

The Better Way

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SPRING CHURCH OF CHRIST

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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

SUNDAY

Bible Study.....9:00 a.m.
Worship.....10:00 a.m.
Afternoon Worship.....1:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY

Bible Study.....7:30 p.m.
(via Zoom Meetings)

ELDERS

David P. Brown
Ken Cohn
John West

DEACONS

Bret Bailey
J. D. Gunter
Eric Paluka

EVANGELIST

David P. Brown

SECRETARY

Sonya West

CIVIL RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIANS

Guy N. Woods

Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same: for he is a 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 a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For for this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this very thing. Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfilment of the law (Rom. 13:1-10).

Our lesson text for today is an extremely important one, because it sets out the relation between Christians and the government under which they live, and their duties and responsibilities to it. Taught, with great emphasis here, is the fact that civil law is ordained of God, Christians are expected to be law-abiding citizens; to rebel against civil law (when that law is not in conflict with the law of God), amounts to rebellion against God.

Our lesson text may more fully be outlined as follows: (1) Government is ordained of God (Rom. 13:1-7). (a) Those who violate civil law, disobey God. (b) Civil law is for the good of the people. (c) The civil power is an agency of God against evil doers. (d) Submission to the law of the land is both safe and proper. (e) Paying taxes is a matter of conscience. (f) Love fulfils the law. (g) Love prompts one to keep the commandments. (h) Love works no ill to ones neighbor, and thus fulfils the law.

God does not determine the kind of civil government under which His people are to live; He does designate the disposition that must characterize His people toward the government, regardless of its kind. Civil law is necessary to the existence of peaceful society; and children of God must live in submission thereto. The only exception is when the

government bids one do that which violates the law of God. Peter and John stated that principle which must then motivate us, when they said: **“Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard”** (Acts 4:19, 20). **“We must obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:30).

“THE POWERS THAT BE ARE ORDAINED OF GOD”

The context clearly shows that the phrase **“higher powers”** (to which **“every soul”** is to be in subjection) simply designates the civil government under which we live. To be in subjection, is to be in *submission*) to be *obedient* to the **“powers”** to which we are subject. How *far* we are to submit is not here indicated; we have seen, in the introduction, that the principle is set out, by inspired apostles, in Acts 4:19, 20; 5:30. Where that exception does not exist, Christians are required, by divine edict, to live in harmony with the laws of the land where they reside. The reason assigned is: **“There is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God.”** When it is said that there is **“no power but of God,”** it is meant that all power is exercised by the will of God, who permits it, and who can (and sometimes does) withdraw it at will. Examples of God setting up men as rulers, and demoting them are numerous in the sacred writing (Dan. 2:21; 4:17-35). See 1 Samuel 8:1-33. All who exercise authority do so by the will of God, because government itself is **“ordained of God.”** The word *ordain* means to set in order; God thus provides men with civil government; because, in the nature of the case, man in this life, must have it to survive. God does not designate the *kind* of government (whether dictatorial, monarchical, or republican); He leaves it to man to determine the kind of government under which he prefers to live; neither does God always approve of the conduct of the governments which He ordains. Often, He uses wicked men to further His plans, because they possess the character suited to the work to be done. For example, God has used wicked men to punish His own people when they became wicked, examples of which are Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. Since God is the author of human governments, it follows that those who resist them, are in rebellion to God and shall suffer punishment (both by the government and by God) for their disobedience.

“HE BEARETH NOT THE SWORD IN VAIN”

To be in “terror” is to be afraid; those who are engaged in a good work have nothing to fear; only those engaged in evil are terrified by the civil power. If, therefore, children of God wish to be in a position of confidence respecting their government, let them do that which is good and they not only will not have occasion for fear, they will enjoy the approval of the government which looks with favor on law-abiding citizens. Why is this so? The civil ruler is **“a minister of God”** (he performs his duties by the will of God), and he operates for the good of the Lord’s people. Those who do evil are the ones who have reason to be afraid, because the officer of the law does not bear his sword in vain, he will use it to execute vengeance on the evildoer. This shows us that the civil power is an agent of God for the execution of punishment upon those who violate the laws of society, and of God in the world. The sword is a symbol of power and is a lethal weapon. When it is said that the officer bears the sword **“not in vain,”** it means that he can, and will, use it, for the purpose for which it is designed. This teaches us that the state (civil government) has divine authority for restraining the wicked, and the use of **“the sword”** (deadly weapons) in so doing. The words **“avenger for wrath,”** means an avenger to execute wrath upon evil doers. The officer is the “minister” (servant) of God to this end. We should carefully distinguish between the legitimate activities of the officer ordained of God for this purpose, and the effort of an individual (or the Christian) to seize such power and execute it on his own behalf. The former is acceptable to God; the latter is sinful.

In verse 5, of our lesson text, two reasons for subjection to the civil authorities are assigned: (1) fear of punishment; (2) the exercise of a good conscience, (the realization we are carrying out the will of God). We have seen that (a) God ordains civil government; (b) rulers exercise their powers by divine decree; (c) children of God are to be in subjection to them. *What of those governments which have persecuted Christians, and have sought to exterminate Christianity? We must conclude that such governments do not act in harmony with the divine will; they are not pleasing to Him, and may, therefore, be resisted in their ungodly demands. All that is required of us is to be in subjection in those areas not involving violation of God’s law. It is obvious, from the context, that these matters were not involved in the apostle’s*

view; discussed is the proper attitude toward *civil government* operating in its legitimate sphere.

“RENDER TO ALL THEIR DUES”

That is, because of fear of punishment and for conscience sake, Christians pay tribute (taxes). The employees of the government engaged in the collection of taxes are functioning by divine authority, and are, therefore, **“ministers of God’s service.”** Inasmuch as civil government is divinely authorized, and since governments must collect taxes to exist, God ordains the tax collection system. To resist the system, or those operating it, is to be in rebellion to God. This shows us it is a sin for one to withhold taxes lawfully owed. Jesus said, **“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s”** (Mat. 22:21).

“Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” The first clause, **“render to all their dues,”** is a general statement setting out the obligation of Christians to recognize the rights of others, and to yield in all such matters. Particularly intended here are the duties owed the government: **“tribute”** was personal taxes; **“custom”** was taxes on land or real estate-property taxes; the **“fear”** indicated was a proper attitude toward the officers of the law; and the **“honor”** owed was the respect they were to entertain for the rulers who sat in places of authority. Thus, Paul taught that children of God are to respect their obligation in the area of civil government; they are to pay their taxes, and show proper respect for those in authority.

“LOVE WORKETH NO ILL TO HIS NEIGHBOR”

The first clause forbids the making of an obligation one cannot discharge. Some have interpreted it to mean that all credit business is forbidden by the apostle, but this is an unwarranted conclusion. Money borrowed is not owed until the note is due; goods purchased on time are owed for, only when the time of payment arrives. The passage, in principle, forbids the making of bad debts, unwise credit buying, and disregard of obligations. One debt all can pay is to love one another; it is one always owed, and on which we are always to pay! It can never be fully discharged. Those who thus love fulfil the law respecting one’s self and one’s neighbor, because love leads one to

discharge one’s responsibility to another. It is said to fulfil the law, because it is so sure to be done that it is regarded as already done!

“For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self.” These are prohibitions of the law. If, therefore, one loves one’s neighbor as one’s self, not one of these, or any of the other commandments, will one violate, inasmuch as the violation of them would work ill to the neighbor whom one loves. If the command to love is obeyed, all evil-doing, deception, falsehood, murder, immorality and covetousness will be avoided against others, because all evil acts violate *the law of love*. Hence, the law of love causes the entire law of God to be respected, upheld and obeyed. The principle involved is the same as that set out in the “golden rule.” Thomas has well said:

No one who adopts this rule of living will ever be able to say, “I have done all that I am supposed to do, and there is nothing more for me to undertake.” This way of living embraces all law and goes beyond it; and it would be, if we were able to fulfil it, the complete realization of the perfect life.

“Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfilment of the law.” This is a conclusion drawn from the premises set out above. Love eliminates the doing of wrong to one’s neighbor (i.e., forbids killing him, lying about him, coveting what he has, etc.), and thus works no ill (evil) to him whatsoever; therefore, since love removes the possibility of evil doing to one’s neighbor, love fulfils the law of respecting him. This shows us that love is the base of all other commandments, because if it is properly engaged in, all other duties follow as a matter of course. If, therefore, we love, love properly, love truly, we fulfil, satisfy the demands of the law. It is not surprising that there is so much emphasis given to love in the sacred writings (John 13:34, 35; 15:12). If men could be led to love one another, and to seek each other’s good, all other problems of life would be easily resolved.~

Deceased

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