law) for fear of God’s *sword*, but we should be subject to those laws because of those watching us—proper

1. See *The Biblical Examiner*, “Why Does God Exalt the Ungodly?”

subjection will gain their respect. How can we expect those watching us to respect God's authority if we fail to properly respect the human authority God has raised up over us? Moreover, any resistance to ungodly laws of men must be accompanied by an obviously submissive spirit because our attitude toward human authority will be evident. (2 Tim. 2:25.) Others will know if we are rebellious or submissive. Our attitude toward human authority unavoidably reflects our attitude toward God's. (1 Jn. 4:20.) If we intend to influence others for the Lord, they must be able to see that we are not rebellious.

The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

Romans 13:1-5: Though we have gone into depth using scripture to interpret scripture, the reader may have skipped over our argument. If you have, and cannot agree with this conclusion, our advice is to go back, and search it out for yourself. From past experience, we know that many will not search because they do not want to confront God in an area where their minds are made up, or they do not want a conflict that might require a choice and sacrifice. "MY MIND IS MADE UP; DON'T CONFUSE ME WITH THE FACTS."

First and foremost, we must keep in mind that Romans 13:1-5 is built upon Romans 12. Trying to take a stand against the spirit of Antichrist, from whatever source, without the submission required in Romans 12, is anarchy. Godly submission will be evident in any confrontation with ungodly men and their antichrist requirements.

Second, hypocrisy uses Romans 13:1-7 to support one's belief while avoiding vv. 8-14.

Third, remember the question being addressed by Paul in its context was, "Civil government is so corrupt and wicked, should we recognize it at all, or should we just go our own way and obey God?" — "Should we pay toward its support."

Fourth, the office of civil government was established by God to provide conditions of protection for those desiring to do good, and to punish those desiring to do evil as defined by God.

Fifth, when civil office holders depart from their godly responsibility and start oppressing good and praising evil, then we have bad laws. The Christian response must be, in our system of government, to get involved in the political process: run for office, support good men (with time and money) who run for office, and use every means at our disposal to appeal unrighteous laws. If appeal fails, amend them. When all else fails, then we must break unjust laws, not foolishly or defiantly. Daniel clearly shows us both the steps to take and the proper attitude of godly resistance. There comes a time when men must go to prison rather than to obey certain ungodly requirements. Only as certain men have gone to prison have other men been free to serve God. The only law which cannot and must not be broken is the eternal, Divine Law. As long as sinners hold civil offices, there will be conflict between Divine Law and man's laws. When the laws of men hinder the Christian's obedience to their King, appeal them; if appeal fails, amend them; if amending fails, then as the three Hebrew children and Daniel did, ignore them and proceed on with our obedience to God. It is a higher, holier allegiance which must draw our obedience.

I have found that as I, as a pastor, have tried to get involved in attempts to keep good laws in our county, no other pastor nor Christian would join with me. Others will complain about and maybe even visibly protest bad laws, but they refuse to get involved and run for office or help others who are willing to run for office. This shows me that we are getting the unjust laws and oppressive civil rulers we deserve.

Fifth, Jeremiah chapters 25-29 with Daniel chapters 1-6 clearly show us that any law which violates God's higher law cannot be regarded as a law, no matter the source (e.g. family, vocational, ecclesiastical, civil, &c). Not only must ungodly laws be resisted, but at times publicly stood against and denounced. Lawless "law makers" must be confronted with their lawlessness; men who enforce ungodly laws must be confronted with what they are doing; they must be reminded they are **servants**

of the Most High God and that their responsibility is to Him. Rebellion is in terms of our relationship to God and His law-word.

Sixth, any disobedience to man's laws because of their conflict with God's cannot be accomplished by an attack upon the office the man holds. To attack the office is to attack God; to resist the laws emanating from this office which reflect God's laws, is to resist God; obedience to antichrist laws designed to overthrow God and usurp His authority will make us partakers in the ungodly effort.

Chapter VIII

To Pay Tribute or Not?

For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. (Rom. 13:6.)

Now we come to what could be considered the second part of this difficult passage. As we looked at vv. 1-5 in the context of the historical period of the early church as well as the context of scripture, we saw that the Lord emphasized the *office* of the civil government, not the people in it. He ordained the *office* for the good of mankind - to restrain evil and to praise good.

Even sinful, power-hungry men in civil *offices* misusing their power will exercise their power over others to control "violent crimes," if for no other reason than personal power reasons - the control they can have over others. Though the wicked in authority have little or no concern for the life, liberty or private property of others, they still use their power against open violence. The old Soviet empire that "officially" collapsed exemplifies what we are saying: even under the violent, wicked Bolsheviks, open anarchy was restrained more than it has been since the collapse. (One wonders if the "official" collapse was orchestrated to shift the tremendous "peace keeping" expense within the old Soviet empire to the West, as well as to bring the old "Soviet Union" into NATO, e.g., Poland.)

Paul warned God's people especially not to resist the *office* and to be extra cautious of being involved in any attempt to overthrow the *office*. Our attitude toward civil government is our attitude toward God. Paul is not even dealing with the question of obeying unjust laws - as defined by God's Law-Word. Those to whom he wrote needed no such instruction, for that was already settled. Peter's letters tell us that the first century Christians were facing death over their refusal to obey the laws of man when they conflicted with the Divine laws of God as revealed in His Old Testament Law-Word. The New Testament records many instances where civil authorities misused their power to persecute and even kill those who would not abide by the man-made laws when they conflicted with God's laws. Was not Christ put to death by civil authority misusing its God-given power? (Ac. 2:23.) Did not Paul and Peter unjustly lose their lives when Rome misused its power?

To use Romans 13:1-6 to say that God gave civil government the power to define good and evil is doing the very thing Peter warned against, *wresting* Scripture to our own destruction. (2 Pet. 3:20-21.) There will always be the necessity of making the choice between God's Divine laws or fallen man's laws of death. (Pr. 14:12, &c.) From earliest time, man's desire has been to overthrow God and His law-order. One way this is done is by quietly substituting man's law for Biblical law. When God's people permit the substitution and obey man's laws of death, they become partakers in the evil attempt to overthrow God. (Ps. 2.) One way we stand against this attempt is by refusing to obey the laws which are contrary to God's Divinely given laws, the Ten Commandments. Also included in our stand against the wicked's attempts against *the bands and cords* of God's Command-Word is to cry out against these ungodly attempts. (Ps. 50:18; Lev. 5:1; Pr. 25:24.)

A problem addressed in Romans 13:1-6 was that the men in the civil *offices* were more corrupt than the lawless men on the street. The office holders obtained their offices by every wicked way

imaginable, and were using the offices to further their own personal goals. The attitude of the Christians would have been, “Why even be concerned about these offices of civil government. We will ignore them. We will disregard their laws, and will not pay a penny to them because it goes to support their wickedness and to keep them in power. The *office* holders not only deny God, but they are persecuting those who refuse to recognize their authority over every thought and action.”

Paul told these people at Rome (the capital of the one-world government and seat of the Antichrist of the day and the master over the captive state of Israel) not to dismiss the *office* of the civil authority even though it was occupied by those warring against *the Lord and His Christ*. Doing so, said Paul, would be rebellion against God and what He had ordained. Those to whom Paul wrote were past Romans twelve, having already yielded everything to God, even willing to die for their commitment to the Christian faith; and many did. (Rom. 8:18.) The issue addressed was “should we dismiss civil government all together.” Paul says, “No! It is established by God for the protection of good and the punishment of evil.”

Because

For this cause — Because God put the instrument of the civil *office* into effect for the basic good of mankind. “Looking back,” Paul says, “God appointed the *office* to protect your rights, to protect you from the desires of wicked, uncontrolled men. The power of punishment is given to that *office* for your protection and, really, no matter how corrupt that office holder is and no matter what his motives, that *office* still provides a certain amount of protection from the violent law breaker.”

Accordingly, the *office* of civil government is appointed or approved by God. In this statement, however, we cannot say all the requirements issuing forth from the *office* are appointed by God. We know which are and which are not from a close examination of His total Word.

Violating the laws from the offices appointed by God that reflect God’s laws of life exposes us to punishment by that civil authority. If the civil authority does not deal with the lawless, then God will. God will not tolerate rebellious disregard of His moral laws. As long as sinful men are in these *offices*, however, there will be ungodly demands that will require a choice: either disobey the ungodly requirements and face the wrath of man and the praise of God, or join in their vain attempts to overthrow God and face the wrath of God and the praise of men. The Christian life is a life of choices, some major and some minor. A major choice is, “Who is Lord?” the Lord Jesus or the state:

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. (Mat. 16:24.)

“Take up the cross” Each one has “his” cross, some point in which the will of God and self-will come into direct opposition. To the Captain of our salvation the conflict came in its very darkest and most dreadful form. Its climax was in the Garden, when after the great agony He cried: “Not My will, but Thine be done.” Our conflict will not be nearly so severe: it may even be on a point that may seem small, — whether or not we will give up some besetting sin, whether or not we will do some disagreeable duty, whether or not we will surrender something which stands between us and Christ, — but whatever that be in which the will of God and our own will are set in opposition, there is our cross, and it must be taken up, and self denied that we may follow Christ. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh.” Gibson

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Our Lord gives man the answer for which to obey when the conflict between man’s laws and God’s laws come about. (Mat. 10:28; Lk. 12:5.) We must, moreover, add that the modern corruption in civil leadership is not much more common than the corruption in the general spiritual leadership.²

1. *Eclectic Notes*, Online Bible.

2. *Dateline*, 6/13/97, questioned the general population over the recent military’s stand against adultery, a stand they are taking according to the UCMJ. The overwhelming majority of people questioned, well over 50%, said they felt the military was making a lot out of nothing. In other words, the people are corrupt, so what can we expect from the civil office holders?

Pay Tribute

Pay (#5055) *tribute* - Since the civil *office* is appointed by God, the tribute required to support the office is an act of honor to God. *Pay* here means *to pay*. It is used in one other place - *And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter and said, doth not your master pay tribute?* (Mat. 17:24.)¹

Pay tribute (#5411)-There are at least three *tributes* in the New Testament:

First, Matthew 17:24 (#1323), the word used by the tax gatherers, and quoted above; second, Matthew 17:25; 22:17, 19; Mark 12:14 (#2778), the word used by the Lord in answering the tax-gatherers' question; and third, Luke 20:22; Romans 13:6, 7 (#5411), the word we are considering.

(#1323) Matthew 17:24,

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

[T]ribute was a two-drachma piece, a silver Greek coin worth about a half shekel. The context shows *tribute* in this case simply refers to a unit of measure in which the "tax" was paid.

Second, (#2778) Matthew 17:25; 22:17, 19; Mark 12:14,

He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? (Mat. 17:25.) Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. (Mat. 22:17-19.) And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? (Mk. 12:14.)

Tribute

(Among the Romans, denoting a register and valuation of property in accordance with which taxes were paid), in the N.T. (as in Cod. Just. 4, 47) *the tax or tribute levied on individuals and to be paid yearly (... our capitation or poll tax):* Mt. xvii. 25; xxii. 17;; Mk. xii. 14; ..., the coin with which the tax is paid, *tribute money*, Mt. xxii. 19.

Thus it was the tax or *tribute* levied on individuals, and was to be paid yearly. This tax usually followed a census. Our Lord paid this *tribute* to prevent offending others. (Mat. 17:25-27.) In Matthew 22:17, 19, it was the money required for Caesar from every individual.

Custom (#5056, Mt. 17:25), *toll, custom*, [i.e. an indirect tax on goods]: Mt xvii. 25; Ro. xiii.7.²

Observe

God's Word, not civil authority, determines what belongs to God and what belongs to civil authority. Belonging to God includes: A) the individual, including his time, talent, treasure, children, Psalms 127:3; Ezekiel 18:4; B) the tithe and offering, as well as those things which are bought with the tithe and offering, Malachi 3:10 (oppressive taxation does not prevent giving to the Lord God what is His; if civil government would forbid giving to the Lord what is His, then we would have to "disobey"); C) submission to godly spiritual authority, Hebrews 10:25; 13:17; D) the church, Ephesians 1:22, 23; and, E) the world and all that is therein, Psalms 24:1. The Lord God is to be joyfully and gladly served according to His Law-Word with everything:

Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his

1. Unless otherwise noted, the following definitions are from *Thayer*.

2. See Appendix A for Edersheim's account of what took place in Mat. 22.

commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee: And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. (De. 28:45-48.)

Because Israel did not serve the Lord God properly, God made Israel servants to Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, who finally destroyed Israel.

Attempts to stand against any unjust claim by civil authority in Romans 13 without submitting to the Lord what rightly belongs to Him in Romans 12 is hypocrisy, as well as rebellion. God promises His tribulation and anguish against the refusal to submit to Him what is His. The sinner who refuses to glorify God as God cannot choose what tribulation and anguish to receive from the Lord, nor from where to receive it. (Ps. 47:4.) We do know, however, that the tribulation and anguish will come. (Rom. 2:6-11.) We also know that when we give to God what is His, the hand of unjust civil authority will be against us, yet the hand of God will be for us. Men, particularly wicked men in authority, will not approve of our doing Romans 12:1, 2, yet we will have praise from God.

The experience of this pastor has been that many of those crying the loudest against civil government's tyranny and demands upon mammon (money), cry very little about God's demand in the areas listed above. I know of people who are willing to go to jail over "Don't give to Caesar the mammon he claims," yet they will send their children to a government school to receive Antichrist indoctrination. In doing so, they are giving something far more important than mammon to Caesar as well as violating a much clearer law in God's Word than is the issue of tribute. (Jer. 10:2.) The perception one gets, though it could be wrong, is that many times the motive for standing against "Caesar" is money, not advancing the cause of Christ. It also looks like money is more important to them than even their children as they cry out against the abuse of tax dollars, yet remain strangely silent about the state's educational and emotional abuse against their children, turning them against proper authority and God's Word. Many may say, "I don't see any danger in the government schools." To those we suggest they read the text books and listen to what the teachers are saying to the children in the light of God's Word.

Third, (#5411) Luke 20:22; 23:2; Romans 13:6, 7,

Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? (Lk. 20:22.) And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. (Lk. 23:2.) 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.

Tribute

The annual tax levied upon houses, lands, and persons. Lk xx. 22; xxiii. 2, Ro. xiii. 7; Ro. xiii. 6.

A tax imposed by a king on his subjects #2Sa 20:24 1Ki 4:6 Rom. 13:6 In #Mt 17:24-27 the word denotes the temple rate (the "didrachma," the "half-shekel," as rendered by the R.V.) which was required to be paid for the support of the temple by every Jew above twenty years of age #Ex 30:12 2Ki 12:4 2Ch 24:6,9 It was not a civil but a religious tax. In #Mt 22:17 Mr 12:14 Lu 20:22 the word may be interpreted as denoting the capitation tax which the Romans imposed on the Jewish people. It may, however, be legitimately regarded as denoting any tax whatever imposed by a foreign power on the people of Israel. The "tribute money" shown to our Lord #Mt 22:19 was the denarius, bearing Caesar's superscription. It was the tax paid by every Jew to the Romans.¹

[Greek] (Mt 22 22; Mk 12 14)= "census," while [Greek words] (Lk 20 22; 23 2; Rom 13 6.7), signifies an annual tax on persons, houses, lands, both being direct taxes. The *phoroi* was paid by agriculturists, payment being made partly in kind, partly in money, and are contrasted with the *tele* of the publicans,

1. *OnLine Bible.*

while *kensos* is strictly a poll tax. The amount of tribute required as a poll tax by the Romans was the [Greek] (Mt 17 24), AV “Tribute,” RV “Half-shekel.” The [Greek words] (ver 27), was a tetradrachm, “one shekel,” or pay for two. After the destruction of Jerus, the Jews were required to pay this poll tax toward the support of the worship of Jupiter Capitolinus. Different kinds of personal taxes were raised by the Romans: (1) an income tax, (2) the poll tax. The latter must be paid by women and slaves as well as by free men, only children and aged people being exempt. The payment extracted began with the 14th year in the case of men and the 12th in the case of women, the obligation remaining in force up to the 65th year in the case of both. For purposes of assessment, each person was permitted to put his own statement on record. After public notice had been given by the government, every citizen was expected to respond without personal visitation by an official (see Lk 2 1 ff). On the basis of the records thus voluntarily made, the tax collectors would enforce the payment of the tribute.¹

TRIBUTE (IN NT).— Lat. *census* (Mt 22.17 Mk 12.14), (Lk 20.22 23.2, Rom. 13.6.7), in Mt 17.25 (‘toll or tribute ‘), an annual tax levied on persons, houses, or lands. In all the passages quoted the reference is to the imperial taxes, to taxes paid to a prince or civil governor on behalf of the Roman treasury. Both [Greek] and [Greek] are, properly, direct taxes. The [Greek], strictly speaking, were taxes paid by agriculturists, the payme~t [sic] being generally made in kind, and were contrasted with the [Greek] or customs collected by the publicans. The word [Greek], again, was originally used of the property register upon which taxation was calculated, and thence came to mean the capitation or poll tax (cf. D in Mk 12.14 [Greek]). In Mt 17.24 the word tr. ‘tribute’ in AV and ‘half-shekel’ in RV is the didrachmon. This sum every adult male Israelite had to pay to cover the cost of the public sacrifices at the temple. The ‘staler’ of v.27 was a tetradraehmon, equal to a whole shekel, and therefore payment for two. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Vespasian caused the Jews to pay this didrachmon tax for the support of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. Nerva, though not abolishing the tax, made it less offensive to the Jews by dissociating it from this heathenish use.²

TRIBUTE MONEY, (Mt 22.19), the coin used in payment of the imperial taxes. The phrase literally means ‘the lawful money of the tax.’ The tribute had to be paid in the current coin of the realm.³

Christ & the Temple Tribute

Tribute, accordingly, referred to two taxes: The *tribute* in Matthew 17:24 referred to the payment required of every adult Israelite male to pay for the public temple sacrifice. Christ said that because He was a “child of the temple,” He was free from this tax. However, he paid it anyway.

Christ & the Roman Tribute

The second *tribute* referred to the tax Rome placed upon everything of value; it included an annual tax paid by a province or nation to a superior, as the price of protection, or as an acknowledgment of subjection. All conquered peoples had to pay this tax to Rome. This *tribute* went directly to the Roman treasury to finance Rome’s activities, e.g., the life-style of the emperor and the army’s activity in the captive nations. Because Christ had nothing of value other than the clothes He wore, He was not subject to Rome’s oppressive *tribute*.⁴

Pilate

Pilate was the sixth Roman procurator of Judah and Samaria. According to Luke chapter 23, those seeking Rome’s permission for Christ’s death brought three charges against Christ: 1) sedition, 2) preventing the payment of *tribute* to Caesar, and 3) assuming the title of king. Pilate examined Christ privately, and, finding no fault in Him, sent Christ to Herod Antipas, who also found no fault in Christ. Pilate sought to release Christ, three times declaring Christ innocent of all the charges. Christ’s appearance before Pilate gives us these points to consider:

1. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, 3010, 3011.

2. Hastings, *Dictionary*, vol IV.813.

3. *Ibid.*

4. We should mention that when the Muslims conquer a people, the people either convert, pay tax or are killed.

First, the *tribute* (tax) extracted by Rome from Judah went to support Rome's occupation of Judah, including the support of Pilate who would sentence Christ to death.

Second, Pilate's power over God's people in Judah and over Christ was not from Rome, though he represented Rome. Christ told Pilate that he, Pilate, was God's *minister*. (Jn. 19:11.) Peter said the same thing: Pilate was God's *minister*, doing the will of God. (Ac. 2:23.) Thus those who might say that the Lord God would not exalt wicked men into places of civil authority clearly do not know the Word of God—He not only exalted Nebuchadnezzar, who killed God's people, looted and razed Jerusalem and the temple to the ground, but He also exalted Pilate, who crucified our Lord. (See also Re. 13:7. All power belongs to Christ; therefore, Christ gave the power to the ungodly *to make war with the saints, and to overcome them*. Moreover, *God put in their hearts to fulfill his will* against the city that crucified the Lord, 17:17.)

Third, after careful examination of the charges, neither Pilate nor Herod found any grounds for the accusations against Christ; in fact, Pilate told the people three times that the charges leveled against Christ in Luke 23:2 were totally unfounded. (Lk. 23:14, 15, 22.) According to *Robertson*,

2. *Began to accuse* (*êrxanto katêgorein*). They went at it and kept it up. Luke mentions three, but neither of them includes their real reason nor do they mention their own condemnation of Jesus. They had indulged their hatred in doing it, but they no longer have the power of life and death. Hence they say nothing to Pilate of that. *We found* (*heuramen*). Second aorist active indicative with first aorist vowel *a*. Probably they mean that they had caught Jesus in the act of doing these things (*in flagrante delicto*) rather than discovery by formal trial. *Perverting our nation* (*diastrephonta to ethnos hêmôn*). Present active participle of *diastrephô*, old verb to turn this way and that, distort, disturb. In the N.T. only here and Acts 13:10. The Sanhedrin imply that the great popularity of Jesus was seditious. *Forbidding to give tribute to Caesar*, (*kôluonta phorous kaisari didonai*). Note object infinitive *didonai* after the participle *kôluonta*. Literally, hindering giving tribute to Caesar. This was a flat untruth. Their bright young students had tried desperately to get Jesus to say this very thing, but they had failed utterly (Luke 20:25). *Saying that he himself is Christ a king* (*legonta hauton Christon basilea einai*). Note the indirect discourse here after the participle *legonta* with the accusative (*hauton* where *auton* could have been used), and the infinitive. This charge is true, but not in the sense meant by them. Jesus did claim to be the Christ and the king of the kingdom of God. But the Sanhedrin wanted Pilate to think that he set himself up as a rival to Caesar. Pilate would understand little from the word "Christ," but "King" was a different matter. He was compelled to take notice of this charge else he himself would be accused to Caesar of winking at such a claim by Jesus.¹

19. *Insurrection* (*stasin*). An old word for sedition, standing off, the very charge made against Jesus (and untrue). If Jesus had raised insurrection against Caesar, these accusers would have rallied to his standard...²

Though finding none, Pilate was clearly looking for a reason to justify Christ's death. He knew there were no grounds to think that Christ was resisting or teaching resistance to Rome's civil authority over the captive nation, Judah, nor did Pilate see Christ's kingdom in competition with Rome's. (See Mat. 27:18; Mk. 15:10; Jn. 18:36.)

Thus one cannot use Christ to say, "It is against God's Word to pay *tribute* (tax) to an unjust civil authority." Though both Pilate and Herod sought for a charge to stand against Christ, they both knew there were no grounds for the charge that Christ "hindered giving tribute to Caesar." However, Pilate yielded to public pressure, and Christ was crucified under Pilate according to *the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*. (Ac. 2:23.)

The Romans 13 Question

Paul, in Romans thirteen, addresses the question: "Is it right to acknowledge Rome's claim over Israel and submit to it by paying *tribute, custom, fear* and *honour* to Rome?" (One reason not to recognize Rome's claim would have been the wicked leadership in Rome.) The idea of Roman domina-

1. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 2:278, 279.

2. Ibid.

tion over Israel was especially galling to the Jews and to the Jewish Christians, *e.g.*, “Now that we are Christians, a member of a far greater kingdom (Col. 1:13), why should we be subject to this corrupt kingdom any more, especially when the *tribute* goes to support wicked men?” Paul established that the purpose of civil government as established by God must be supported, both in deed (obedience) and now in payment of tribute.

Ministers

[F]or they are God's ministers (#3011), servant - “those by whom God administers his affairs and executes his decrees: so of magistrates, Ro. xiii.6; of angels, Heb. I.7 fr. Ps. ciii. (civ.) 4 [cf. Philo de caritat. § 3].”

A significant point often overlooked in v. 6 is, *for they are God's ministers*, not man's, and as such, they (the *ministers*) will face a far more severe judgment than those under their authority. (Lk. 12:48.) The *ministers* may obtain their civil office by various means, *e.g.*, revolts, elections, appointments, &c., but the fact remains: they are *God's ministers*, not man's. God Himself placed them in that office for His own purpose. (Da. 4:17, &c.) As such, Paul's instructions concerning another man's servant applies to civil magistrates: *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.* (Rom. 14:4.)

Babylon

Probably the best Old Testament illustration of *God's ministers* is found in Jeremiah 27:5-11, where the pagan king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, is called by God, *my servant*. (See also, Jer. 25:9, 43:10.) It is interesting that David is called by God, *my servant*, three times in Jeremiah, which is the same number of times as God calls the pagan king, *my servant*. In other words, pagan kings and rulers are as much God's servants, *ministers*, as are godly leaders. Consider these points:

First, according to God's promise in 1 Samuel 8, God's people were placed *into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon*, and incorporated into the pagan king's true one-world system of Babylon because, though warned many times, they refused to *glorify God as God* and render unto the Lord God what was His. (Jer. 25:1-11.) Nebuchadnezzar is the one who built the golden image, and demanded everyone bow before it. Second, God's people were told to submit to the pagan king in everything and live a peaceful life in obedience to the king and his people. We see, however, that the obedience was not unlimited, for the best of the Hebrews refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image. Third, though throughout Scripture Babylon is pictured as the one-world, Antichrist system, God's people were *not* told to withhold *tribute, custom, fear* nor *honour* from Nebuchadnezzar and his servants in Babylon. Fourth, when the king's command required violation of God's Law-Word, God's faithful people refused to obey, even in the face of death, and God honored their stand, *e.g.*, the four Hebrew children, the fiery furnace and prayer. Fifth, the Hebrew's stand against the commands of the pagan king and against his one-world government, Babylon, did not involve money in any way. It was over the authority of God's laws over them. (Dan. cps. 1-4.) When God's men made their appeal to the human authority with the proper godly attitude and it was ignored by the civil authorities, then they appealed to the Lord God as they stood firm; their appeal to God was heard. We all know the rest of the story.

Admittedly, God's people were in Babylon for a specific time, and when that period was fulfilled, His people were restored to the land, though they never again had the same freedom they had before the Lord sent His *servant*, the pagan king of Babylon, against them. (Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10.) However, note the inescapable applications (*ensample*) for all people of all times—the reason the pagans were exalted over God's people was because His people absolutely refused to submit to the Law-Word of their Lord and King. Moreover, when God's judgment against His disobedient people was fulfilled, He judged the pagans with whom He had judged His people. (Jer. chaps 50 & 51.)

Conclusion: God judged His people for their clear violation of Romans 1:21 — knowing God, they refused to glorify Him as God over every thought and action. God judged them by exalting His pagan, antichristian *servants* over His people to bring upon His people His *tribulation and anguish* promised in Romans chapter two; and God's *servants* were murdering, whoremongering, thieving pagans.

Accordingly, pagans are exalted by God because of His people's sins; therefore, even the pagans, though acting like pagans, are *God's ministers*, carrying out God's will just as sure as was *Nebuchadnezzar*. (Rom. 13:6.) Even corrupt civil office holders clearly *are God's ministers*, carrying out God's instructions, unbeknown to themselves, against a population that has departed from the law of the Lord. We could say that oppressive taxation, therefore, is part of the Biblically required restitution (His promised *tribulation and anguish*) by a population of law-breakers that has forgotten its God. Ungodly civil authorities forcefully extract the restitution.

Sin and Judgment

Romans 13:6 — The *office* is ordained by God to judge sin. We like to believe that the sins held in check are the sins of murder, fraud, adultery, fornication, theft, &c. However, the office is also ordained of God to judge the sin of His people's refusal to *glorify God as God*. And God makes His people pay for their own judgment. (Did not the Lord God pay Assyria's, Nebuchadnezzar's and Rome's armies with the spoils taken from His people?) Throughout history, the Lord God has used the ungodly to chastise His people for their departure from Himself, and then He makes His people pay for their own chastisement.

We must also point out that wicked men in the offices of civil authority are, generally, there because Christians have withdrawn from the area of civil government, believing the devil's lie that "Christians should not be involved in politics." Listening to the lie that Christians should not try to bring about a godly social order nor work for a Christian civil order, the entire area of civil government has been voluntarily yielded to the wicked. No doubt, the wicked bear rule today as God's judgment against the Christian indifference to the *civil* area of life.¹

The Lord alone places people in authority for reasons only known to Himself. Paul, accordingly, points out that withholding *tribute* (tax) from the office of civil authority is to withhold it from God.

Attending

Attending continually upon this very thing. Their purpose is to be ministers of God for good and against evil. Even the most wicked of men in these offices still require at some least semblance of civil tranquillity. They may be very oppressive against righteousness and tolerate of evil, even condoning and encouraging abortions, drugs, drunkenness and other evils, yet they, as a whole, will not tolerate civil strife, *e.g.*, the old Soviet Union, oppressive and antigod as it was, restrained civil strife in the various nations it controlled. The restraint of anarchy and civil strife is one reason God established civil authority. Though civil authority may extract a very oppressive tribute to support itself, we must remember why it is there: 1 Samuel 8 makes it clear that when men refuse to be self-controlled under God, God will control them through oppressive civil authority and high taxation.²

Thus only as God's people return to gladly taking upon themselves the responsibilities established by His Law-Word will God take care of the oppressive authorities. From what this author has generally observed, those who speak the loudest against oppressive civil authority and high taxes do not carry on much about not being able to submit totally to the King of kings as required in Romans 12:1-2.

1. *Death of the Church Victorious* traces the modern roots of this lie, as well as its results.

2. Sadly, Christians are forced through the ungodly property tax scheme to finance their own destruction in the state education system. However, have they not brought it upon themselves by refusing to accept their individual responsibility for their own children?

Render

Romans 13:7, *Render* (#591) *therefore all... Render:*

2. *to pay off, discharge*, what is due, (because a debt, like a burden, is thrown *off*, [Greek], by being paid): a debt (Germ. *aabtragen*), Mt. v. 26; xviii. 25-30, 34; Lk. vii. 42; x. 35; xii. 59; wages, Mt. xx. 8; tribute and other dues to the government, Mt. xxii. 21; Mk. xii. 17; Lk. xx. 25; Ro. xiii. 7; produce due, Mt. xxi. 41; Heb. xii. 11; Rev. xxii. 2; [Greek] things promised under oath, Mt. v. 33, cf. Nun. xxx. 3, ([Hebrew] a vow, Deut. xxiii. 21, etc.); conjugal duty, I Co. vii. 3; [Greek] grateful requitals, I Tim. v. 4; [Greek] *to render account*: Mt. xii. 36; Lk. xvi. 2; Acts xix. 40; Ro. xiv. 12 L txt. Tr txt.; Heb. xiii. 17; I Pet. iv. 5; [Greek] to give testimony (as something officially due), Acts iv. 33. Hence 3. *to give back, restore*: Lk. iv. 20; [vii. 15 Lchm. mrg.]; ix. 42, xix.8.

Because civil government is established by God, it is due the tribute of taxes. Christianity is to confirm (and influence for godliness we must add) the proper order which God has established; Christianity is not to attempt to overthrow civil government, no matter how corrupt it might be. On the other hand, we are commanded to “Christianize” those offices as God permits. Paul instructs those at Rome to support civil government because it is ordained as a servant to God, to prevent society from being overrun by violence. Though the *offices* may be overrun with very violent men, that is not what determines our responsibility to that *office*. God’s Word determines Christian responsibility to civil authority. Christians must point out and cry against sin in all forms, in all places, yet they must still support civil government.

The Word of God is clear: it is the Christian’s relationship with the total of God’s Word that determines who God exalts to those offices. Men by the score cry out against oppressive civil government that will not accept responsibility before God, yet very little crying is heard against God’s people who will not accept their responsibility before God. How can we expect the civil magistrate to honor God’s Laws when God’s people ignore God’s Laws?

Dues

Dues (#3782),

that which is owed; prop. *a debt*: Mt. xviii. 32; metaph. plur. *dues*: Ro. xiii. 7; spec. of *conjugal duty* [R. V. *her due*], I Co. xii. 3 G L T Tr WH. Found neither in the Grk. O.T. nor in prof. auth.; f. *Lob. ad Phryn.* p. 90.

Thus Paul calls taxes a debt. No matter how corrupt the office holder might be or how misused the funds may be in our day, it cannot compare to corrupt Rome of Paul’s day.¹ Even in his day, the civil authority prevented anarchy from reigning in the streets. In fact, Rome prevented a mad mob from killing Paul. (Ac. 21:31ff.) Rome, even with its corrupt emperors, held in check the violence that controlled men before the flood more than if there were no civil government at all. It still performed the basic function of restraining evil. No matter how corrupt or what the motive may be in controlling violence, wicked rulers still prevent uncontrolled violence, if for no other reason than to protect their own power. Because they do perform the basic function of restraining mob rule, we owe them the finances to perform their basic function. It is a debt which God says we owe to those who prevent chaos from taking over a society. They still prevent men from totally doing what is right in their own eyes.

Tribute, custom, fear, honour

[T]ribute to whom tribute..., taxes are a debt due to those who restrain evil. *Custom to whom custom* (#5056)...., “toll, custom, (*i.e.* an indirect tax on goods.)” Matthew 17:25, our Lord pointed out that the kings of this earth charge more taxes or custom to the stranger. Observation: the unsaved

1. See *Ludwig’s Handbook*.

many times expect more from Christians. A heathen boss on the job will allow his drinking buddies to get away with far more than he will those who will not partake of his sin with him. *Fear to whom fear* (#5401)... “Reverence, respect, (for authority, rank, dignity): Ro. xiii. 7; 1 Pet. ii. 18; iii. 16 (15)...” (It is also identified with the wife’s response to her unsaved husband, 1 Pet. 3:2. Therefore these passages say to respect the *offices*—they are ordained of God, and disrespect toward them is disrespect toward God. But the respect does not include obedience to ungodly requirements. Again, Dan. chps. 1 through 3 will bear this out.) *Honour to whom honour* (#5092)... “*honour* which belongs to or is shown to one: ... *deference, reverence*, Ro. xii. 10; xiii. 7; 1 Tim. v. 17; vi. 1.”

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; (Rom. 12:10.) Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. (1 Tim. 5:17.) Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. (1 Tim. 6:1.)

Therefore, *honour* is the respect due for the *office*; it is not *honour* towards the actions emanating from the *office* that are contrary to God’s Word. 1 Timothy 6:1, the name of God and His doctrine is blasphemed when professing Christians do not show proper *honour* to those in authority over them, whether the authority be family, occupation, church or civil authority.

Conclusion

"But Israel was a captive nation to Rome, so she had to pay the *tribute*. Such is not the case with America, for she has not been conquered by a foreign power." Maybe we should define “captive” and “conquered.”

And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (2 Tim. 2:26.)

Israel’s problem was sin: she was delivered to the oppressive captivity of Assyria, Babylon and Rome because of her captivity to sin; she was conquered by sin. America’s problem is sin: she is delivered to oppressive civil authorities because of her captivity to sin; she is conquered by sin, *e.g.*, two of the most openly wicked men of our day have been repeatedly voted into office, Ted Kennedy and Bill Clinton. Yes, Christ came to set the captives free, but the freedom He offered and offers was/is not freedom from oppressive civil authority, but freedom from the captivity to sin. Was not one of the major problems in His day with the Jewish leaders the expectation of a mighty Messiah who would free Israel from Roman oppression? When Christ did not meet their expectation and made it clear He came to set the captives free from sin, which was the cause of oppressive captivity, they wanted nothing more to do with Him. (Mat. 11:5; Ac. 26:18; Isa. 42:5ff.; 49:9; 61:1 [*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; - Lk. 4:18ff.; Ps. 146:7.*])

Christians must speak out against ungodliness in places of authority: sin must be called sin. We must stand against sin no matter where it comes from in order to be right with God. When necessary, we appeal ungodly laws, and if appeal does not work, change them. If we are unable to change them, then we must refuse to obey them, but this all must be done with a meek and respectful attitude. (Zec. 3:2; 1 Pe. 3:9; 2 Pe. 2:11; Jude 1:9.)

The ungodly laws emanating from “above” do not permit refusal to pay tribute — civil government is still providing its basic function, an orderly society. It prevents violent anarchy from becoming the social norm.

Appendix A

Edersheim, “Is it lawful...?”

Dr Edersheim’s comments concerning Christ’s answer to the question, “*Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?* (Mt 22:17) is worth consideration:¹

2. Foiled in their endeavour to involve Him with the ecclesiastical, they next attempted the much more dangerous device of bringing Him into collision with the civil authorities. Remembering the ever watchful jealousy of Rome, the reckless tyranny of Pilate, and the low artifices of Herod, who was at that time in Jerusalem, (St. Luke xxiii. 7) we instinctively feel, how even the slightest compromise on the part of Jesus in regard to the authority of Caesar would have been absolutely fatal. If it could have been proved, on undeniable testimony, that Jesus had declared Himself on the side of, or even encouraged, the so-called ‘Nationalist’ party, He would have quickly perished, like Judas of Galilee. (Acts v. 37; *Jos. Ant.* xviii. 1.1; xx. 5.2) The Jewish leaders would thus have readily accomplished their object, and its unpopularity have recoiled only on the hated Roman power. How great the danger was which threatened Jesus, may be gathered from this, that, despite His clear answer, the charge that He perverted the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, was actually among those brought against Him before Pilate. (St. Luke xxiii. 2)

The plot, for such it was, (St. Matt. xxii. 15-22; St. Mark xii. 13-17; St. Luke xx. 19-26) was most cunningly concocted. The object was to ‘spy’ out His inmost thoughts, (St. Luke) and, if possible, ‘entangle’ Him in His talk. (St. Matthew) For this purpose it was not the old Pharisees, whom He knew and would have distrusted, who came, but some of their disciples—apparently fresh, earnest, zealous, conscientious men. With them had combined certain of ‘the Herodians’—of course, not a sect nor religious school, but a political party at the time. We know comparatively little of the deeper political movements in Judea, only so much as it has suited Josephus to record. But we cannot be greatly mistaken in regarding the Herodians as a party which honestly accepted the House of Herod as occupants of the Jewish throne. Differing from the extreme section of the Pharisees, who hated Herod, and from the ‘Nationalists,’ it might have been a middle or moderate Jewish party—semi-Roman and semi-Nationalist. We know that it was the ambition of Herod Antipas again to unite under his sway the whole of Palestine; but we know not what intrigues may have been carried on for that purpose, alike with the Pharisees and the Romans. Nor is it the first time in this history, that we find the Pharisees and the Herodians combined. (Comp., for example, St. Mark iii. 6.) Herod may, indeed, have been unwilling to incur the unpopularity of personally proceeding against the Great Prophet of Nazareth, especially as he must have had so keen a remembrance of what the murder of John had cost him. Perhaps he would fain, if he could, have made use of Him, and played Him off as the popular Messiah against the popular leaders. But, as matters had gone, he must have been anxious to rid himself of what might be a formidable rival, while, at the same time, his party would be glad to join with the Pharisees in what would secure their gratitude and allegiance. Such, or similar, may have been the motives which brought about this strange alliance of Pharisees and Herodians.

Feigning themselves just men, they now came to Jesus with honeyed words, intended not only to disarm His suspicions, but, by an appeal to His fearlessness and singleness of moral purpose, to induce Him to commit Himself without reserve. Was it lawful for them to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? were they to pay the capitation-tax (*Jos. Jews. War* ii. 16.4 [See appendix for the speech given by king Agrippa, ed.]) of one drachm, or to refuse it? We know how later Judaism would have answered such a question. It lays down the principle, that the right of coinage implies the authority of levying taxes, and indeed constitutes such evidence of de facto government as to make it duty absolutely to submit to it. (Babba K. 113 *a*, and the instance of Abigail pleading with David that Saul’s coinage was still in circulation. *Jer, Sanh.* 20 *b*) So much was this felt, that the Maccabees, and, in the last Jewish war, Bar

1. Edersheim, *The Life and Times*, Book V, 386. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids Michigan. 1886. 1972 reprint.

Kokhabh, the false Messiah, issued a coinage dating from the liberation of Jerusalem. We cannot therefore doubt, that this principle about coinage, taxation, and government was generally accepted in Judea. On the other hand, there was a strong party in the land; with which, not only politically but religiously, many of the noblest spirits would sympathise, which maintained, that to pay the tribute-money to Caesar was virtually to own his royal authority, and so to disown that of Jehovah, Who alone was Israel's King. They would argue, that all the miseries of the land and people were due to this national unfaithfulness. Indeed, this was the fundamental principle of the Nationalist movement. History has recorded many similar movements, in which strong political feelings have been strangely blended with religious fanaticism, and which have numbered in their ranks, together with unscrupulous partisans, not a few who were sincere patriots or earnest religionists. It has been suggested in a former part of this book, that the Nationalist movement may have had an important preparatory bearing on some of the earlier followers of Jesus, perhaps at the beginning of their inquiries, just as, in the West, Alexandrian philosophy proved to many a preparation for Christianity. (For fuller particulars on this point see Book II. ch. x.) At any rate, the scruple expressed by these men would, if genuine, have called forth sympathy. (Some might have even religious scruples about handling a coin of Caesar. Such an instance is mentioned in *Ab. Zar. 6 b*, where a Rabbi is advised to throw it into the water, and pretend it had accidentally dropped from his hand. but probably that instance refers to the avoidance of all possibility of being regarded as sharing in idol-festivities.) But what was the alternative here presented to Christ? To have said *No*, would have been to command rebellion; to have said simply *Yes*, would have been to give a painful shock to deep feeling, and, in a sense, in the eyes of the people, the lie to His own claim of being Israel's Messiah-King!

But the Lord escaped from this 'temptation'—because, being true, it was no real temptation to Him. (However pictorial, the sketch of this given by *Keim* [*Jesu von Nazara.* iii. 1, pp. 131 &c.] is—as too often—somewhat exaggerated.) Their knavery and hypocrisy He immediately perceived and exposed, in this also responding to their appeal of being 'true.' Once more and emphatically must we disclaim the idea that Christ's was rather an evasion of the question than a reply. It was a very real answer, when, pointing to the image and inscription on the coin, (By a strange concurrence the coin, which on Christ's demand was handed to Him, bore 'the image' of the emperor. It must, therefore, have been either a foreign one (Roman), or else one of the Tetrarch Philip, who exceptionally had the image of *Tiberius* on his coins [comp. *Schurer*, N.T. *Zeitgesch.* p. 231]. Neither Herod nor Herod Antipas had any 'image' on their coins, but only the usual 'devices' of the Maccabaen period. And the coins, which the Roman emperors had struck specially for Palestine, bore till the time of Vespasian, in accommodation to Jewish prejudices, no image of any kind.) for which He had called, He said, 'What *is* Caesar's render to Caesar, and what is God's to God.' It did far more than rebuke their hypocrisy and presumption; it answered not only that question of theirs to all earnest men of that time, as it would present itself to their minds, but it settles to all time and for all circumstances the principle underlying it. Christ's Kingdom is not of this world; a true Theocracy is not inconsistent with submission to the secular power in things that are really its own; politics and religion neither include, nor yet exclude, each other: they are, side by side, in different domains. The State is Divinely sanctioned, and religion is Divinely sanctioned—and both are equally the ordinance of God. On this principle did Apostolic authority regulate the relations between Church and State, even when the latter was heathen. The question about the limits of either province has been hotly discussed by sectarians on either side, who have claimed the saying of Christ in support of one or the opposite extreme which they have advocated. And yet, to the simple searcher after duty, it seems not so difficult to see the distinction, if only we succeed in purging ourselves of logical refinements and strained inferences.

It was an answer not only most truthful, but of marvellous beauty and depth. It elevated the controversy into quite another sphere, where there was no conflict between what was due to God and to man—indeed, no conflict at all, but Divine harmony and peace. Nor did it speak harshly of the Nationalist aspirations, nor yet plead the cause of Rome. It said not whether the rule of Rome was right or should be permanent—but only what all must have felt to be Divine. And so they, who had come to ‘entangle’ Him, ‘went away,’ not convinced nor converted, but marvelling exceedingly.

The Nationalists/Zealots

The nationalists’, or Zealots, movement was basically centered in Galilee. Therefore, it is not without important significance that “All of the disciples of Jesus except Judas Iscariot were Galileans and much of the teaching and ministry of Jesus took, place there...”¹In fact, the Apostles are called men of Galilee. (Ac. 1:11.)

Galilee covered the ancient possessions of Issachar, Zebulun, Naphtali, and Asher, “In the time of Christ it stretched northwards to the possessions of Tyre on the one side, and to Syria on the other. On the south it was bounded by Samaria—Mount Carmel on the Western, and the district of Schthopolis on the eastern side, being here the landmarks; while the Jordan and the Lake of Gennesaret formed the general eastern boundary line.” It was divided into Upper and Lower Galilee—the former beginning ‘where sycomores (not our sycamores) cease to grow.’ Fishing in the Lake of Galilee was free to all (Baba K. 81 b).²

When Israel went in to conquer the land, nor all of the former pagan Gentile inhabitants were driven out; rather, they continued to live among Israel—“To this state of things, probably, is due the name given in Isa. 9:1 to this region, ‘Galilee of the nations,’ i.e. a district occupied by a mixed population of Jews and heathen.”³

By New Testament times, the land of Canaan (Israel) had been divided into three parts, Judea on the south, Samaria and Galilee on the north. As we know, the Hebrews of Christ’s day refused to have any dealings with the Samaritans in the middle.

Luke tells us that Christ preached in the synagogues of Galilee, showing that He spent a great deal of His ministry in the area of Galilee. Luke also tells us that it was from Galilee that His fame went out. (4:14, 44.)

Until the fall of Jerusalem, Galilee was held in contempt by the Jewish learned leaders. After the fall, the city of Tiberias in Galilee became the main center of their national and religious life.⁴

(During the time of Christ, *ed.*) ... *Galilee* was not the home of Rabbinism, though that of generous spirits, of warm, impulsive hearts, of intense nationalism, of simple manners, and of earnest piety. Of course, there would be a reverse side to the picture. Such a race would be excitable, passionate, violent. The Talmud accuses them of being quarrelsome, but admits that they cared more for honour than for one of his most outspoken opponents a Galilean, Rabbi Jose. In religious observances their practice was simpler; as regarded canon-law they often took independent views, and generally followed the interpretations of those who, in opposition to Akiba, inclined to the more mild and rational—we have almost, said, the more human—application of traditionalism. The Talmud mentions several points in which the practice of the Galileans differed from that of Judea—all either in the direction of more practical earnestness, or of alleviation of Rabbinic rigorism. On the other hand, they were looked down upon as neglecting traditionalism, unable to rise to its speculative heights, and preferring the

1. *Baker’s Bible Atlas*, 201. Baker Book House.

2. Edersheim, *Life and Times*, Book I, 224, note.

3. *ISBE*, 1163.

4. *Ibid*, 1164.

attractions of the Haggadah to the logical subtleties of the Halakhah. There was a general contempt in Rabbinic circles for all that was Galilean...

Among such a people, and in that country, Jesus spent by far the longest part of His life upon earth...

This period of the life of Christ in Galilee was extremely important. He humbled Himself in every way, even being identified with the Galileans, the most despised of the Jewish world of His day, rather than the wisdom of the teachers of the law in Jerusalem. No wonder the common people heard Him so willingly. And the religious leaders from Jerusalem despised Him so much.

Galilee, the Seat of Nationalism

This accession of Herod, misnamed the Great, marked a period in Jewish history, which closed with the war of despair against Rome and the flames of Jerusalem and the Temple. It gave rise to the appearance of what Josephus, despite his misrepresentation of them, rightly calls a *fourth* party—besides the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes—that of the *Nationalists*.¹ *A deeper and more independent view of the history of the times would, perhaps, lead us to regard the whole country as ranged either with or against that party. As afterwards expressed in its purest and simplest form, their watchword was negatively, to call no human being their absolute lord; positively, that God alone was to lead as absolute Lord. It was, in fact, a revival of the Maccabean movement, perhaps more fully in its national than in its religious aspect, although the two could scarcely be separated in Israel, and their motto almost reads like that which according to some, furnished the letters whence the name *Maccabee* was composed... It is characteristic of the times and religious tendencies, that their followers were no more called, as before, *Assideans* or *Chasidim*, ‘the pious,’ but *Zealots*, or by the Hebrew equivalent *Qannaim*. The real home of that party was not Judea nor Jerusalem, but Galilee.*²

[T]he Brave, free Highlanders of Galilee, and of the religion across their glorious lake, seemed to have inherited the spirit of Jephthah, and to have treasured as their ideal—alas! often wrongly apprehended—their own Elijah, as, descending in wild, shaggy grab from the mountains of Gilead, he did battle against all the might of Ahab and Jezebel. Their enthusiasm could not be kindled by the logical subtleties of the Schools, but their hearts burned within them for their God, their land, their people, their religion, and their freedom.

It was in Galilee, accordingly, that such wild, irregular resistance to Herod at the outset of his career, as could be offered, was organized by guerilla bands, which traversed the country, and owned one Ezekias as their leader...³

Note that Edersheim identifies this *Nationalist Party* as the *Zealots*. Josephus, in describing Rome’s war against Jerusalem which led to the final destruction of the Jewish nation, identifies the leaders inside the city who killed all Jews wanting to yield to the Romans, as the *Zealots*.

This *Nationalist Party* (the *Zealots*), was at its height of appeal and influence from the time of the accession of Herod to the throne to the final destruction of Jerusalem: “No one understood the meaning of Jewish Nationalism so well as he; no one ever opposed it so systematically.” Herod made every attempt to suppress the Nationalists, first, by executing Ezekias, and afterwards, when he became King of Judea, by the slaughter of the members of the Sanhedrin who sympathized with them. This was also behind his attempt to kill the King of the Jews among the infants of Bethlehem. Herod married into the Boethos family of the high priest. The family allied with Herod, and after his death, formed a party—the Herodians. He appointed the high priest during his reign, and saw that they were

1. Josephus says that the founder was Judas the Galilean. They agreed in all other things to the Pharisaic notions, but they had an inviolable attachment to liberty. He also says that they were so well known that there was no need to describe them. He attributes the final revolt against Rome to this *fourth party*, who cared about nothing, their families, their nation, their own lives, other than liberty, *Antiquities*, XVIII, ii.6.

2. Edersheim, *The Life and Times*, Book II, 237.

3. *Ibid*, 238.

not Nationalists.¹

Observe

First, Galilee bordered the Gentile world, and was greatly influenced by the Gentiles. The proximity with the Gentiles resulted in Galilee being not only a center of trade with the pagans, but a center of paganism as they adopted many pagan practices. Galilee was thus a center of Greek humanism.

Galilee was known for its independence, as well as its commerce. The people separated from the traditional interpretation of the law as accepted in Jerusalem. Galilee was the home of the Nationalist Party, which refused to submit to any authority other than God's (according to the Old Testament) in their zeal for 'God and country.' Even though under Rome, they at times stood violently against Roman rule. But darkness prevailed in the area.

Second, the religious leaders in Jerusalem looked down on any from Galilee so much that 'Galilean-Fool' was a common expression among the Judeans.²

On the other hand, Judaea (Jerusalem), was regarded as the seat of learning in the law. Everything about this area was favorable to the all-engrossing passion for Rabbinic study, kindling fanaticism.

Here was seen the conviction that they were the true home of the expounders of the mysteries of the Hebrew faith, the fountain-head of wisdom, the home of the knowledge of God, the only interpreters of the law. The Judean teachers claimed to have the power to: judge something lawful or not; loose and bind according to their word; remit or retain sins as they pronounced something lawful or unlawful; decide the sacrifice to be offered for a sin and whether or not a sacrifice could be offered. They felt they had the authority to determine what punishment was placed upon the individual in the next world. No men before nor since have been more fanatical than the Judaeans at the seat of all learning, Jerusalem.

In other words, as far as the learned at Jerusalem were concerned, all wisdom, knowledge and judgment according to the law of Moses, rested with them. Then here comes a man from Galilee telling them that they were wrong.

Third, Galilee was the home of the *Nationalist Party* later identified as the *Zealots*, who led in the revolt against Rome. They were lovers of Liberty who refused to call any man lord, and were willing to give everything to the cause of reclaiming their national freedom.

It was the *Nationalists*, or *Zealots*, who asked Christ, *Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?* (Mt. 22:17.)

Conclusion

Farther,—It is as certain that the elevation of the covenant-people to the dominion of the world cannot take place all on a sudden, and without any farther ceremony, inasmuch as, according to a fundamental view of the Old Testament, all outward deliverance appears as depending upon conversion and regeneration. "Thou returnest," so we read in Deut. xxx. 2, 3, "to the Lord thy God, and the Lord thy God turneth to thy captivity." And in the same chapter, vers. 6, 7: "The Lord thy God circumciseth thy heart, and *then* the Lord thy GOD putteth all these curses upon thine enemies." Before Gideon is called to be the deliverer of the people from Midian, the Prophet must first hold up their sin to the people, Judg. vi. 8ff., and Gideon does not begin his work with a struggle against the outward enemies, but must, first of all, as Jerubbaal, declare war against sin.³

The Nationalists' "hearts burned within them for their God, their land, their people, their religion, and their freedom. It was in Galilee, accordingly, that such wild, irregular resistance to Herod at the

1. *Ibid*, 240.

2. *Ibid*, 226.

3. Hengstenburg, on Isa. 9:2, *Christology*, 441.

outset of his career, as could be offered, was organised by guerilla bands, which traversed the country, and owned one Ezekias as their leader.”¹

The *Nationalists*, or *Zealots*, of our day can declare and wage “guerilla warfare” against oppression from above, *i.e.*, ungodly civil authority, but until war is declared against sin, God himself will see that oppression continues.

1. Edersheim, *Life and Times*, Book II, 238.

Appendix B

King Agrippa's Speech

Following is reproduced Josephus' account of king Agrippa's speech to the Jews, trying to dissuade them from revolting against Rome, the nation to whom they were captive. Agrippa's speech sounds like one that might be given today to dissuade Nationalists who are intent on revolting against any oppressive civil power. Though a pagan, Agrippa's charge against the Nationalists was in accord with God's word. In fact, reading his speech, one would almost think he was a Bible believing, hell-fire and damnation preacher—his speech to the Nationalists was more Scriptural than 90% of all messages going out from “God's men” today. He told the Nationalists that their problem was not with Rome, but their problem was with their God—they were at war against God's law.

Agrippa was no “dummy:” he had his finger on the pulse of the Jewish nation, and was very familiar with Israelite history. Wasting no words, he placed his finger on the problem—he told the Nationalists Jews that their present problems resulted from their failure to stand against the small things when they had the freedom and power to do so. The result of their failure was their present bondage to Rome. Now, Agrippa argued, it is foolish to try to do what they refused to do when they had the chance.

But the Nationalist's mind was made up, and they rejected Agrippa's warning. They chose instead to continue their war against God's law-word and were totally annihilated at the hands God's army, pagan Rome.¹

We will introduce Agrippa's speech with the translator's footnote for Sect. 4 concerning the authenticity of Josephus' account of the speech:

* In this speech of king Agrippa we have an authentic account of the extent and strength of the Roman empire when the Jewish war began. And this speech, with other circumstances in Josephus, demonstrates how wise and how great a person Agrippa was, and why Josephus elsewhere calls him *Thaumasiotatos*, a most wonderful, or admirable man, Centr. Ap. I, 9. He is the same Agrippa who said to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” Acts xxvi, 28; and of whom St. Paul said, “He was expert in all the customs and questions of the Jews,” v 3. See another imitation of the limits of the same Roman empire, Of the War, b. iii, ch. v, sect. 7. But what seems to me very remarkable here is this, that when Josephus, in imitation of the Greeks and Romans, for whose use he wrote his Antiquities, did himself frequently compose the speeches which he put into their mouths, they appear, by the politeness of their composition, and their flights of oratory, to be not the real speeches of the persons concerned, who usually were no orators, but of his own elegant composition. The speech before us is of another nature, full of undeniable facts, and composed in a plain and unartful, but moving way, so it appears to be king Agrippa's own speech, and to have been given Josephus by Agrippa himself, with whom Josephus had the greatest friendship. Nor may we omit Agrippa's constant doctrine here that this Roman empire was raised and supported by Divine Providence; and that therefore it was in vain for the Jews, or any others, to think of destroying it. Nor may we neglect to take notice of Agrippa's solemn appeal to the angels, here used; the like appeals to which we have in St. Paul, I Tim. v, 22, and by the apostles in general, in the form of the ordination of bishops, Constitut. Apost. viii, 4.

Comments

First, this was the Agrippa before whom Paul stood and witnessed the Christian faith.

1. For those who have a copy of Josephus, you can find this speech in *Wars*, Book 2, Chap. 16, Sect. 4, 5. For those who do not have a copy, you need to get one. “Agrippa I, d. AD 44, called Herod Agrippa in the Bible, was the son of Aristobulus, one of Herod the Great's executed sons. Brought up in Rome he became a favorite of Caligula, who appointed him king of both Philip's and Antipas's territories. He was succeeded after an interval by his son Agrippa II, b. AD 27, under whom Herodian rule ended. The Jews, never great partisans of the Idumaeen dynasty and continually outraged by the political and religious insensitivity of the various Herodians and the Roman governors, revolted in AD 66. Agrippa aided the Romans in suppressing the revolt and went to Rome after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70. He was the brother of BERENICE.” Multimedia Encyclopedia, Ver. 1. Herod Agrippa I, King of Judaea and Samaria, AD 37-44; Herod Agrippa II, AD 52-Roman war, after which he went to Rome.

Second, Agrippa was an expert in all the customs and questions of the Jews, which Paul readily confessed.

Third, Agrippa contended that Rome, who was obviously oppressive to the Jews, was raised up by God because the Jews rebelled against God. Therefore, said Agrippa, to resist Rome, who was God's minister of justice against Israel's rebellion against himself, was futile—in fact, it was resistance against God himself.

The following speech by Agrippa shows that he was a very wise man, and certainly had his finger on the situation. Josephus has it as one long paragraph. We have broken it up with comments about the more obvious points. The “thinking person” will easily find many more points, and will wonder why I did not see them.

Agrippa's speech

4. * “Had I perceived that you were all zealously disposed to go to war with the Romans, and that the purer and more sincere part of the people did not propose to live in peace, I had not come out to you, nor been so bold as to give you counsel; for all discourses that tend to persuade men to do what they ought to do is superfluous, when the hearers are agreed to do the contrary. But because some are earnest to go to war because they are young, and without experience of the miseries it brings; and because some are for it, out of an unreasonable expectation of regaining their liberty, and because others hope to get by it, and are therefore earnestly bent upon it; that in the confusion of your affairs they may gain what belongs to those that are too weak to resist them, I have thought proper to get you all together, and to say to you what I think to be for your advantage; that so the former may grow wiser, and change their minds, and that the best men may come to no harm by the ill conduct of some others. And let not any one be tumultuous against me, in case what they hear me say do not please them; for as to those that admit of no cure, but are resolved upon a revolt, it will still be in their power to retain the same sentiments after my exhortation is over; but still my discourse will fall to the ground, even with relation to those that have a mind to hear me, unless you will all keep silence. I am well aware that many make a tragical exclamation concerning the injuries that have been offered you by your procurators (“an official of ancient Rome who managed the financial affairs of a province or acted as governor of a lesser province,” *e.g.*, tax collector, *ed.*), and concerning the glorious advantages of liberty; but before I begin the inquiry, who you are that must go to war, and who they are against whom you must fight,—I shall first separate those presences that are by some connected together; for if you aim at avenging yourselves on those that have done you injury, why do you pretend this to be a war for recovering your liberty? but if you think all servitude intolerable, to what purpose serve your complaints against your particular governors? for if they treated you with moderation, it would still be equally an unworthy thing to be in servitude. Consider now the several cases that may be supposed, how little occasion there is for your going to war. Your first occasion is, the accusations you have to make against your procurators: now here you ought to be submissive to those in authority, and not give them any provocation: but when you reproach men greatly for small offences, you excite those whom you reproach to be your adversaries, for this will only make them leave off hurting you privately, and with some degree of modesty, and to lay what you have waste openly. Now nothing so much damps the force of strokes as bearing them with patience; and the quietness of those who are injured, diverts the injurious persons from afflicting.

Comments

First, my, how right he was—men whose minds are made up cannot be persuaded otherwise.

Second, Only the young and foolish want to go to war. Notice he said, “unreasonable expectation of regaining their liberty.” He will proceed to show how “unreasonable” it was for the Jews to think they could regain “their liberty” through war against their oppressor, Rome.

Third, the reason for going to war was against the “injuries” perpetrated by Roman representatives,

saying that all “servitude” was “intolerable.” However, their stand against Roman oppression was inconsistent, for they had no problem with “servitude” when the particular governors treated them with “moderation.” Thus, Agrippa told them, evidently, that they were going to war out of vengeance, so why were they claiming it was to regain liberty?

This writer despises “servitude” to oppressive, wicked civil authorities (and foreign troops) as much as any other “red-blooded” American. This writer also despises “servitude” to the money lenders, so he keeps a very low standard of living, so he does not have to live by “servitude” to a lender. (Pr. 22:7.) How right Agrippa was: How can people claim to love freedom and liberty when they willingly submit to moderate “servitude,” *e.g.*, money lenders.

Fourth, he pointed out that, yes, the “procurators” were making things difficult for those under their authority, but many times the people brought the “strokes” upon themselves by stirring up trouble over small things. One would think king Agrippa had read 1 Peter chapter two, for even he understood that patient endurance of unjust buffeting brings the adversary to shame.

Continuing

But let us take it for granted that the Roman ministers are injurious to you, and are incurably severe; yet are they not all the Romans who thus injure you; nor hath Caesar, against whom you are going to make war, injured you: it is not by their command that any wicked governor is sent to you; for they who are in the west cannot see those that are in the east; nor indeed is it easy for them there, even to hear what is done in these parts. Now it is absurd to make war with a great many for the sake of one: to do so with such mighty people, for a small cause; and this when these people are not able to know of what you complain: nay, such crimes as we complain of may soon be corrected, for the same procurator will not continue forever; and probable it is that the successors will come with more moderate inclinations. But as for war, if it be once begun, it is not easily laid down again, nor borne without calamities coming therewith. However, as to the desire of recovering your liberty, it is unseasonable to indulge it so late; whereas you ought to have labored earnestly in old time that you might never have lost it; for the first experience of slavery was hard to be endured, and the struggle that you might never have been subject to it would have been just; but that slave who hath been once brought into subjection, and then runs away, is rather a refractory slave than a lover of liberty; for it was then the proper time for doing all that was possible, that you might never have admitted the Romans [into your city] when Pompey came first into the country. But so it was, that our ancestors and their kings, who were in much better circumstances than we are, both as to money and [strong] bodies, and [valiant] souls, did not bear the onset of a small body of the Roman army. And yet you who have not accustomed yourselves to obedience from one generation to another, and who are so much inferior to those who first submitted in your circumstances, will venture to oppose the entire empire of the Romans; while those Athenians, who, in order to preserve the liberty of Greece, did once set fire to their own city, who pursued Xerxes, that proud prince, when he sailed upon the sea; and could not be contained by the seas, but conducted such an army as was too broad for Europe; and made him run away like a fugitive in a single ship, and brake so great a part of Asia as the Lesser Salamis are yet at this time servants to the Romans; and those injunctions which are sent from Italy, become laws to the principal governing city of Greece.— Those Lacedemonians also, who got the great victories at Thermopylae and Platea, and had Agesilaus [for their king], and searched every corner of Asia, are contented to admit the same lords. These Macedonians, also, who still fancy what great men their Philip and Alexander were, and see that the latter had promised them the empire over the world, these bear so great a change, and pay their obedience to those whom fortune hath advanced in their stead.—Moreover, ten thousand other nations there are, who had greater reason than we to claim their entire liberty, and yet do submit.

Comments

First, once arms are taken up, they are not easily laid down.

Second, why did those concerned about liberty wait so long to express their concern? Why did they only express concern in certain areas and not deal with every area of servitude? Why did they not express their concern in the small things of servitude when they could do something about it? When a slave who willingly let himself be taken into slavery by small things runs away from the big things, is he really a lover of liberty? The true lovers of liberty will, though it may be useless, “set fire to their own city” rather than let it come into bondage.

Continuing

You are the only people who think it a disgrace to be servants to those to whom all the world hath submitted. What sort of an army do you rely on? What are the arms you depend on? Where is your fleet that may seize upon the Roman seas? and where are those treasures which may be sufficient for your undertakings? Do you suppose, I pray you, that you are to make war with the Egyptians, and with the Arabians? Will you not carefully reflect upon the Roman empire? Will you not estimate your own weakness? Hath not your army been often beaten even by your neighboring nations, while the power of the Romans is invincible in all parts of the habitable earth? nay, rather they seek for somewhat still beyond that; for all Euphrates is not a sufficient boundary for them on the east side, nor the Danube on the north, and for their southern limit, Libya hath been searched over by them, as far as countries uninhabited, as is Cadiz their limit on the west, nay, indeed they have sought for another habitable earth beyond the ocean, and have carried their arms as far as such British islands as were never known before. What therefore do you pretend to? Are you richer than the Gauls, stronger than the Germans, wiser than the Greeks, more numerous than all men upon the habitable earth?—What confidence is it that elevates you to oppose the Romans? Perhaps it will be said, It is hard to endure slavery. Yes, but how much harder is it to the Greeks who were esteemed the noblest of all people under the sun! These, though they inhabit in a large country, are in subjection to six bundles of Roman rods. It is the same case with the Macedonians, who have juster reason to claim their liberty than you have. What is the case of five hundred cities of Asia? Do they not submit to a single governor, and to the consular bundle of rods? What need I speak of the Heniochi, and Colchi, and the nation of Tauri, those that inhabit the Bosphorus, and the nations about Pontus, and Meotis, who formerly knew not so much as a lord of their own, but are now subject to three thousand armed men, and where forty long ships keep the sea in peace, which before was not navigable, and very tempestuous? How strong a plea may Bithynia, and Cappadocia, and the people of Pamphylia, the Lycians, and Cilicians, put in for liberty! but they are made tributary without an army. What are the circumstances of the Thracians, whose country extends in breadth five days’ journey, and in length seven, and is of a much more harsh constitution, and much more defensible than yours, and by the rigor of its cold, sufficient to keep off armies from attacking them? do not they submit to two thousand men of the Roman garrisons? Are not the Illyrians, who inhabit the country adjoining, as far as Dalmatia and the Danube, governed by barely two legions? by which also they put a stop to the incursions of the Dacians; and for the Dalmatians, who have made such frequent insurrections, in order to regain their liberty, and who could never before be so thoroughly subdued, but that they always gathered their forces together again, and revolted, yet are they now very quiet under one Roman legion. Moreover, if great advantages might provoke any people to revolt, the Gauls might do it best of all, as being so thoroughly walled round by nature; on the east side by the Alps, on the north by the river Rhine, on the south by the Pyrenean mountains, and on the west by the ocean.—Now, although these Gauls have such obstacles before them to prevent any attack upon them, and have no fewer than three hundred and five nations among them, nay have, as one may say, the fountains of domestic happiness within themselves, and send out plentiful streams of happiness over almost the whole world, these bear to be tributary to the Romans, and derive their prosperous condition from them; and they undergo this, not because they are of effeminate minds, or because they are of an ignoble stock, as having borne a war of eighty years, in order to preserve their liberty, but by reason of the great regard they have to the power of the Romans, and their good fortune, which is of greater efficacy than their arms.

Comments

The Gauls were the ones to whom the Book of Galatians was written. Bishop Lightfoot comments:

Thus when the writers of the Roman period, St Paul and St Luke for instance, speak of Galatia, the question arises whether they refer to the comparatively limited area of Galatia proper, or to the more extensive Roman provinces. The former is the popular usage of the term, while the latter is the more formal and official character... The Galatians, whom Manlius subdued by the arms of Rome, and St Paul by the sword of the Spirit, were a very mixed race...¹

One should also note that Rome's insurgence into every habitable area of its day meant that there were paved roads into those areas. Rome was known for the roads she built to keep her vast empire under control. From the start (c. 509 BC), the Roman Empire specialized in organization. (Tradition says the city of Rome was founded in 753 BC. However, a more accurate date would be 509 BC, when the patrician families of Rome set up a quasi-representative form of government.) As Rome expanded, a very key factor in keeping control of its subjected peoples was the paved roads it built to every corner of the empire—53,000 miles worth into parts of more than 40 different nations. Thus though the Romans meant for the roads for a means of controlling the empire, the roads actually paved the way for the very rapid spread of Christianity all over Europe. Rome normally showed enormous tolerance toward religion; however, Christianity was excepted. The problem with Christianity was that it would not recognize that Cæsar was over the Lord Jesus Christ.

Continuing

These Gauls, therefore are kept in servitude by twelve hundred soldiers, who are hardly so many as are their cities, nor hath the gold dug out of the mines of Spain been sufficient for the support of a war to preserve their liberty, nor could their vast distance from the Romans by land and by sea do it, nor could the martial tribes of the Lusitanians and Spaniards escape, no more could the ocean, with its tide, which yet was terrible to the ancient inhabitants. Nay, the Romans have extended their arms beyond the pillars of Hercules, and have walked among the clouds, upon the Pyrenean mountains, and have subdued these nations; and one legion is a sufficient guard for these people, although they were so hard to be conquered, and at a distance so remote from Rome. Who is there among you that hath not heard of the great number of the Germans? You have, to be sure, yourselves seen them to be strong and tall, and that frequently, since the Romans have them among their captives everywhere; yet these Germans, who dwell in an immense country, who have minds greater than their bodies, and a soul that despises death, and who are in rage more fierce than wild beasts, have the Rhine for the boundary of their enterprises, and are tamed by eight Roman legions. Such of them as were taken captives became their servants; and the rest of the entire nation were obliged to save themselves by flight. Do you also, who depend on the walls of Jerusalem, consider what a wall the Britons had: for the Romans sailed away to them, and subdued them while they were encompassed by the ocean, and inhabited an island that is not less than [the continent of] this habitable earth, and four legions are a sufficient guard to so large an island: and why should I speak much more about this matter, while the Parthians, that most warlike body of men, and lords of so many nations, and encompassed with such mighty forces, send hostages to the Romans; whereby you may see, if you please, even in Italy, the noblest nation of the east, under the notion of peace, submitting to serve them. Now, when almost all people under the sun submit to the Roman arms, will you be the only people that make war against them? and this without regarding the fate of the Carthaginians, who, in the midst of their brags of the great Hannibal, and the nobility of their Phoenicians original, fell by the hand of Scipio. Nor indeed have the Cyrenians, derived from the Lacedemonians, nor the Marmaridae a nation extended as far as the regions uninhabitable for want of water, nor have the Syrtes, a place terrible to such as barely hear

1. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 8. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Preface date, February 18, 1865. Lightfoot places Galatians' date as AD 57, 58, *ibid.*, 40. Caesar Nero's reign over Rome was AD 54-68; however, Nero's serious persecution against the Christians did not start until after Rome burned, AD 64.

it described, the Nasamons and Moors, and the immense multitude of the Numidians, been able to put a stop to the Roman valor; and as for the third part of the habitable earth [Africa], whose nations are so many, that it is not easy to number them, and which is bounded by the Atlantic sea, and the Pillars of Hercules, and feeds an innumerable multitude of Ethiopians, as far as the Red sea, these have the Romans subdued entirely. And besides the annual fruits of the earth, which maintain the multitude of the Romans for eight months in the year, this, over and above pays all sorts of tribute, and affords revenues suitable to the necessities of the government.

Comments

The *tribute* paid by captive nations, including Judah, went to maintain the One-World Roman government, which even King Agrippa admitted was at times oppressive, injurious and unjust. In fact, many Christians, with very good Scriptural documentation, considered Nero Caesar (AD 54-68), under whom most of the New Testament was written, the Antichrist of Scripture. Paul's message was as upsetting to the Jews as was Christ's. (Lk. 23:2/Ac. 24:5.) The Jews, whose power and authority were threatened by the gospel preached by both Christ and Paul, brought the same charges against Paul as were brought against Christ: "He is a mover of sedition among all the Jews." Their motive was the same as it was against Christ: to get Rome to see Paul as a threat to Roman rule over Judah, and thus support the Jews' efforts to put Paul to death. (Ac. 21:31.) After Festus and King Agrippa both thoroughly examined Paul concerning the charges the Jews brought against him, *i.e.*, inciting the Jews to rebel against Rome, they could find no fault in him. (Ac. 25:24—26:32.) In other words, nothing in Paul's words could be twisted by those seeking his death to convince Rome that he was a threat to Rome's authority over their captive nations, no matter where the captive nations were. (Everywhere Paul went, that nation was subject to Roman authority.) The same situation existed with Christ in Luke twenty-three—the charges of *perverting* the nation against Rome were totally unsupportable in both Christ's and Paul's situations.¹

Continuing

Nor do they, like you, esteem such injunctions a disgrace to them, although they have but one Roman legion that abides among them; and indeed what occasion is there for showing you the power of the Romans over remote countries, when it is so easy to learn it from Egypt, in your neighborhood? This country is extended as far as the Ethiopians, and Arabia the Happy, and borders upon India; it hath seven millions five hundred thousand men, besides the inhabitants of Alexandria, as may be learned from the revenue of the poll-tax; yet it is not ashamed to submit to the Roman government, although it hath Alexandria as a grand temptation to a revolt, by reason it is so full of people and of riches, and is besides exceeding large, its length being thirty furlongs, and its breadth no less than ten; and it pays more tribute to the Romans in one month than you do in a year: nay, besides what it pays in money, it sends corn to Rome that supports it for four months [in the year]: it is also walled round on all sides, either by almost impassable deserts, or seas that have no havens, or by rivers, or by lakes; yet have none of these things been found too strong for the Roman good fortune; however, two legions that lie in that city are a bridle both for the remoter parts of Egypt, and for the parts inhabited by the more noble Macedonians.

Where then are those people whom you are to have for your auxiliaries? Must they come from the parts of the world that are uninhabited; for all that are in the habitable earth are [under the] Romans. - Unless any of you extend his hopes as far as beyond the Euphrates, and suppose that those of your

1. The charges were brought against Paul in c. AD 58. Paul defended himself before Felix, yet was left in prison for the next couple of years. Festus replaced Felix, AD 60. Having appealed to Caesar, he was sent to Rome in the autumn of AD 60. Paul reached Rome in "the seventh year of Nero's reign, when he had already shown his infamous character by the murder of Agrippina, his mother, in the previous year, and other acts of cruelty... The martyrdom of Paul under Nero is established by the unanimous testimony of antiquity..." Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, I:327, 329. Thus Paul's ministry (AD 40-64) and a large portion of his writings were under King Agrippa and during the reign of the "Antichrist," Nero.

own nation that dwell in Adiabene will come to your assistance (but certainly these will not embarrass themselves with an unjustifiable war, nor, if they should follow such ill advice, will the Parthians permit them so to do); for it is their concern to maintain the truce that is between them and the Romans, and they will be supposed to break the covenants between them, if any under their government march against the Romans. What remains, therefore, is this, that you have recourse to divine assistance; but this is already on the side of the Romans; for it is impossible that so vast an empire should be settled without God's providence. Reflect upon it, how impossible it is your zealous observation of your religious customs to be here preserved, which are hard to be observed, even when you fight with those whom you are able to conquer; and how can you then most of all hope for God's assistance, when, by being forced to transgress his law, you will make him turn his face from you? and if you do observe the custom of the Sabbath-days, and will not be prevailed on to do anything thereon, you will easily be taken, as were your forefathers by Pompey, who was the busiest in his siege on those days on which the besieged rested; but if in time of war you transgress the law of your country, I cannot tell on whose account you will afterward go to war; for your concern is but one, that you do nothing against any of your forefathers; and how will you call upon God to assist you, when you are voluntarily transgressing against his religion? Now, all men that go to war, do it either as depending on divine or on human assistance; but since your going to war will cut off both those assistances, those that are for going to war choose evident destruction. What hinders you from slaying your children and wives with your own hands, and burning this most excellent native city of yours? for by this mad prank you will, however, escape the reproach of being beaten; but it were best, O my friends, it were best, while the vessel is still in the haven, to foresee the impending storm, and not to set sail out of the port into the middle of the hurricanes; for we justly pity those who fall into great misfortunes without foreseeing them; but for him who rushes into manifest ruin, he gains reproaches [instead of commiseration].

Comments

First, how right Agrippa was. It was/is impossible for so vast an empire-nation to rise among nations without God's direct intervention, *i.e.*, providence. Thus God was clearly on the side of that nation, though it was at that time ruled by the most debased man in all history, Nero Caesar.

Second, notice the very strong hint on Agrippa's part that the reason Judah was subject to Rome was because Judah had turned its back upon the laws of her Lord God. So his question is valid - "How can those who are 'voluntarily transgressing' God's Laws call upon God when their transgressions makes God turn His face away?" Such people are asking for defeat.

Third, all men go to war depending on either "divine or on human assistance." Agrippa told them, "Since God established Rome and since you are at war against God's Laws, then you must go to war against Rome depending upon human assistance. And where are you going to get human assistance? You might as well kill your wives and children and set fire to your own cities with your own hands and save Rome the trouble."

Fourth, wise people keep their vessels in safe haven when they foresee a hurricane. We pity those who fall into great, unforeseen misfortunes, but those who go ahead anyway only gain reproach.

Continuing

But certainly no one can imagine that you can enter into a war as by an agreement, or that when the Romans have got you under their power they will use you with moderation, or will not rather for an example to other nations, burn your holy city, and utterly destroy your whole nation, for those of you who shall survive the war will not be able to find a place whither to flee, since all men the Romans for their lords already, or are afraid they shall have hereafter. Nay, indeed, the danger concerns not those Jews that dwell here only, but those of them who dwell in other cities also; for there is no people upon the habitable earth which have not some portion of you among them, whom your enemies will slay, in

case you go to war, and on that account also, and so every city which hath Jews in it will be filled with slaughter for the sake only of a few men, and they who slay them will be pardoned; but if that slaughter be not made by them, consider how wicked a thing it is to take arms against those that are so kind to you. Have pity, therefore, if not on your children and wives, yet upon this your metropolis, and its sacred walls; spare the temple, and preserve the holy house, with its holy furniture, for yourselves; for if the Romans get you under their power, they will no longer abstain from them, when their former abstinences shall have been so ungratefully requited. I call to witness your sanctuary, and the holy angels of God, and this country common to us all, that I have not kept back anything that is for your preservation; and if you will follow that advice which you ought to do, you will have that peace which will be common to you and to me; but if you indulge your passions, you will run those hazards which I shall be free from."

Josephus' account continues

When Agrippa had spoken thus, both he and his sister wept, and by their tears repressed a great deal of the violence of the people; but still they cried out, that they would not fight against the Romans but against Florus, on account of what they had suffered by his means. (According to Josephus, "Florus contrived another way to oblige the Jews to begin the war..."¹ Florus, thus, was a major instigator to stir up the Jewish revolt against Rome.) To which Agrippa replied, that what they had already done was like such as make war against the Romans; "for you have not paid the tribute which is due to Caesar;* and you have cut off the cloisters [of the temple] from joining to the tower Antonia. You will therefore prevent any occasion of revolt, if you will but join these together again, and if you will but pay your tribute; for the citadel does not now belong to Florus, nor are you to pay the tribute-money to Florus."

* Julius Caesar had decreed, that the Jews of Jerusalem should pay an annual tribute to the Romans, excepting the city of Joppa, and for the Sabbatical year; as Spanheim observes from the *Antiq. b. xiv, ch. x, sect. 6.*

Conclusion

King Agrippa's speech to the Jews 2,000 years ago is applicable for all time.

First, many people seem to be ready to fight and die for "liberty." However, if they were really against slavery, they would be against slavery in the small areas, which they were not—they welcomed slavery in moderation, *e.g.*, credit-card and consumer debt is at record high.

Second, social orders are under oppressive authorities because they sinned against the Lord God of heaven and earth. Their sin results in God exalting oppressive civil governments. And being against God and His Law-Word, they have absolutely no chance of regaining the liberty they allowed to be removed a little at a time.

Third, Agrippa certainly placed his finger on a major problem—a problem common to man that must be continually dealt with:

Had I perceived that you were all zealously disposed to go to war with the Romans, and that the purer and more sincere part of the people did not propose to live in peace, I had not come out to you, nor been so bold as to give you counsel; for all discourses that tend to persuade men to do what they ought to do is superfluous, when the hearers are agreed to do the contrary.

Those whose minds are made up cannot be persuaded otherwise.

Might our prayer be, "Lord, if in anything I am otherwise minded than your word, reveal even this unto me, and give the grace to change." (Php. 3:15.)

1. Josephus, *Wars*, Book 2, Chap. 16, Sect. 1..

As we know, Agrippa's warning fell of deaf ears—their mind was made up. The Jews continued their war against God's Law, rebelled against Rome, and Rome utterly destroyed them, killing their men, women and children, and burning their chief city to the ground.

Appendix C

Rome after New Testament Times

The preceding dealt with the social and political climate during which the New Testament was written. In this section, we will look at the later Christian (after AD 70) response to persecution. We saw in the Introduction that Irenaeus (AD 120-202) held that it was a Devilish lie that says the Devil and not God appoints rulers, even wicked rulers. As you read the following, please keep in mind Irenaeus' statement and dates.

How did the "early Church fathers" view Romans 13 and civil government? How much different are we than they were? Maybe a look into the social climate of their day will help us grasp the seriousness of our day. We must remember that from Christ to Constantine, the Christian life was not attractive to the natural man—it many times meant the worse sort of torture and even death.

The foundation of every social order is a religious foundation. According to Rushdoony:

Law is in every culture *religious in origin*. Because Law governs man and society, because it establishes and declares the meaning of justice and righteousness, law is inescapably religious, in that it establishes in practical fashion the ultimate concerns of a culture. Accordingly, a fundamental and necessary premise in any and every study of law must be, *first*, a recognition of this religious nature of law.

Second, it must be recognized that in any culture *the source of law is the god of that society*. If law has its source in man's reason, then reason is the god of that society. If the source is an oligarchy, or in a court, senate, or ruler, then that source is the god of that system...

Third, in any society, any change of law is an explicit or implicit change of religion...

Fourth, no disestablishment of religion as such is possible in any church. A church can be disestablished, and a particular religion can be supplanted by another, but the change is simply to another religion. Since the foundations of law are inescapably religious, no society exists without a religious foundation or without a law-system which codifies the morality of its religion.

Fifth, there can be no tolerance in a law-system for another religion. Toleration is a device used to introduce a new law-system as a prelude to a new intolerance.¹

The Roman Empire of the early church was pagan to the core. Its foundation was paganism.

The piety of Romulus and Numa was believed to have laid the foundation of the power of Rome. To the favor of the deities of the republic, the brilliant success of the Roman arms was attributed. The priests and Vestal virgins were supported out of the public treasury. The emperor was ex-officio the *pontifex maximus*, and even an object of divine worship. The gods were national; and the eagle of Jupiter Capitolinus moved as a good genius before the world-conquering Legions...²

Thus Rome attributed its success to its faithfulness to the pagan gods. The worship of those gods was woven into every fabric of Roman society. Religion was thus a tool of the state to strengthen itself. As Rome conquered other nations, she permitted religions contrary to its religion only on condition that those religions would not seek to undermine the state's religion. Thus Judaism was permitted as long as it did not seek to proselytize the worshipers of Rome's gods. Christianity was seen by Rome as simply a sect within Judaism, and, accordingly, Paul traveled the vast Roman empire with the gospel under Rome's protection—Rome had not yet realized what the message of Christ was.

1. R.J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, I.4, 5.

2. Schaff, *History*, II.41. The Pope now claims the title, *Pontifex Maximus*.

The gospel of Christ claimed universal validity as the only true religion, one God who is Lord over all. Christianity made converts from every people and sect, attracting Romans and Greeks in large numbers along with the Jews. The new converts refused to pay divine honours to the emperor and his statue; they refused recognize Rome's gods, so were considered atheists. They refused to participate in Rome's pagan, idolatrous ceremonies, and they were more concerned about the eternal than the temporal.

The emperors who did not realize the character of Christianity (only one God who is Lord of all) did not persecute the Christians. Of course, as Rome realized that Christianity was destroying its fabric by causing people to disregard Rome's gods, trouble came. Rome moved against Christianity, seeing it as a threat to the state. If people disregarded Rome's gods, Rome would fall.

Pliny (Roman governor in Bithynia, Asia Minor, 109-111, ed.) came in official contact with the Christians. He himself saw in that religion only a "depraved and immoderate superstition," and could hardly account for its popularity. He reported to the emperor (Trajan, 98-117, ed.) that this superstition was constantly spreading, not only in the cities, but also in the villages of Asia Minor, and captivated people of every age, rank, and sex, so that the temples were almost forsaken, and the sacrificial victims found no sale. To stop this progress, he condemned many Christians to death, and sent others, who were Roman citizens, to the imperial tribunal. But he requested of the emperor further instructions, whether, in these efforts, he should have respect to age; whether he should treat the mere bearing of the Christian name as a crime, if there were no other offence.¹

Trajan told him that his response to the Christian threat was proper, and they should be punished. However, Trajan told Pliny that he should not seek out Christians for punishment, that Pliny should ignore anonymous accusations against Christians, and that if one charged of being a Christian would repent of the crime and show his repentance by worshipping Rome's gods, the accused should be pardoned.

Rome fully realized that as its citizens changed their allegiance from Rome's pagan gods to the Christian God, Rome itself would be changed.

Application

We might add a modern note here. The god of this age, of course, is humanism, whether under the name of Christianity or under the various names of paganism. Humanism is defined as every person doing what is right in their own eyes, what seems best at the time or what appeals most to the emotions. (Jud. 17:6; 21:25; Pr. 12:15; 21:2.) In all cases, the final authority of God's total Law-Word is ignored. The "motivation" behind current Western Culture has changed from the desire to please God to covetousness, *i.e.*, a desire to have more and better. It is well described by Paul in his letter to Timothy:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. (1 Tim. 6:6-12.)

The Lord Christ put it this way:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he

1. Schaff, *History*, II.46.

will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13.)

Accordingly, if just the professed Christians in the “Christian West” would obey the above exhortations and serve God rather than mammon, the pagan god, of the West would surely fall. (It will fall anyway—God will see to that.) The modern, paganized Western culture is clearly built upon debt just as sure as Rome was built upon its pagan gods. People can resist the modern pagan American culture all they want to, railing against it in every way, but a major move required for its overthrow will be freedom from covetousness and debt.

There are serious modern moves against Christianity, but only in areas where the paganized state sees that Christianity a threat to its hold over people.

Rome’s Emperors after Christ

Schaff gives some interesting information concerning the Roman Empire after Christ.

After Nero came the rapidly succeeding reigns of Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian and Titus. During the time of Titus, as far as we know, the church suffered no serious persecution from Rome

Domitian (81-96), “a suspicious and blasphemous tyrant, accustomed to calling himself and being called ‘Lord and God,’ treated the embracing of Christianity as a crime against the state, and condemned to death many Christians, even his own cousin...” Domitian destroyed the surviving descendants of David. The martyrdom of Andrew, Mark, Onesimus, Dionysius and Ignatius reportedly took place under Domitian.

However, his successor, Nerva (96-98) was known as a just and human man, and refused to treat confession of Christianity as a crime.

Trajan (98-117) renewed the persecution, but he forbade searching out Christians for punishment. The problem with Christianity, as Pliny (governor of Bithynia in Asia minor, 109-111) saw it, was that it attracted every age, sex, rank, whether they lived in the cities or not. Christianity caused the people to forsake the temples, leaving the sacrifices with no market. In other words, Christianity undermined the Roman gods, and thus Rome itself. Trajan supported treating Christians as enemies of the state, yet if a Christian would worship Rome’s gods, the person would be freed.

Though Trajan tried to ignore the problem brought about by the Christians’ refusal to worship Rome’s gods, the situation continued to force itself upon him and into the public’s attention. Christianity spread with great power, and people forsook Rome’s gods. Action had to be taken if Rome was to survive. Pliny “applied the rack to tender women. Syria and Palestine suffered heavy persecutions in this reign. Symeon, bishop of Jerusalem, and like his predecessor James, a kinsman of Jesus, was accused by fanatical Jews, and crucified A.D. 107, at the age of a hundred and twenty years.” In 107, Emperor Trajan came to Antioch, and there threatened with persecution all who refused to sacrifice to Rome’s gods. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, refused, and was transported to Rome to be thrown to the beasts in the Colosseum.¹

Hadrian (117-138) appeared to be indifferent to Christianity. However, he did intentionally insult both Jews and Christians equally, erecting temples of Jupiter and Venus over the site of the temple and the supposed spot of the crucifixion. There was a very bitter public sentiment against the Christians at the time.

Antoninus Pius (137-161) “protected Christians from the tumultuous violence which broke out against them on account of the frequent public calamities.” However, his name, “Pius,” was obtained from his strict adherence to the pagan religions of his fathers. Under his reign, there was great fury against an illegal religion from the provincial governors and the people. The last man with personal

1. Ignatius’ martyrdom is recorded in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, I.129-131.

contact with the apostolic age, Polycarp, was martyred under Antoninus, 155, at the age of 86. "The death of the last witness of the apostolic age checked the fury of the populace, and the proconsul suspended the persecution."

Marcus Aurelius (161-180) was a well educated, just, kind and amenable emperor who prayed to Jupiter. He had no sympathy with Christianity, probably regarding it as an absurd and fanatical superstition. "He considered the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul, with its moral consequences, as vicious and dangerous to the welfare of the state." Laws were passed punishing everyone with exile who would endeavor to influence people's minds with fear of Divinity. The most severe measures were taken against followers of the "forbidden" religion under Marcus.

About the year 170 the apologist Melito wrote: "The race of the worshipers of God in Asia is now persecuted by new edicts as it never has been heretofore; shameless, greedy sycophants, finding occasion in the edicts, now plunder the innocent day and night."¹

Terrible calamities, such as floods, earthquakes, insurrections, pestilences, struck the empire. These calamities caused the government and people to unite against the enemies of Rome's gods, supposing that the gods were angry because the people were forsaking them for the Christian God. However, the public anger against the Christians shows that the Christian religion was gaining increasing importance in the empire.

In 177, the churches of Lyons and Vienna, in the South of France, underwent a severe trial. Heathen slaves were forced by the rack to declare, that their Christian masters practiced all the unnatural vices which rumor charged them with; and this was made to justify the exquisite tortures to which the Christians were subjected. But the sufferers, "strengthened by the fountain of living water from the heart of Christ," displayed extraordinary faith and steadfastness, and felt, that "nothing can be fearful, where the love of the Father is, nothing painful, where shines the glory of Christ."²

"The most distinguished victims of this Gallic persecution were the bishop Pothinus," the virgin Balandina and Ponticus (a fifteen year old boy), Symphorinus of Autun (near Lyons), and Justin Martyr, at Rome in 166. The dead bodies of Christian martyrs that covered the streets were mutilated, then burned, and their ashes cast into the Rhone, lest the enemies of Rome's gods desecrate Roman soil. This persecution only stopped when the people grew weary of the slaughter.

Christians had greatly "infiltrated" the Roman army, and though victories were attributed to the prayers of these Christians, the victories were credited to the Roman gods.

Commodus (180-192) "wallowed in the mire of every sensual debauchery." Though through the influence of a concubine, Marcia, he left Christians alone, a Roman senator, Apollonius, was put to death for his faith.

Septimius Severus (193-211) brought a line of emperors to the throne who were more "Oriental than Roman in their spirit: Caracalla, Heliogabalus, Alexander Severus. Thus they were not as dedicated to maintaining the old state religion as previous emperors had been. However, Clement of Alexander wrote of the period toward the end of the second century, "'Many martyrs are daily burned, confined, or beheaded, before our eyes.'"

Septimius Severus (202) "enacted a rigid law against the further spread both of Christianity and Judaism," which brought about violent persecutions in Egypt and North Africa. Among the many martyrs: Leonides, father of Origen, was beheaded, "Potamiaena, a virgin of rare beauty of body and spirit," after suffering treatment worse than death, was cruelly tortured and burned with her mother in boiling pitch. One of the executioners, Basilides, who tried to shield them somewhat from abuse, after their death embraced Christianity and was beheaded.

1. Schaff, *History*, II.54, 55.

2. *Ibid*, 55.

Caracalla (211-217) continued things basically the same as he found them, passing no new laws against the worship of Christ as Lord.

El-Gabal, or Heliogabalus, (218-222) “polluted the throne with the blackest vices and follies.” However, he tolerated all religions, hoping to merge “them in his favorite Syrian worship of the sun with all its abominable excesses.”

Alexander Severus (222-235) was a pantheistic hero-worshiper, placing “the busts of Abraham and Christ... with those of Arpheus, Apollonius of Tyana, and the better Roman emperors.” On the walls of his palace, he had “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”

Maximinus the Thracian (235-238) assassinated Alexander Severus. He was first a herdsman, and then he was a soldier. Coming to the throne, he encourage the popular fury against the enemies of the gods. He ordered either the entire clergy or only the bishops to be killed. He even plundered the heathen temples.

Gordianus (238-244) left the church undisturbed.

Philip the Arabian (244-249) was supposed by some to be a Christian. Origen kept contact with Philip and his wife by letters.

This season of repose, however, cooled the moral zeal and brotherly love of the Christians; and the mighty storm under the following reign served well to restore the purity of the church.¹

Decius Trajan (249-251) revived the old Roman spirit. He “resolved to root out the church as an atheistic and seditious sect.” In 250, he published an edict enjoining all the governors of all the provinces to return to the pagan state religion, “under the heaviest penalties.” Thus Decius’ reign probably produced more martyrs than any previous period. Every kind of torture, promise, threat, confiscation and exile was used to persuade Christians to apostasy. Multitudes of nominal Christians sacrificed to the gods or produced false certificates that they had done so. The church then accounted them as apostates. However, “hundreds rushed with impetuous zeal to the prisons and the tribunals, to obtain the confessor’s or martyr’s crown... The authorities were specially severe with the bishops and officers of the churches... Fabianus of Rome, Babylas of Antioch, and Alexander of Jerusalem, perished in this persecution.” Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, though hiding for a time, was martyred under Decius.

Callus (251-253) saw the persecutions receive fresh vigour with the incursions of the Goths, the prevalence of a pestilence, drought and famine. Cornelius and Ladius, both bishops, were banished and condemned to death.

Valerian (253-260) started mild with the Christians. However, in 257 he sought to check the Christian progress with every means short of the death penalty. When his efforts failed, he renewed the death penalty. Bishops Sixtus II. of Rome, and Cyprian of Carthage were martyred under Valerian. On his way to the scaffold, Cyprian was attended by a vast multitude. On the Scaffold, he prayed, undressed himself, covered his eyes, requested a presbyter to bind his hands, and to pay into the trembling hands of the executioner twenty-five pieces of gold. He won his incorruptible crown, September 14, 258. His execution was exceptional, for Cyprian was a man of great social standing and importance in the church.

Gallienus (260-268) give peace to the church.

Aurelian (270-275) was energetic and warlike, and sought to reinstate the persecutions. His edict of persecution was rendered void by his assassination.

Six emperors rapidly followed (275-284), all leaving Christians alone.

Clrus, Numerianus, and Carinus (284-285) are credited with persecuting the Christians, but their persecutions are based more in legend than in history.

1. Schaff, *History*, II.60.

During the time of peace, the church rose in numbers and outward prosperity. Large, splendid houses of worship were erected, and funds were raised to purchase sacred books and gold and silver vessels for the administration of the sacraments. Meanwhile, discipline relaxed, quarrels and factions increased, and worldliness poured in like a flood. "Hence a new trial was a necessary and wholesome process of purification."

The last and greatest era of persecution was the most violent in history, even worse than what had taken place under Nero.

Diocletian (284-305) was the son of a slave, who worked himself into the place of supreme power. He divided the immense Roman empire among three subordinate co-regents: Maximian (committed suicide, 310), Galerius (d. 311), and Constantius Chlorus (d. 306, father of Constantine the Great).

Apostolic Fathers

Now let us examine a little of the Apostolic Fathers who lived in the times of the above Roman Emperors. Note the dates and compare them with the dates of the emperors mentioned above. The following is Lockyer's account of the Fathers:¹

The Apostolic Fathers is,

... the title of a group of Greek Christian writers who were born toward the end of the first century and exercised their ministry through the second century. Tradition associates Clement and Hermas with Peter; Ignatius, Polycarp and Papias with John. At first these writers were called Apostolic Men. The term Apostolic Fathers came into use about the sixth century, after the authority of the Fathers had been developed. Later the title was broadened to include other writers. A brief resume of the earliest of these Fathers must suffice. For an exhaustive treatment of all the *Apostolic Men*, the reader is referred to such works as *The Apostolic Fathers* by E. J. Goodspeed, and R. M. Grant's volume, *The Appeal to the Early Fathers*. A satisfactory coverage can also be found in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Ignatius (AD 70-115)

Ignatius, A.D. 70-115, would have been a young man between twenty-five and thirty years of age when the apostle John ended his career. This second bishop of Syria was one of the earliest of the Apostolic Fathers, and wrote seven epistles of unique importance, some of which his contemporary Polycarp quoted. Tradition has it that Ignatius wrote these epistles while on his way to martyrdom in Rome. Traveling across Syria in chains he shouted, "I am made happy by these wild beasts." His yearning for martyrdom has led some scholars to regard him as being somewhat neurotic. When he reached Rome, and the Christians there tried to prevent his martyrdom, he said: "I am the wheat-corn of God; let me be ground to death by the teeth of wild beasts that I may become the pure bread of Christ."

Parenthesis

CHAP. VI.—ABSTAIN FROM THE POISON OF HERETICS.

I therefore, yet not I, out the love of Jesus Christ, "entreat you that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1:10) For there are some vain talkers (Tit. 1:10) and deceivers, not Christians, but Christ-betrayers, (Literally, "Christ-sellers.")⁹ bearing about the name of Christ in deceit, and "corrupting the word" (2 Cor 2:17) of the Gospel; while they intermix the poison of their deceit with their persuasive talk, (Literally, "sweet address.") as if they mingled aconite with sweet wine, that so he who drinks, being deceived in his taste by the very great sweetness of the draught, may incautiously meet with his death. One of the ancients gives us this advice, "Let no man be called good

1. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Apostles of the Bible*, 266, 267.

who mixes good with evil.”(Apost. Constitutions, vi. 13.) For they speak of Christ, not that they may preach Christ, but that they may reject Christ; and they speak (Supplied from the old Latin version.) of the law, not that they may establish the law, but that they may proclaim things contrary to it. For they alienate Christ from the Father, and the law from Christ. They also calumniate His being born of the Virgin; they are ashamed of His cross; they deny His passion; and they do not believe His resurrection. They introduce God as a Being unknown; they suppose Christ to be unbegotten; and as to the Spirit, they do not admit that He exists. Some of them say that the Son is a mere man, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are but the same person, and that the creation is the work of God, not by Christ, but by some other strange power.¹

It is also interesting that Ignatius warned specifically against the errors of Judaism, errors so prevalent today among Christians:

It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism. For Christ is one, in whom every nation that believes, and every tongue that confesses, is gathered unto God. And those that were of a stony heart have become the children of Abraham, the friend of God; (Matt. 3:9; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23. Some read, “children of God, friends of Abraham.”) and in his seed all those have been blessed (Gen. 28:14) who were ordained to eternal life (Acts 13:48.) in Christ.²

In fact, Ignatius stood so strongly against Jewish errors that if he were alive today, Rome would not have to put him to death. The average “Christian Zionists” church would do it for them.

Continuing³

Polycarp, A.D. 65 (*Fathers’ date*, ed.) -155, as Bishop of the much persecuted Church at Smyrna, was a conspicuous figure in the early church. Probably a disciple of John and a friend of other contemporaries of our Lord, Polycarp had much to do in the development of the church and also in the formation of the Canon of the New Testament. His writings mirror the sayings of Christ, and the teaching of Paul. As he was being prepared for burning, he was urged by his persecutors to save his life by reviling Christ, and made his famous reply: “Four-score and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong; how, then, can I blaspheme the King who saved me?”

Clement, A.D. 30 - 100, is the oldest of the Apostolic Fathers, who is said to have been the first bishop of Rome—a tradition the Romish Church does not accept. Toward the end of the first century Clement wrote his renowned Epistle to the Church at Corinth urging its dissident members to return to peace and apostolic order. Christians of the third and fourth centuries regarded his letters as Scripture. One of his Epistles began with the words: “Brothers we must think of Jesus Christ as of God.”

Papias, A.D. 60 -150, is said to have been another disciple of the apostle John. Early in the second century he served as Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia. A work from his pen bore the title *Exegeses of the Dominical Oracles*, in which Papias drew much information from Peter’s epistles, and testified to Mark as being the earliest of the four gospels. Papias was also the first one to affirm that Matthew wrote the discourses of our Lord in the Hebrew Tongue.

Irenaeus, A.D. 120-200, was a devoted pupil of Polycarp, and became Bishop of Lyons. He was the author of two important works, namely *Against All Heresies*, in which he bore witness to almost the whole of the New Testament, especially to the four gospels. Then *In Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*, Irenaeus gave the Church, “a sort of *vade mecum* (pocket manual, or handy reference book) for an intelligent Christian.” In it, he explained his faith, or as he called

1. *Ibid*, 68. “Beware of False Teachers,” &c., p 53

2. *Ibid*, 63.

3. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Apostles of the Bible*, 266, 267.

it, “a remembrancer of the more essential things.”

Hermas is the Early Father, born about the end of the second century, who produced a book known as the Shepherd — a title taken from the guise of the angel who appeared unto him, and which contains five visions he had, and also twelve moral “commandments” and ten “parables.” He represented a kind of Jewish Christianity that seems to have flourished in Rome during his period.

In the latter decades of the second century and during the third century, many others appeared, and some of their writings reveal a significant decline from the Christianity of the apostolic age, especially in relation to Paul’s doctrine of grace. The earlier apostolic fathers bore a clear testimony to the New Testament, and during their ministry the church was evidently a spiritual force in the new age. Justin Martyr, A.D. 100-165 was the Samaritan philosopher who embraced the Christian faith on the grounds of reason, and by observing the steadfastness of Christians in the face of martyrdom. A prolific writer, he addressed two *Apologies* to the Roman Emperor in defense of Christians and also wrote the *Dialogue With Trypho*, in which he justified Christianity for Jewish minds. He died a martyr’s death.

Others grouped among the Fathers are *Tatian, Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian*, and several of the third and fourth centuries whose careers can be followed in any reliable work like that of *The Apostolic Fathers*, by Bishop Lightfoot or Schaff’s two volumes on Church History. The reader will find the study of these conspicuous figures of the earlier centuries a fascinating and rewarding task, especially in their treatment of the writings of those who composed the New Testament.

Actions & Teachings

Having established the dates of the early church “fathers,” we should consider how they felt about and reacted to unjust and wicked civil authority. The First Century Christians were not only confronted with the men in civil authority using every wicked means to obtain and retain their civil offices, but the office holders demanded of everyone the statement, “Caesar is Lord.” Along with the statement was the demand that everyone burn a little incense to Caesar. If they would comply with the demands of the civil authorities, then the “Christians” could go ahead and worship God and even preach the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Probably the martyrdom that most clearly shows the “Caesar worship” was that of Polycarp:

And the Irenarch Herod, accompanied by his father Nicetes (both riding in a chariot), met him, and taking him up into the chariot, they seated themselves beside him, and endeavored to persuade him, saying, “what harm is there in saying, Lord Caesar (or Caesar is Lord), and in sacrificing with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of safety? Polycarp refused and was brought to the stadium where he was to be killed. He stood before the proconsul. But Polycarp said, ”to thee I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]: for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are ordained of God. But as for these, (the proconsul had said “persuade the people” of Christianity as they screamed for his death), I do not deem them worthy of receiving any account from me.”¹

The average “Christian” today would have answered Irenarch Herod, “Sure, we’ll submit to Caesar as long as we can go on preaching Jesus.” There was no prohibition against preaching placed upon Polycarp.

Many who professed Christ saw no problem with, or if they did, they went ahead and made this statement “Caesar is Lord” so they could continue to “preach Jesus.” Maybe they thought that since in their hearts they did not really mean the words it was okay in God’s eyes. However, in order to justify recognition of civil authority over the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, one must remove Daniel chap-

1. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I.40-41.

ter three from the Word of God, which many appear to do so they can “preach the gospel” with a clear conscience.

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