

Romans 16 - Our walk in the World (Part 1)

In the final section of the book of Romans, we are looking at a Christian walk that is consistent with the spirit of the Law.

Rom 2:27-29 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

28For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.

Rom 7:6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

2Cor 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

In the last two weeks we looked at our walk in the service of the Lord in general and also according to how He has specifically gifted us. The next several chapters cover our walk in various relationships.

When we talk about our walk in the world, we are usually talking about our how we affect our friends, neighbors, and people with the Gospel. If we are going to try to use the phrase "walk in the world" in a special way according to Rom 13, we are referring to the world *system*. Most of our walk is within our evangelistic, Gospel mission, as part of the church, but that does not present a complete picture of our life situation. In the kingdom of God, there are actually two institutions. Besides the church which is responsible for the *sacred* aspect of the Kingdom of God, God has instituted government which is responsible for the *secular* aspect of the Kingdom of God. That which is sacred is concerned about the spiritual and eternal. That which is secular is concerned about the physical and temporal. The sacred is *primarily* religious. The secular is *primarily* neutral with regards to religion. The idea of the secular might seem to be the opposite of the sacred and excluding religion. That would be either secular humanism or just plain secularism which makes man or the state the *only* authority. The secular and the sacred are not mutually exclusive in the kingdom of God. Each one is held accountable by God and carries out the will of God from its own angle. In Romans 13, Paul covers the unique relationship we have specifically with government in the secular world.

2. Agents of God -

Government can be characterized by its responsibility. This was first described in Genesis 9.

Gen 9:1-6 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

2And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon

every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth *upon* the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

3Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

4But flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

5And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

6Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

Man is given stewardship, or governance, over the earth that is most firmly established by the special responsibility for human life. This is affirmed in Romans 13:

Rom 13:4 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.

Vs. 4 repeats the stewardship of government by not bearing the sword, a weapon of execution, in vain as the ultimate responsibility. This is referring to capital punishment, or the death penalty. It is a responsibility that God has given. Verses 1-3 give a perspective on the secular role of government.

Rom 13:1-3 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.

2Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3For 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:

There are several things that we have to be careful of in this passage.

First, this passage does not give *carte blanche* for dictators or governments to do what they please. It is the *power*, or *authority* that is ordained of God.

Second, this primarily refers to *governmental* power. In almost all places where the word *power* is used it is referring to authority. In a few places, it refers to those who derive their authority as an *agent* of government. Although God has moved for certain leaders to be placed in office, that does not necessarily mean that God put Hitler or Stalin in office. Even in the example of Jeroboam and Rehoboam, God worked *indirectly* through the instrumentality of man to elevate Jeroboam. On the other hand, God endorsed Nebuchadnezzar and had him restored to the throne after God humbled him. Even in that case, it was not without the cooperation of the Babylonian leaders. Nevertheless, once a ruler *is* in a place of authority, he is accountable to God since God has ordained government. Their responsibility is to be a terror to the evil. This passage does not suggest that government is here to control the righteous.

Thirdly, government as the secular power exercises a different dominion than the church with its spiritual power. One of the great mistakes of the Thyatira church age in the Middle Ages was for

the popes to claim supremacy above the state as well as the church. Using the reference to Christ's remarks about two swords being enough, the Medieval church read into this that the church had a spiritual power and a secular power. Though the church was primarily responsible for *spiritual* judgment, the state was used to exercise physical judgment, including torture and death, for those who opposed the church. The Mediaeval church usurped the power of the government to justify attacking unbelievers rather than minister to unbelievers for their salvation.

The great principle we can derive from all of this is that those who will not operate according to the Law of God within the sphere of the spiritual ministry of the church are not excused from Biblical morality. They are just as morally responsible before the Law of God under the sphere of the secular power of the state.

3. The church state relationship -

We especially want to remember that when Paul wrote this, he was fully aware of the fact that the Emperor of Rome was not a boy scout. Our ministry does not oppose the state. There is a mistake that secularists and many naive, under-informed Christians make in America. Government was never intended to be devoid of spirituality. The separation of church and state does not extend to eradicating any effect of the church in the national life of the country. It merely refers to the fact that neither one has authority over the other. By all means each one influences the other. We are not free to establish a *state* religion, but we are free to exercise our religion everywhere.

There is a time when we are to stand with God against government. Early in the life of the Jerusalem church, the high priest made a move to put down the revival going on.

Acts 5:17-29 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, [**The high priest was the chief power aside from the Roman oversight of Judea.**]

18And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

19But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

20Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. [**Peter had a divine command to preach.**]

21And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. [**Here was the full governmental power of the High Priest, the council, and the senate.**]

22But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

23Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

24Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

25Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. [**Peter was in full defiance of the government.**]

26Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

27And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council: and the high priest asked them,

28Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

29Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

The great principle, here, was that God's commands ultimately supercede man's commands. But, we need to be ready to go all the way with that relationship. They *did* end up complying with the council. If they preached, they would get a beating. They essentially said okay. That doesn't mean they stopped preaching, They complied by preaching and then taking the beating.

We have to be careful, though, not to over apply this principle. There have been times when bombastic preachers have stood up to the government over issues that did not warrant the fight. According to vs. 5-7, we are to maintain a respectful relationship.

Rom 13:5-7 Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

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

7Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Paul applied the principle of living at peace as much as lieth in you when it came to his relationship with the government. Peter certainly had a case to stand up to the government but Paul was not advocating that we merely roll over out of respect for the powers. Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen. When he was unjustly jailed in Philippi he claimed his rights as a Roman which put the Philippian authorities in a panic for violating them. When he was taken captive in Jerusalem, after he had preached, the chief captain decided to interrogate him further. That means he was going to beat the information out of him.

Acts 22:24-29 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

25And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

26When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.

27Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

28And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was *free* born.

29Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

Ultimately, Paul claimed his right as a citizen to be heard by Caesar himself. From history we understand that he won that case. He died a martyr later.

4. The Christian in the world -

Paul wrote by inspiration of God about government, but he was not influenced by any naivete when it came to those powers. Sometime you might hear that we don't have to obey government because they are corrupt or evil. Just because men work corruptly does not invalidate government. Paul was fully aware of the fact that Caesar was pagan when he appealed to him. He knew that the Jewish leadership was not pure. He actually used the dissent within their ranks at his Jerusalem trial by setting the Sadducees against the Pharisees. All government is under God and any corrupt leaders are held accountable by God whether they know it or not.

So, what *is* our general relationship with government? We are to pray for rulers for peace and an open door.

1Tim 2:1-4 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men;
2For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.
3For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;
4Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Paul does not merely call on us to pray for kings so we can live a cushy life. In vs. 4 he explicitly looks for a peaceable life *so that we can spread the Gospel*. Having peace is not just for selfish reasons. We do not live a go-along-to-get-along, I'm-okay-you're-okay, live-and-let-live kind of life so we can sit back at the end of the day in an easy chair with a bowl of popcorn and a movie.

We are called to preach as long as we can.

2Tim 4:1-5 I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;
2Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.
3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
4And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.
5But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

5. Beware of bad government -

While it is true that government is responsible to God, there is a danger that people face. It is not just in the fact that sinful men use government corruptly. The danger is in an over-reliance assuming that government has all the answers. Bad government is a government that seeks to be free from God. When government tries to stand apart from Godliness, people run the risk of treating it like a

god. Good governance is not just about having machinery of state run smoothly. You can have all the social services, the infrastructure, and the national budget running smoothly, but that doesn't satisfy our greater need. Just as the churches need to recognize their freedom to *preach* the Word of God, those who have not become a child of God need to recognize their freedom to *receive* the Word of God. Freedom in a secular society should not be taken advantage to be free *from* God, but to have the opportunity to be free *in* God. The right balance is to recognize God's power in the secular and the sacred. Without it, the state becomes god and people become slaves to the state.

Pilate struggled over power with Christ.

John 18:36-38 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

37Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

38Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault *at all*.

Pilate had no idea of the power of Who he was dealing with. As the governor, he was accountable to the very one he was trying. I somehow think he was aware of this because he could find no fault in Christ. Finding no fault, however, is not sufficient. He needed to embrace the truth for himself.

This was the message of Christ.

John 8:31-32 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed;

32And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

The truth is that we are sinners and need God's salvation. The truth is that we need to be part of God's kingdom, living as spiritual saints in a secular world. Anything less renders us to be mere cogs in the machinery of the state grinding on to a Godless eternity in Hell.

Rom 2:27-29, 7:6, 2Cor 3:6

2. Agents of God - Gen 9:1-6, Rom 13:1-4

3. The church state relationship - Acts 5:17-29, Rom 13:5-7, Acts 22:24-29

4. The Christian in the world - 1Tim 2:1-4, 2Tim 4:1-5

5. Beware of bad government - John 18:31-38