

God-Ordained Institutions: Civil Government, Part 1

Introduction

Family—Creation
Civil Government—Fall
Church—Redemption

Civil Government—Fall
Humanity's fallen nature makes necessary some kind of restraining authority.

The most basic function of civil government is to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right (1 Peter 2:14; Romans 13:3).

The problem is that *every human who participates in human government is a fallen being infected with the sin plague.* Every form of human government has this tragic flaw. That is why human government, whatever form it takes, will never be perfect till Jesus reigns supreme. He is the only perfect Human, His reign the only perfectly righteous human government ever.

We should not be shocked and dismayed when the lawmakers display lawlessness. Nor should we despair that they will get away with their sins. God holds rulers accountable—not

just those who are part of a theocracy like ancient Israel, but the pagan nations as well.

Isaiah 13:11 (Babylon)

Assyria, Moab, Damascus (Syria), Cush (Ethiopia), Egypt, Tyre and Sidon (Phoenicia)

Jeremiah 25:11-14

I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.

Daniel 4

²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, ²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. ²⁶ And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the

oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

In light of redemption, those who are born again bring a holy influence to whatever their role is in civil government for the good of their nation.

Jeremiah 18:7-10

7 If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, **8** and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. **9** And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, **10** and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.

Jonah

Sent to the Assyrian city of Nineveh to preach against it, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed!”

They repented and God forgave them.

Nineveh continued for another 150 years

before God's judgment finally fell, as prophesied by Nahum. It was so obliterated that for centuries many historians thought it was a mythical city—that is, until its ruins were discovered in 1846.

Jeremiah 29:7

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

With our form of government—a representative democracy called a republic—if those who participate have been redeemed by Christ, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in them impacts their voting, their running for office, and their execution of assigned duties. A godly ruler is a blessing from God. A wicked ruler is a terror to his people.

Proverbs 8:15-16

¹⁵ By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; ¹⁶ by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly.

Proverbs 16:12

It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness.

Proverbs 20:28

Steadfast love and faithfulness preserve the king, and by steadfast love his throne is upheld.

Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

Proverbs 21:7

The violence of the wicked will sweep them away, because they refuse to do what is just.

Proverbs 22:22-23

²² Do not rob the poor, because he is poor,
or crush the afflicted at the gate,
²³ for the LORD will plead their cause
and rob of life those who rob them.

Proverbs 23:10-11

¹⁰ Do not move an ancient landmark
or enter the fields of the fatherless,
¹¹ for their Redeemer is strong;
he will plead their cause against you.

Proverbs 28:2, 4-5

² When a land transgresses, it has many rulers, but with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue.
⁴ Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive against them.
⁵ Evil men do not understand justice, but

those who seek the LORD understand it completely.

Proverbs 28:15-16

15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

16 A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.

Proverbs 29:2, 4, 7-8

2 When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan.

4 By justice a king builds up the land, but he who exacts gifts tears it down.

7 A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.

8 Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away wrath.

We must also remember that *all those who participate in human government are created in the image of God. As image bearers they deserve kindness and respect. And as those placed into authority by God, Scriptures calls us to give them honor and obedience*, much in the same way godly children should honor obey their imperfect parents. If we ourselves are redeemed, we are no longer rebels, and we understand that only the gospel can change people the way they need to be

changed, governed and governing alike. This is what the NT emphasizes in our response to governing authorities.

Romans 13:1-7

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

1 Peter 2:9-17

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the

excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Titus 3:1-3

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and

pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

Next time: among other issues, is there ever a time for civil disobedience?