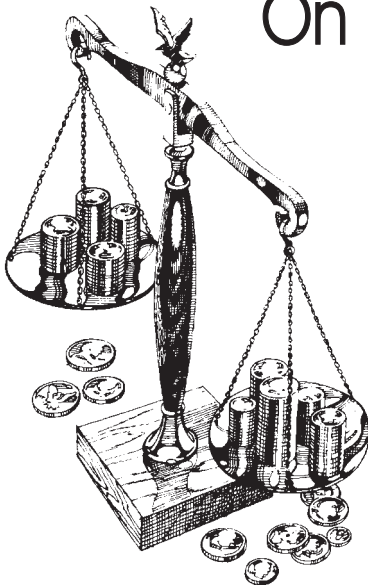


Rendering To CAESAR

A Biblical Perspective
On Government



Gil Rugh

Rendering To Caesar: A Biblical Perspective On Government

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

As Christians, we have a dual citizenship. We are members of an earthly nation, but we also have a citizenship that is in heaven. The outworking of this double citizenship, however, has often led to confusion. People often ask me, as a pastor, how we Christians should view the institution of earthly government: Is human government founded by God? Does God ordain all authority, even bad authority? Do Christians have an obligation to human governments? Should we try to Christianize our nation by political means? To what degree should we submit to government?

Broadly speaking, those who are Christians have sometimes fallen into two extremes on this issue. One view says that since we are citizens of heaven, we have no responsibilities or relationship to earthly government at all. Those who strictly believe this would not vote, serve in the military, salute the flag, or show any allegiance or concern for the nation in which they live. On the other hand, a second view closely ties Christianity with political and social activity.

Which view is correct? Is the answer somewhere in the middle? Although great confusion and variety of opinions exist on this subject, the Bible does give us answers and guidelines for understanding government and how we as Christians should view and respond to it. The purpose of this work, therefore, is to show from Scripture what God says about these issues and the responsibilities we, as believers, have in light of that.

C H A P T E R O N E

Order Established By God

Before discussing our relationship to government, we must understand that order has always been a part of God's plan. It is not something evil or something that only came about because of the fall of man. Our world often rebels against order and the ideas associated with it. For example, the term, "authority," can bring to mind iron-fisted dictators, corrupt politicians, and others who use their positions of power for selfish gain. On the other hand, submission to authority is often associated with weakness and lack of freedom. In our day of self-assertion and looking out for number one, many see submission as an archaic denial of individual rights. Those ideas, however, do not come from the Bible. Both authority and submission, as God intended, are not evil. In fact, God established order and it has always been a part of His plan from eternity past to eternity future. The negative aspects of order, as we will see, do not come from God but from the adverse consequences of the fall of man.

The following examples show that order has always been a part of God's plan:

The Trinity

All members of the Godhead, including Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are all equal in essence and nature. They are all fully God. Yet within this equality of essence, a functional order exists. When Paul

described God's plan for order in the church he said, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and *God is the head of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:3) [emphasis mine]. This clearly shows that order exists within the Godhead. When Paul wanted to show the Corinthians an example of order, he pointed to the Son's willing subordination to the Father.

This submission of the Son to the Father is not temporary; in fact, it will continue for eternity. In 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, Paul states that at the end of Christ's Millennial Kingdom on earth, Christ will turn over the Kingdom to the Father and "will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him" (1 Corinthians 11:28). So even when the eternal state begins, Christ is pictured as One who is in subjection to the Father. This shows that even after God has removed all the negative aspects of the fall, order will still exist and continue forever.

We also see submission in the Trinity with the Holy Spirit. According to Scripture, the Father and the Son are the Ones who send the Holy Spirit (see John 14:16; 16:7). Though equal with the Father and the Son in essence, the Holy Spirit proceeds from them, and therefore, is subordinate to them in function. Order, therefore, transcends man and the fall. If we can see order in the Trinity, we should not be surprised to see it in God's creation.

The Angelic Realm

If order only came about because of the fall of man we would not expect to see it among the angels. Yet the Bible does suggest that it exists in the angelic realm. Ephesians 6:12 states, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Most Bible scholars agree that the categories mentioned in this passage describe a hierarchy within the forces of Satan. If so, then order exists even among the fallen angels.

Daniel 10 also is helpful in showing rank among the spiritual armies of God and Satan. In Daniel 10:13, an angel (perhaps Gabriel) tells Daniel that he was delayed three weeks by the "prince of the kingdom of Persia." In this context, "prince" would be a fallen angel

hindering the progress of an unfallen angel. As a result, Michael, who is called an "archangel" in Jude 9, was then sent to release the hindered messenger. In this account, Michael, an angel of exceptional rank, delivers a fellow unfallen angel from the power of a "prince" of Satan. The activity described in this passage suggests that among the angelic armies of God and Satan, rank and order exist.

The Pre-Fall Earth

God told man to "fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). God gave man dominion over the whole earth. With that dominion comes authority.

God also established order between men and women at creation. In explaining why women were not to exercise authority over men in the church Paul said, "For it was Adam, who was first created, and then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13). Men are to function as leaders in the church because of God's creation order. Some believe that order in the church between men and women is only because of the fall. Paul, however, does not say this authority was a result of the fall. It was established at creation. The creation order of Adam and Eve took place before the fall. So if the fall never happened, this order would still exist.

The Negative Aspects of Authority and Submission

Order, as created by God is good. Yet if God established authority why are there so many negatives associated with it? Why do people abuse their power and why do people rebel against authority?

The Reason — Sin

The reason authority and submission have taken on negative associations is because of one thing — *sin*. Sin is rebellion against God's authority. God created order for good. Nevertheless, when sin entered the world, God's plan for order became perverted. If sin never existed there would be no negative aspects of authority and submission.

Where did this rebellion begin? Rejection of God's authority

began with Lucifer. Isaiah 14:13-14 tells of the five "I will's" of Lucifer:

"But you said in Your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
And I will sit on the mount of assembly
In the recesses of the north.
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.' "

These "I will's" of Lucifer meant "I will replace God. I will not accept and submit to His plan for order." As a result, Lucifer would then become the father of all those who rebel against God.

Humanity eventually joined Lucifer's rebellion against God's intended order. When Adam disobeyed God, sin entered the world (see Romans 5:12). With sin, man's ability to rule and submit became tainted. Sinful man naturally rebels against authority and rejects the idea of submission. That is the reason for the negative aspects of order in our society. Those in authority want to use their power for their own selfish desires, while those who are to submit to authority do not want anyone telling them what to do.

As we have seen, then, the Trinity, the angelic realm, and the pre-fall earth show that order has always been a part of God's plan. It existed before the fall and will exist throughout eternity.

C H A P T E R T W O

Establishing Kings And Kingdoms

I once read an article by a Christian leader who refused to believe that God could be involved in the establishing of ungodly governments. According to this man, God tolerates unjust governments but He does not place them in power. This leads to an interesting question — Does God appoint all leaders and governments, even wicked ones?

In spite of this man's strong feelings, the Bible is clear that God directly establishes *every* government in power. For example:

- There is no authority except from God (Romans 13:1).
- Submit yourselves to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him (1 Peter 2:13-14).
- And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings (Daniel 2:21).

God's sovereignty does directly apply to all those in power. This does not mean all leaders appointed by God are well-pleasing to Him, but He appoints them to carry out His purposes. The following examples show God's sovereignty in establishing all government:

King Nebuchadnezzar

Nowhere in the Bible is God's sovereignty in selecting leaders more evident than with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar, who reigned from 604 - 562 B.C., was one of the greatest kings who ever lived. His kingdom was unparalleled in glory and strength. When he became king of Babylon, he was obviously a pagan ruler. Yet the Bible is clear that Nebuchadnezzar was a chosen vessel of God:

I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him (Jeremiah 27:5-6).

Though King Nebuchadnezzar was not a believer at this time, God called him "My servant." In other words, Nebuchadnezzar was a selected instrument of God to accomplish His purposes.

When the godly Jew, Daniel, was made a part of Nebuchadnezzar's court, Daniel told the king:

You, O king are the king of kings, to whom *the God of heaven has given the kingdom*, the power, the strength, and the glory; and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, *He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all* (Daniel 2:37-38). [emphasis mine]

God appointed Nebuchadnezzar's great and glorious kingdom to which Daniel clearly affirms. This did not mean that Nebuchadnezzar humbly understood where his power came from or gave God the glory. In fact, he gave himself the glory for his kingdom:

Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty (Daniel 4:30)?

Nebuchadnezzar made the mistake of attributing the glories of his kingdom to himself. Because of his pride, God would humble

Nebuchadnezzar:

This is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: that you be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that *the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes* (Daniel 4:24-25).
[emphasis mine]

Because of Nebuchadnezzar's pride, God would teach him a lesson. Nebuchadnezzar would become as a beast for seven years. Twelve months later this prophecy was fulfilled. After this period he then realized that God:

Does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?' (Daniel 4:35)

God returned Nebuchadnezzar's power to him when he realized that God, not himself, was the source of his authority. He then had a different perspective on who was really in charge. God is the one who establishes and removes kings. This applied even to one of the greatest kings who ever lived.

Pilate

Pilate, who put Jesus to death, was a man known for his cruelty. Did God give Pilate his authority? The answer is yes. When Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pilate said, "Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify you?" But Jesus told him, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given to you from above . . ." (John 19:10-11). Even knowing that Pilate would give the command for his crucifixion, Jesus affirmed that Pilate, indeed, had legitimate authority. Pilate's authority was not in question, but Jesus reminded him that it came from God.

Pharaoh

The Pharaoh of Egypt at the time of the Exodus represents one

of the greatest examples of stubbornness and rebellion against God. Moses told Pharaoh to free the people of Israel so they could worship the Lord. Yet he refused to obey. Could such a leader, who opposed God, also be put in power by God? Again the answer is yes: "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH' " (Romans 9:17). Pharaoh was a wicked leader, yet the Bible says God sovereignly raised him up so God could accomplish His purposes through him.

Nero

What about the leaders in the times of the apostles? When Paul wrote, "there is no authority except from God," (Rom. 13:2) and that government is "a minister of God" (Rom. 13:4), Nero was on the throne in Rome. Nero was a homosexual who had many Christians tortured and put to death. It was to such a leader that Paul commanded his readers to be in subjection. That Paul could say this with Nero on the throne shows us that God not only establishes all government but His sovereignty even extends to those governments that are oppressive to believers.

These examples show that God sovereignly appoints and removes all governments and their leaders. If God put in power such men as Nebuchadnezzar, Pilate, Pharaoh, and Nero, we can conclude that God is sovereignly placing in power today those who He will use to fulfill His purposes.

God's control in appointing governments should be an encouragement to us as believers. I have sometimes seen Christians become discouraged and upset when certain leaders in this country have been voted in or out of power. Listening to some Christians after an election would lead one to believe that God had been defeated at the polls. Certainly, as responsible members of society we should be concerned about whom our leaders are and if we can vote, we should try to elect the best leaders. Still, on the other side, we do not have to fret or become anxious about who gets elected or who is leading the government. We can know that whoever is in power is there because God has placed them in that position. Though this does not always mean these leaders will be just, it does mean

we can be assured they will carry out God's purposes. If Paul could see God's sovereignty with Nero on the throne, we as Christians should also see God's hand in whoever comes to power in our nation.

Forms of Government

With all its problems, our country grants us privileges and freedoms that many nations do not have. Our democracy allows us freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to vote. There are nations, however, that are not democracies and are not known for granting individual freedoms. Does the Bible distinguish between these different forms of governmental rule? Interestingly, the Bible does not make distinctions between forms of government such as democracy or dictatorship. The Bible simply says that all authority is "established by God" (Romans 13:1). Whatever governments are in place, whether cruel oppressive dictatorships, or free democracies, they are all established by God. We are not allowed to say, "I disagree with this form of government; therefore, God could not have put it in place." It is also significant that the Bible does not divide governments into good and bad ones. This is important when we discuss our duties to government. Though the form of government may change, our responsibilities as Christians to our government do not. They are the same whether we live in an oppressive communist state or a democracy.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

The Purposes of Government

God establishes all governments. But what responsibilities has He delegated to it? According to the Bible, government has two main functions: (1) to punish evildoers and (2) to reward those who do right:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the *punishment of evildoers* and the *praise of those who do right* (1 Peter 2:13-15). [emphasis mine]

Punishing Evildoers

The issue of crime and punishment is much debated in our country. Some say the primary purpose of dealing with criminals is reform, while others say it is punishment. That leads to the question, what is government to do with lawbreakers?

According to Peter, one function of government is "the punishment of evildoers." God gives government the power to punish lawbreakers. The word "punishment," as used by Peter, means "inflicting retribution for a wrong done." It is just retribution for a crime. As one Bible student put it:

Though some theories of criminal punishment maintain that reforming the criminal and protecting society from further

crimes are the only legitimate purposes of punishment, Peter here includes retribution, the inflicting of just desert on the one who has harmed others, as a legitimate purpose.¹

Though reform and societal protection are factors, they are not the primary reasons for dealing with criminals — punishment is: "for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil" (Romans 13:4).

"The sword" is figurative for the right to punish. In this context it would especially apply to capital punishment. (We will examine capital punishment in the next section.) God, therefore, has given government the right to punish criminals for wrongdoing.

A Deterrent to Evil

As government wields the sword by punishing evildoers it is also deterring potential evil:

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good. . . But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing (Romans 13:3-4).

When the authorities properly deal with lawbreakers, a deterrent exists to those who would break the law. If we obey the law, we have no reason to fear authority. However, those who break the law have reason to worry. For example, if I obey the 65 mph speed limit on the Interstate I have no fear of being pulled over by the state patrol. But if I drive 30 miles over the speed limit, I would be looking nervously out the rear view mirror to see if any flashing red lights were approaching because there is a natural fear of government that comes with breaking the law.

In another example, if I were in line at a grocery store to pay for my food and a police officer came behind me I would not be nervous. Yet if moments before he came, I had slipped a candy bar into my pocket I would fear getting caught. The principle is this —

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 120.

obeying government brings peace of mind but breaking the law gives one reason to fear. God therefore, uses government to deter evil.

In recent years, our nation has experienced a rise in crime, and as that trend continues there is more fear of being victimized. But in spite of the climbing crime rate in America, we should be grateful that our government still provides a deterrent to evil behavior. We can still walk out of our homes in relative safety. If someone tries to break into our house we can call the police and they will be there. Compare that with countries where anarchy reigns because no stable government exists. Imagine if we had gunfire in our streets and no authority existed to stop it. The former Soviet Union was an example of this. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, many states were left without a strong government. Fighting, rebellion and crime came about because no stabilized government existed to curb the evil. Compare this with China, who though communistic, has a strong central government. Because of this very little crime exists. I experienced this first hand when I had the opportunity to visit China. I could walk the streets at night without fear of harm. I did not have to worry about my valuables being stolen. The government provided protection from evil.

We may not always agree with how certain governments function, but whether we agree with it or not, it does provide a deterrent to evil and adds stability to society. For that we should be grateful.

A Rewarder for Doing Good

The government deals with those who break the law. But the second main function of government is “the praise of those who do right” (1 Peter 2:14). In other words, the government rewards those who keep the law. When we obey the authorities, we do not have to be afraid of them. We can function freely in our society. Those who disobey government often lose the benefits and freedoms given to those who abide by the law. If I go to prison because I robbed a store I forfeit my freedom and privileges. However, if I am a law-abiding citizen, they reward me with freedom and benefits.

Romans 13:4 also tells us that government is “a minister of God to you for good.” We need to be reminded that government can be good. Often we focus on the corruption and deception we see in it and we become negative toward it. We may think, “If the

apostles only knew the corruption we have in our political situation today they would not have said that government is a minister of God for good.” The truth is they lived in a Roman government that had more corruption than this nation. Many Roman emperors were open homosexuals, adulterers, and murderers. This Roman government would eventually put some of the apostles to death. But the apostles believed government accomplished good. Although the Roman government was corrupt, the peace that Rome brought to the world produced an environment that allowed for the quick spread of the Gospel. This does not mean that government is always sympathetic to the Gospel. On the contrary, many Christians have been persecuted for their faith. Still, a stable government does allow for the Gospel to be presented and spread.

In the United States, our authorities allow us to meet freely and whenever we want without interference. If any person or group would try to disrupt our gatherings, we could rely on the government to protect us. Once, at the church I pastor, we had people who were protesting our church because of our biblical beliefs. There was even the possibility of our service being disrupted. The local authorities, however, provided protection in case anyone tried to disrupt our gathering. We saw first hand how the government was a minister for good as they gave us the protection to worship freely.

Collecting Taxes

As we have seen, the two primary duties of authority are to punish evildoers and to reward those who do right. Yet government also has a third function — collecting taxes:

For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Romans 13:6-7).

Grumbling about paying taxes is easy. Many dread April 15 each year because that is the day our taxes are due. Certainly, no one enjoys paying the government money, especially when we feel it is too much. Yet the Bible tells us why we pay taxes. We pay taxes to compensate rulers who are “ministers of God” (Romans 13:4). God sees governing authorities as providing an honorable public

service; therefore, they are worthy of compensation. Taxes are also necessary for running the government. I am concerned when people do not pay their taxes because of some supposed Christian convictions. Whatever convictions they have, they are not in agreement with Romans 13:6-7. This does not mean that government always does what is right with our tax money. In fact, government often uses our money in sinful ways. For instance, I do not enjoy seeing our tax money used to support things like abortion and obscene art. But the government is the one ultimately responsible for how they use our tax money. Our responsibility is to pay our taxes. How it is used is something for which we are not accountable. Rome obviously did not use Paul's tax money in a way he would have agreed with. Nero, the emperor in Paul's time, used tax money to pay for his elaborate homosexual wedding and to persecute Christians. Some Roman emperors bankrupted the Roman treasury with their extravagant spending. This empire that Paul was supporting with his tax money eventually put him to death. Yet Paul said "render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due" (Romans 13:7).

In our nation, fortunately, we have some influence on the taxes we pay. Sometimes we can vote directly on certain tax issues. But even these privileges are given to us by the government. If all these privileges were taken away, we would still be responsible for paying our taxes. The famous phrase, "No taxation without representation" may be the ideal, but it is not a condition for paying our taxes. Whether we had representation or not our responsibility is still the same. There was no representation for taxes when Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon. Paul and Peter did not have representation when they paid their taxes either, but that did not matter. God says "pay your taxes," so we should. We do not have the right to decide whether we will pay them or how much we will pay.

Jesus' conviction on paying taxes is consistent with Paul's. The Pharisees, who were trying to trap Jesus into saying something wrong, asked Him: "tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar or not?" (Matthew 22:17). The Pharisees knew that to some Jews, paying taxes to Rome was abhorrent because the Romans were ruling them.

But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the

poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:18-21).

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees shows that paying the government what they require does not conflict with obeying God. We pay taxes because that is part of God’s plan for supporting government.

C H A P T E R F O U R

Capital Punishment

Capital punishment is a highly debated issue. Even among Christians there exists a variety of opinions on its validity. One Christian chaplain, who works with inmates on death row, condemned capital punishment by saying, “When we kill them, we are allowing their evil to contaminate us. . . . Sometimes we commit evil in the name of justice.”² He is not alone in his sentiment. In fact, many feel that capital punishment is another form of murder that breeds more violence. This leads us to the question. Does government have the right to execute criminals? Fortunately, the Bible gives us the answer.

The Institution of Capital Punishment

Genesis 9:6 gives us the first and simplest direction relating to capital punishment:

- Whoever sheds man’s blood,
By man his blood shall be shed,
For in the image of God
He made man.

In this passage, God gives the right of capital punishment to man. If someone commits murder, they are required to die. In the

² Erik Brady, “Bringing God to death row,” *USA Today*, August 25, 1995.

debate over capital punishment, some say, "We do not have the right to take human life, only God does." That is only partly true. Ultimately, the right to take a human life belongs only to God, but God has also chosen to delegate this responsibility to man. When the government carries out capital punishment, therefore, it is acting on the delegated authority of God. So rather than usurping God's role, man is responsible to God for executing those who murder another person.

The Reason for Capital Punishment

Why does God require the death of one who commits murder?

- For in the image of God He made man (Gen. 9:6).

Murder is serious because man is created in God's image. Therefore, when someone commits murder he has struck at the image of God. Man, even fallen man, is sacred in God's sight. God gave him a special place in creation. Notice that men are not to be executed for chopping down a tree, stepping on a worm, or killing an animal. God did not create those creatures in His image. But killing a man is a capital offense because he was made in God's image. Capital punishment, therefore, is not a humanitarian issue. It is a justice issue. One reason there is so much debate about capital punishment is because our society does not understand justice. It has abandoned God and any fixed standard of right and wrong.

Is Capital Punishment for Today?

There is some debate whether the command for capital punishment in Genesis 9:6 is for today. After all, we do not keep all the commands given in the Old Testament. For example, we do not sacrifice animals today as they did in Old Testament times. How can we be sure that Genesis 9:6 is for today? To know this we must understand its context.

God gave the responsibility for capital punishment to Noah shortly after the worldwide flood. The instruction given to Noah in Genesis 8:21-9:17 makes up what we call the Noahic Covenant. Because the flood had destroyed all of humanity except Noah and his family, Noah is the representative of the entire human race. God, then, spoke to Noah as the head of the human race. We also do not find anywhere in Scripture where this command is revoked. If

capital punishment was only temporary we would expect Scripture to tell us this. But it does not. Therefore, we have reason to believe the command is as valid today as it was then.

We see the validity of capital punishment for today in the other aspects of the Noahic Covenant that are still operative today. Put another way, if we can see aspects of the Noahic covenant in effect today, this helps show that God's instruction for capital punishment is also in effect for today. And this is the case. For example, God promised Noah that seasons would exist:

While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
And cold and heat,
And summer and winter,
And day and night
Shall not cease (Gen. 8:22).

Before the flood, the entire planet probably had a tropical environment, but the flood brought radical changes to the environment, one result of which is the changing seasons. Obviously, God's revelation about seasons continues to this day.

Also, the timeless nature of the Noahic Covenant can be seen in God's promise to never destroy the world again with a flood:

All flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth. . . . I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth (Gen. 9:11-13).

God promised Noah that He would never again destroy the earth with water. The rainbow would be the sign of this promise. Again, this clearly applies today. In the middle of this section is the instruction for capital punishment (Gen. 9:6). We, therefore, have good reason to believe that God's command for capital punishment is also in effect for today.

Difference Between Accidental Killing and Murder

Other passages of Scripture give us insight into God's plan for capital punishment. Exodus 21:12 states, "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death." This parallels the instruc-

tion God gave Noah in Genesis 9:6. Notice that God does not say that He personally will put them to death. It is implied that the leaders of Israel were to carry out the execution of a murderer. We also see that capital punishment is not for accidental killing:

But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die" (Exodus 21:13-14).

Here, God makes a distinction between unintentional killing and maliciously taking another person's life. Back in Moses' day, if a person was killed whether by accident or intentionally, a near relative of the person killed would take it upon themselves to avenge his relative's death. But God made provision for avoiding the death penalty if the killing was accidental. He appointed cities to which the person responsible for the killing could flee to until the true nature of the crime could be determined.

God, then, clearly distinguishes accidental killing from murder. If someone were to run out in front of our car and die, that would not be murder. However, if we intentionally drove off the road onto the sidewalk to kill someone, then we would be guilty of a capital offense. Capital punishment, therefore, is for intentional murder, not accidental manslaughter.

What About "Thou Shalt Not Kill?"

One morning, as I was reading the local newspaper, I came across an editorial in which a person was arguing against capital punishment. He thought that executing murderers was murder itself. To support this he quoted Exodus 20:13: "Thou shalt not kill." His point was that we should never use capital punishment because the Bible says we should not kill. Is this point valid? Common sense demands that God's command in Exodus 20:13 to not kill does not contradict the command in Exodus 21:12 to execute a murderer. This man's argument is a classic case of pulling Scripture out of context to suit his own opinions. The command in Exodus 20:13 (as translated in the Authorized Version) to not kill obviously refers to murder. In fact, the New American Standard Bible correctly translates this, "You shall not murder." Yet God says in Exodus 21:12 to

put to death murderers. Therefore, the command in Exodus 20:13 does not refer to executing criminals convicted of murder. If it did, the Scripture would contradict itself and not make sense.

Executing a convicted criminal is not murder according to Scripture. And there are other cases given in Scripture where killing is not considered murder. For instance, God commanded the Israelites to kill all the Canaanites in the promised land. This obviously was not considered murder. In 1 Samuel 15:2-3 God told Saul to wipe out all of the Amalekites. When Saul disobeyed, God sent the prophet Samuel to rebuke King Saul for not killing Agag, the king of the Amalekites. Again, God's command to Saul to kill the Amalekites was not a command to murder. In fact, Samuel did what Saul refused to do, namely, hewing Agag to pieces (see 1 Samuel 15:33). We must be careful to keep the Bible in context so we do not make nonsense of what it says.

Capital Punishment as a Deterrent

Justice is the primary reason for capital punishment. Retribution is required for striking at the image of God. Scripture, however, does suggest a secondary reason for the death penalty — deterrence. Even if capital punishment did not deter crime it would still be right because it is just. But justice properly carried out does have a deterring effect on crime. Deterrence can be seen in the following example:

And the man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the Lord your God . . . that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. *Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again* (Deuteronomy 17:12-13). [emphasis mine]

This passage teaches that disobeying the priest of Israel, when he decided on judicial matters, meant that person was to be put to death. As a result, the rest of the people would be afraid and not be tempted to act in such a manner.

Countries that carry out justice quickly and severely usually have low crime rates. For instance, in nations such as Saudi Arabia and China the crime rate is low. Why? Punishment is given quickly and people are afraid to break the law because of the consequences.

When I visited China, I was amazed at how the people could leave valuables unattended without worry of anyone stealing them. People could also walk freely at night with no fear of being mugged. We might not always agree with how those nations govern, but the people in these countries have less fear of being a victim of a crime.

When justice is slow, however, almost no deterrent to crime exists. This principle is found in Scripture, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore, the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). In other words, when justice is slow, criminals feel more free to commit evil acts because they do not fear punishment. When the government takes many years to execute someone convicted of a capital offense, this dilutes the deterrent to doing evil and criminals are more willing to take chances. Criminals in our society know that if they commit murder, a good chance exists they will not have to face the death penalty and even if they do it will not be for many years. Under these circumstances, there is little if any deterrent.

Jesus' View on Capital Punishment

How did Jesus view capital punishment? Jesus did not give specific instruction concerning it but his meeting with Pilate in John 19 is insightful. When Pilate told Jesus he had the power to release or crucify Him, Jesus said, " 'You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above' " (John 19:11). He did not argue with Pilate about capital punishment or tell him it was wrong. In fact, Jesus recognized Pilate's power to carry out capital punishment but reminded Pilate that this authority came from God.

Paul's View on Capital Punishment

Nothing in Paul's life or letters suggest he did not agree with the right of the government to execute criminals. When he was under arrest and defending himself before Festus, the Roman governor of Judea, Paul said, "If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die" (Acts 25:11). In this situation, Paul acknowledges the right of Festus to carry out capital punishment. No debate occurred whether the death penalty was right or not. Paul was aware of the abuse of justice that often took place in the Roman government. After all, the

Romans even killed Christ. Yet that did not cause him to reject the right of the Romans to carry out the death penalty. In fact, Paul was willing to accept the death penalty if it could be shown he had done something worthy of death.

Can Individuals Carry Out Capital Punishment?

In the mid 1990's the nation was shocked at the separate killings of two abortion doctors in Pensacola, Florida. In one murder case, the man who did the killing was an ordained Christian minister. This man claimed that to kill an abortion doctor was "justifiable homicide,"³ which is the taking of someone's life for supposed moral reasons. The reasoning is this: if someone commits a wrong act, and the government will not do anything about it, then the individual has the right to execute justice on his own. But do we, as Christians, or any individuals have the right to take a person's life for moral reasons?

As we have seen, the right of capital punishment lies with the appointed authorities. Nowhere in the Bible are individuals given the right to take the law into their own hands. Romans 12:17 states, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone." Romans 12:19 also says, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord." Vengeance and justice are not the responsibility of the individual. For instance, if someone were to drive by my house at 70 mph, I would not have the right to chase them down and throw them in jail. Although they committed a crime, I do not have the authority or right to prosecute them. Only the proper authorities have that responsibility.

Taking the law into one's own hands is never justified, even to stop abortion. Make no mistake, abortion is a heinous sin. But no individual has the right to take someone's life. That is only the right of the government. Vigilantes who carry and quote their Bibles while they break the law bring disgrace to the name of Jesus Christ and are in direct rebellion with Scripture. 1 Peter 4:15 states, "By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a

³ Time, August 8, 1994, p. 26 "Avenging the Unborn."

troublesome meddler.” God nowhere gives individuals the right to take the life of someone else. If they do, they themselves are a murderer.

Taking the law into one’s own hands is not only unbiblical, it also can work against Christians. Some people strongly disagree with the views of evangelicals. Should they be allowed to disrupt our services and kill pastors whom they disagree with? Most Christians would be appalled at this idea but some Christians would be supportive of illegally disrupting the activity of unbelievers. But when people take justice into their own hands anarchy results and society dissolves.

C H A P T E R F I V E

Submitting to Government

The Command to Submit

Government is established by God for punishing evildoers, rewarding those who do right, and collecting taxes. And we, as Christians, have responsibilities to our authorities as well:

- Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities (Romans 13:1).
- Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities (Titus 3:1).
- Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king. . . or to governors (1 Peter 2:14).
- Honor the king (1 Peter 2:17).

The Meaning of Submission

God commands us, as Christians, to be in subjection to our government. Submitting to government, then, is not an option. It is mandatory. The word “submit” means to voluntarily and willingly place oneself under the authority of another. It was often used of military troops who placed themselves under the authority of their commander, and also was used to describe the relationship of Christ to His parents (Luke 2:51), the believer to Christ (Ephesians 5:24), slaves to masters (1 Peter 2:18), and younger believers to older believers (1 Peter 5:5).

The Scope of Submission

The scope of this submitting is broad. It is to be done “to every human institution” (1 Peter 2:13). This is a blanket statement. It includes the best of human government and the worst. It includes the best rulers and the worst. We are to submit willingly to any form of authority we find ourselves under. Peter lived under the rule of the Roman government, but this command is not limited to just the Roman government. We are to obey the government that God’s providence has placed us in whether we live in the United States, China, India, or any other country. The phrase, “every human institution,” includes, “whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors” (1 Peter 2:14). The “king” is someone who has supreme authority. He is the head of the state. In our country we do not have kings, but we have a President who is our recognized head. “Governors” would be those with delegated authority. Jesus recognized Pilate’s authority, although his power was delegated from the Roman emperor (see John 19:10-11). Government, therefore, not only includes the head ruler, but also includes all delegated authority. In discussing how this relates to us today one writer said:

Put into contemporary terms, it means that Christians are to obey the law of the land, whether on a federal, state, or local level. From the Supreme Court to the traffic court, from income tax to parking regulations, believers are to be subject to duly constituted authority.⁴

We are to obey all forms of government, both local and national. We cannot say, “I will obey the President but I will not obey the local police.”

Does the type of government we are under affect our submission to it? It is significant that the New Testament does not distinguish between different forms of government. We are not told to obey the government only if it is a democracy. Nor are we told that democracy is God’s preferred form of government. In fact, the governments referred to in the Old Testament were not democra-

⁴ William C. Brownson, *Tried by Fire, the Message of 1 Peter*, p. 46.

cies. Sometimes Americans assume that democracy is the best form of government, and that may be. But we need to be careful when we try to prove that point from Scripture. God has chosen to establish many different forms of government throughout the world. As far as God is concerned, they are as legitimate as the democracy we live in.

Frequently, the leaders we are to submit to are not believers. Sometimes they are men of questionable moral character. That is why it is significant that the command to submit to human government was made when Nero was emperor of Rome. Submitting to Nero was not easy. He was an open homosexual and a murderer. He ultimately would be responsible for the death of Peter. What does this tell us? *Our responsibility to submit is not canceled because the person in authority is a godless, wicked person. We submit because the position he has is established by God.* If being godly was a prerequisite for submitting to a leader, Peter and Paul would never have submitted to Nero. Likewise, even if our leaders were the most despicable people on earth God would still require us to submit to them. We need to be concerned when conservative Christians chafe at submitting to our leaders. We do not honor them because of their character; we honor them because God has placed them in leadership over us.

Reasons for Submitting to Government

As we have seen, God commands us to submit to authority. If there were no other reasons given that would be enough. Still, there are other reasons given why we must humbly subject ourselves to authority:

1. Submitting is God's Will. When Peter discussed subjection to authorities he said, "For such is the will of God" (1 Peter 2:13). We are to do this, "For the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13). Christians submit to authority because we want to honor God and do not want to bring reproach on His name. As we obey government, we are really obeying God. It grieves me when I see professing Christians constantly rebelling and fighting the system. The world must be thinking, "There are those Christians who are always fighting authority." That brings disgrace on our testimony for Jesus Christ. Our perspective for obeying government will improve as we understand that obedience to authority is pleasing to God.

2. *Disobeying Government is Disobeying God.* “He who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God” (Romans 13:2). To rebel against authority, therefore, is to rebel against God. Practically, this means that when the authorities establish a law and we break it, we are disobeying God. If the speed limit says 35 mph and I go 55 mph, I have disobeyed Him. It does not matter if I get caught or not. Some people think that if they do not get caught breaking the law they really are not being disobedient, but they are. If we were to cheat on our taxes and no one found out, it would still be a sin in God’s eyes. We must be careful that we do not rationalize sin and only obey those laws that are convenient for us.

3. *Disobeying Government Brings Wrath.* “And they who have opposed (authority) will receive condemnation upon themselves” (Rom. 13:2). “Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection . . . because of wrath” (Romans 13:5). The wrath of government is not pleasant to think about but without it our society would turn to anarchy. It would be great if everyone obeyed the law because that is the right thing. That, however, is not always the reason for some people. Many people will not commit crimes for the simple reason that they are afraid of the consequences. That is good. That is why the more a government quickly and effectively prosecutes criminals, the less likely people are to commit crimes. If I know I am going to get caught and punished for committing a lawless act, the less likely I am to break the law. Rebellion against authority brings consequences. The government “does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil” (Romans 13:4). Whenever a crime is committed wrath should be soon to follow.

4. *Obeying Government Brings a Clear Conscience.* “It is necessary to be in subjection . . . for conscience’ sake” (Romans 13:5). Fear of punishment is a reason to obey government. Yet for the believer, obeying has another dimension — a clear conscience before God. It is not enough for believers to fear the consequences of breaking the law; Christians should have a desire to be right with God. Peace exists for a believer who is doing what God wants him to do. Paul said:

For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly

wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you (2 Corinthians 1:12).

5. *Submitting Silences Foolish Accusations.* “For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15). Another reason we obey the government is so we can have a good testimony and not be rightfully charged with slanderous accusations. The apostle Paul knew what it was like to have unfounded charges made against him. At one time, the Jews brought charges against Paul before the Roman Procurator, Felix. When Paul had a chance to speak, he said:

And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot. *Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.* But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our Fathers” (Acts 24:12-14). [emphasis mine]

The Jews accused Paul of being a trouble maker, and stirring up dissent. Yet Paul told Felix there was no proof of that. Paul, in a sense, was silencing the accusations of ignorant men. Paul said if he were guilty of anything, it would be of being a Christian and preaching the Gospel. His testimony would have been marred if he had truly been a troublemaker. What if the Jews rightfully could have said that Paul spoke slanderously about Felix and the whole Roman government? If Paul had been a dissenter against the government, their charges would have proven true and Paul’s testimony for Christ would have been lessened.

When the Jewish religious leaders brought Jesus before Pilate, they accused Him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” (Luke 23:2). They were accusing Jesus of rebelling against the Roman government. To the Romans, failure to pay taxes was considered rebellion. This accusation, however, was baseless. Days earlier, Jesus had told them to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Luke 20:25). Even Pilate could see through these false charges:

And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought this man to me as one

who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him” (Luke 23:13-14).

Though Pilate would eventually sentence Jesus to death, he knew that he sentenced an innocent man. We, too, should be above reproach in our behavior, “so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:16). We should live godly lives so that no malicious accusations may stick to us. If people are going to accuse us of anything let it be for our preaching the Word.

Slandorous accusations and persecution sometimes come with being a Christian. In the early church many thousands of Christians died for their faith. They were accused of atheism, cannibalism, and many other horrible things. But their consistent, godly lives showed those accusations to be false. Likewise, our lives should be such that if we are slandered, the accusations will be shown to be baseless. Being a Christian does not mean we will never be maligned unjustly; but if we live godly lives, the slanderous accusations will not stick and our testimony for Christ will shine.

6. *Obey Because We Once Were Disobedient.* “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient. . . . For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient” (Titus 3:1-3). Rebellion against God manifests itself in rebellion against human authority. Before we were saved we, too, were “disobedient.” But now that we are saved we should be subject to our rulers. Notice that being disobedient to rulers is something that characterizes the unsaved but it is not to be true of believers.

Sometimes we need to be reminded that we used to live in rebellion against God. It is easy for us to think that before we were saved we were not really too bad. We think that unbelievers are far worse than we ever were. But that is not true. We were just as vile and rebellious as they are. The only thing that separates us from the unbeliever is the grace of God that saved us (cf. Titus 3:4-5). That should motivate us toward godliness.

When Submitting is Difficult

Submitting is easy when we like the people we must submit to and we find it beneficial for us to submit. For example, my children

would find it easy to submit to me if I gave them \$20,000 and told them to spend it on a car and a stereo. They would say, "Dad, I sure enjoy submitting to you." The true test, however, for my children is when I tell them to do something they do not want to do. If my children want to go out and play but I tell them to stay at home and clean their rooms, that is the true test for them. The same is true with government. When we like who is in authority and we agree with what the government is doing, it is easy to be submissive. The test for submitting, therefore, is not when we are happy with government but when we disagree. How will we respond to authority when we think it is ungodly, unfair, and unjust? I have seen Christians be very supportive of elected leaders who were sympathetic to their views. Yet when a leader is elected who does not share their views, many become critical and grumble against them. As Christians, we must be careful to remain submissive even with the leaders with whom we disagree. We are not to be submissive to the governments we like and not submissive to the ones we dislike. The command to "submit yourselves . . . to every human institution" (1 Peter 2:13) is purposely broad. It includes all forms of government whether good or bad. Even unbelievers find it easy to be in subjection to authority they like. But the Christian who submits to unjust authority can manifest his godly character and God's work in his life. "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).

Honor the King

Another command for us is to "honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17). Again, remember Peter said this when the wicked Nero was on the throne. Imagine today if our President were an open homosexual who murdered Christians. It would be difficult to submit to him, but Scripture would still require us to do so.

Our democracy allows us to voice our opinions on issues. Yet in our American political scene, our leaders are not honored. They are often trashed over the airwaves of TV and radio, and in the sarcastic drawings of the editorial pages of newspapers. Unfortunately, many Christians are involved in mean-spirited criticism of our leaders. I have heard believers say of the current president, "I

could never respect him.” That is a problem, because God commands us to respect our leaders. Their problem, then, is not with the President—it is with God. We, surely, have had presidents of questionable character. But we do not honor them because of their character; we honor them because God has placed them in positions of authority. Peter did not honor Nero because he was a great person, he honored him because of his God-given position. As believers we need to be careful. We can disagree with our leaders, and in our political system vote to remove them, but we should never be critical to the point of disrespect.

Praying for Leaders

Maintaining the right perspective toward our leaders can be difficult. One way to make sure we have a right attitude toward them is to pray for them:

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

As believers, we have the responsibility to be praying for our rulers. We are to pray that God gives them wisdom in the decisions they must make. We pray for them so that we will have the type of environment that will help the ministry of the Gospel. And of course, we should pray for their salvation.

God has given us, in this nation, an environment in which we can freely proclaim the Gospel. When I look back on the last 25 years of my ministry, I notice that very little has changed because of who was President or who was in Congress. Someday, however, that may change. As Christians we should not take for granted our liberties to preach the Gospel. Instead, we should thank God for these opportunities and pray that He will appoint leaders that will keep providing an environment that helps promote the spread of the Gospel.

Praying at Election Time

Whenever election time comes around, people often ask me how I decide for whom to vote and how I approach the whole

election process. First, I pray that God will appoint those who He wants to be in office. Then I pray that those, who I believe line up closest with my biblical convictions, are elected. And of course I vote for them. I also pray, “Lord, you, alone, know the hearts of these people. You know what you want to accomplish in this city, state, or nation. I want those that are of your choosing, who will bring the most glory to you.” After that I can relax in God’s sovereignty. No matter who wins, I know that God has placed in power those He wanted to be there.

The Example for Submission—Jesus Christ

Peter knew when he wrote 1 Peter that submitting is hard. So he gave us an example of One who submitted perfectly even in the worst of circumstances:

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:21-23).

No one ever suffered more unjustly than Jesus Christ. Never was authority more abused than when wicked men executed the Creator of the universe on a cross. Yet how He handled authority is to be the example of how we respond to authority. Jesus Christ humbly submitted to it even when it was wicked and cost Him His life. He did so without complaint and entrusted Himself to God. That is the example for us to follow.

C H A P T E R S I X

Obeying God Rather Than Men

The Bible states that Christians are to be in subjection to the government. Yet are there ever times when Christians need to disobey human authority?

In Acts 5:29, the apostles said, “We must obey God rather than men.” This is the most often used verse by Christians when they try to justify breaking the law. But what does obeying God over men really mean? To answer this, we must look at the context in which this statement was given and balance it with what the Scripture says in other areas. Only then will we have a true understanding of the balance between submitting to government and obeying God rather than men.

Acts 4 and 5

Acts 4 and 5 detail the confrontation between the apostles, who had been preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem, and the religious leaders in Israel who tried to stop them. Acts 4:18 states, “And when they (the Sanhedrin) summoned them (the apostles), they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” This was a clear command to stop preaching the Gospel. Later in Acts 5, the religious leaders gave a similar command to the Apostles, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us’ ” (Acts 5:28). In both accounts the Apostles were forbidden to preach Christ. “But Peter

and the apostles answered and said, “‘We must obey God rather than men’ ” (Acts 5:29).

Two points need to be understood about this passage. First, though the religious leaders of Israel were granted certain rights and freedoms from the Roman government, they did not have the legal right to forbid the apostles from preaching the Gospel. So, in reality, to disobey this command by the religious leaders was not disobeying the government. This would be like an anti-Christian religious group commanding that we Christians in the United States stop preaching the Gospel. They would not have the legal right to do so. Disobeying them, therefore, would not be disobeying the law. A second and more important principle, however, is this — *If the government should ever require a Christian to do something directly contrary to Scripture, the Christian must refuse to do it.* That is the only condition in which a believer is justified in God’s sight for disobeying a direct command of the government. Jesus explicitly told the apostles to take the Gospel to the whole world (see Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Not to do so would be disobeying the command of Jesus. Similarly, if the government ever commanded us to do something directly contrary to Scripture, we would have to refuse.

We certainly are to obey God over men; yet we must be careful in applying this principle. This does not mean that every time the government does something we do not agree with we have a right to disobey. Some Christians believe that whenever government does something we do not approve, we have a right to malign and be disrespectful to it.

We are to disobey the government only when it commands us to do something contrary to Scripture. We must then distinguish between the government allowing evil and it requiring Christians to commit evil. We cannot stop the government from promoting and allowing sinful conduct. As Christians, however, we can never become a part of that sinful conduct. For instance, if our government passed a law making Bible reading and sharing the Gospel a crime, we would have to disobey. If the government required my wife to have an abortion, we would have to disobey. Often in the early church being a Christian was unlawful, and consequently, many Christians were tortured and killed. Once a year, the Roman government required that everyone swear allegiance to Caesar as God. Christians could not do this, of course, because that would be

idolatry. At that point, they then had to obey God over men.

Fortunately for us in the United States, our government does not require us to disobey God. At times it tolerates and encourages sin. For example, our government permits the sin of homosexuality. Yet no Christians are required to be homosexuals. Likewise, our government allows abortion but no Christians are forced to have abortions. If someday, the government required believers to participate in immoral activity or be involved with abortions, we would not be able to do so.

Biblical Examples

The Scripture gives us several examples when God's people had to obey God rather than men.

1. When government commands the murder of innocent people. In Exodus 1:15-21, the growth of the Hebrew population frightened the King of Egypt. As a result, he told the Hebrew midwives:

When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.

When the king commanded the Hebrew midwives to murder innocent children, the midwives were under obligation to disobey the king. Likewise, if our government today ever commanded us to kill innocent people, we would have to refuse.

2. When it commands the worship of idols. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, built a large golden image and required every person in his kingdom to fall down and worship it. But Daniel's three companions, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refused to worship the image. As a result, they were brought before the angry king who gave them another chance to fall down and worship it:

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He

does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Daniel 3:16-18).

These three men had been faithful, loyal citizens of the king. But when the king told them to worship something other than God, they could not. This provides a clear example where these Jewish believers could not be obedient to the demands of the king. They could not participate in false worship. It is also significant that they were willing to face the consequences for their actions. Similarly, if our government would someday forbid Christians to worship Jesus Christ and required us to worship idols, we, too, would have to respectfully disobey and be willing to face the consequences.

3. *When government forbids believers from spreading the Gospel.* As we saw in Acts 4 and 5 with the example of the apostles, Christians can never compromise when it comes to sharing the Gospel. If our leaders should ever prohibit evangelism, we too would have to obey God rather than men.

Accepting the Consequences

As we have seen, there may be times when Christians may have to disobey the authorities. But even when we must disobey authority there are guidelines in doing so. Refusing to obey the government when it commands us to sin is different from revolting against the legitimate authority of government. Christians must not be insubordinate. In other words, we should not be seeking ways to break the law. There must also be a willingness to accept the consequences for breaking the law. When Paul was in prison he never complained or said the government had no right to place him there: “For it is better if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong” (1 Peter 3:17).

Our Rights as Citizens

Some governments grant certain rights to its citizens. In the United States, we have many freedoms given to us. Using these rights, then, within the boundaries set forth by the law is not wrong. Paul, as a Roman citizen, understood the rights given to him by the Roman government and was not afraid to use them. In Acts 22, Paul’s teaching had led to a riot among the Jews. As a result the

Roman commander arrested Paul. The following shows how Paul used his rights:

The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging, so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. And when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman." And the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes." And the commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born a citizen." Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains (Acts 22:24-29).

Two points can be gleaned from this account. First, there is nothing wrong with claiming national citizenship. Certainly we are citizens of heaven. But this does not necessarily conflict with our being citizens of an earthly nation. Paul was not afraid to say, "I was actually born a citizen" (Acts 22:28). Second, we can claim the rights given to us by our government. Paul knew as a Roman citizen that being beaten without a trial was unlawful. That was a right he had as a citizen. Likewise, we have certain rights in the United States. For example, we cannot be convicted of a crime without a fair trial. Therefore, we should take advantage of the rights our government has given us. Sometimes people will ask, "Should Christians vote?" The answer is yes. We can vote because our government has given us that right. It is good stewardship to use these privileges.

As citizens in a democracy we have the right to vote and we have the right to address areas of concern because our government has given us these rights. Our freedoms are greater than many countries. We must be careful, however, that we do not go beyond the bounds of authority given to us. No biblical justification exists for believers participating in illegal activity against the government. Nor is there the right to actively join in attempting to overthrow an existing government.

Christians and the Political Process

Today there is great emphasis on believers becoming involved with the political process and social change. For one example, the Christian Coalition, a conservative Christian political group, boasts of 1.7 million members.⁵ Two of their stated goals are to gain control over the Republican Party in all 50 states and to elect a conservative majority in both houses of Congress.⁶ This leads to the question, how involved should Christians become in the political process?

In our democracy, there is provision for us to be a part of the political process and there is nothing in Scripture that prohibits us from using this freedom. But we must be careful that our identity as believers does not get mixed with certain political viewpoints and causes. Our call to be messengers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not tied to a particular political system or position. Certainly there are some political and social positions that are more consistent with a biblical viewpoint, but we as believers are called to a ministry that is the same whatever the political or social activity in our country. Our responsibility as Christians does not change whether our government is liberal or conservative. I am afraid that many in the church have erred to the point of sin in identifying with certain political groups. I once received a newsletter from a prominent Christian leader who was bemoaning the fact that the Republicans had not kept some of their promises they made with the Pro-Life movement. This man had become so tied to a political group that when this group did something he did not agree with he felt betrayed. Some Christians devote their lives to electing a Christian President and Congress. Certainly it would be desirable if we could have a Christian President and Congress and there is nothing wrong with voting for and supporting Christian candidates. But we must be careful that our zeal is kept in proper balance. Our primary concern as the church is not to alter and change the political system. In fact, nowhere does the Bible instruct Christians to alter the social and political situation in their countries. The church's priority is to stand for the truth (1 Timothy 3:15) and take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20). Our primary concern

⁵ "Christian Coalition See Prize Within Reach" Omaha World Herald, p. 3-A

⁶ Ibid.

is spiritual — the preaching of the good news of Christ to people who are lost in their sin and on their way to an eternal hell. The political and social issues of our day are temporary, but the souls of men are eternal. Even if we could stop every abortion and cure every social evil, the eternal destinies of lost men and women would never change unless the Gospel is preached. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find Jesus or the apostles trying to change the political and social system. In the first century church there were many social evils — abortion, slavery, immorality, and ill-treatment of women, to name a few. The apostles, however, were not on a social crusade. They were never seen protesting slavery, demanding human rights, and trying to place certain people in political power. Nor is there any instruction for the church to change society through political action.

When I was in China, I was impressed with the focus of the believers over there. They lived in a communist nation but their focus was not on how to change the political system. They were concerned with ministering the Word and reaching the lost. As a result, they were reaching thousands with the Gospel. Did that mean communism and the social injustices they faced were not important? No. But it did mean the political situation was secondary to the primary purpose of the Gospel. We, too, must understand our primary purpose as Christians. We are here to preach the Gospel. When we blur that purpose with trying to change the political and social conditions, we blur our testimony before the world. In the world's eyes, Christianity becomes just another political movement. We should not become more identified with a political party than with Jesus Christ. I sometimes wonder what would happen if all the money, time, and effort spent by Christians on political causes were to be channeled into reaching the lost. Imagine the eternal significance such action would have.

One pastor in Los Angeles actually did this. He noticed how organized, diligent, and focused many in his church were to promote a certain candidate around election time. He thought that if his people could be so driven and focused for a political campaign, they could probably funnel that same energy toward reaching the lost with the Gospel. If they could reach every person for a political cause, they could also reach them for Christ. His church then drew up a plan to reach the community with the Gospel. This time they

reached the people with a message that had eternal significance.

That is the type of perspective we need in the church. We should not substitute the best by replacing it with the good. In a hundred years, it is not going to matter much who won the most recent election, but it will matter who heard and believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why is it easier to be involved with social and political causes than in sharing the Gospel? The reason is that the Gospel is more offensive. If I identify with political and social causes, I can find myself accepted by both believers and unbelievers. Certainly some unbelievers will oppose me but many will accept me because of my politically conservative views. But if I were to preach the Cross that would be offensive even to many who agree with my political views. Paul said, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). He preached the Cross that unbelievers consider "a stumbling block" and "foolishness" (1 Corinthians 2:23). Paul was careful to make sure that everyone knew his primary message — the Cross of Jesus Christ. He would not do anything to blur that message. Paul knew of the social and political problems of his day, but they did not divert him from his primary task to preach the Gospel. Two thousand years have passed since Paul lived. It did not ultimately matter what impact he had on the political scene of his day. But his impact with the Gospel and the eternal souls he ministered to will last forever.

The evils of society are spiritual problems and can only be solved with a spiritual solution. Man's problems stem from sin. The only remedy is the message of the cross of Jesus Christ. If a person is lost and on their way to hell, it does not matter whether he is a Republican or a Democrat. The more shallow we become with the Word of God the more enthralled we become with the political process. It is time for the church to return to that which matters for eternity.

C H A P T E R S E V E N

Daniel: An Example of Submission

As we have seen, God has much to say on how we as believers should view our responsibility to the governing authorities. Yet it is also good for us to observe a real flesh and blood example of someone who lived these principles, even in trying times.

Daniel is a clear example of a man who obeyed and submitted to government and yet drew the line when that government commanded him to sin. Daniel was a young Jew when Babylon took Judah captive. It was in Babylon where Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (also renamed as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego) were chosen to be a part of King Nebuchadnezzar's court. This was not easy, though, because being a part of the king's court meant eating food that Jews were forbidden to eat by the Mosaic law. Though Daniel would be obedient in everything asked of him, he drew the line when told to do something that God's Word forbade — in this case eating the king's food:

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials (Daniel 1:8-9).

God blessed Daniel for his faithfulness and allowed him to become an official in the king's court without having to eat the defiling food.

And the king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service (Daniel 1:19).

King Nebuchadnezzar was so pleased with Daniel and his friends that when "the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm" (Daniel 1:20). Remember that this was pagan Babylon with an unbelieving king. Daniel was willing to serve the king faithfully if he were not required to sin against God. As mentioned earlier, Daniel's three friends were also faithful to the king. But when they were told to worship a golden image (see Dan. 3), they respectfully disobeyed, being willing to face the consequences of the burning furnace.

Years later, when Darius the Mede became king, Daniel was faithful to him as well. Daniel was such a man of integrity that this led many men in the king's court to be jealous of Daniel. These men:

began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him (Daniel 6:4).

What a testimony Daniel had. When his enemies were looking under every rock to find evidence against Daniel, they could find none. If Daniel had been grumbling against the king or complaining that his nation was under captivity, surely his enemies would have found that out and used it against him. Daniel, however, was a model citizen even in a nation that did not know the Lord. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God" (Daniel 6:5). These wicked men knew that if they were ever going to accuse Daniel of anything they would have to create some situation in which a law of the government was made to conflict with the law of Daniel's God. If only that could be said about Christians. What a testimony it would be if when our enemies want to accuse us of something it would have to be in our service to God.

These men then talked the king into signing into law a decree that forbid prayer to anyone except the king. Breaking this law

would mean death:

Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously (Daniel 6:10).

Daniel, who had been faithful in serving the king and the government now had to disobey the king. He could obey the king in every way unless it meant sin. To stop praying to God and to pray only to the king would have been idolatry. Daniel then willingly disobeyed. He did not broadcast his disobedience, complain how unconstitutional the law was, or try to revolt against the government. He just went about obeying God. Of course, his enemies found him praying to God and they reported Daniel, who was then sentenced to the lion's den (Daniel 6:16-18). Of course, God delivered Daniel that night:

Then the king arose with the dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lion's den. And when he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime" (Daniel 6:19-22).

Daniel knew he had done no wrong. Yet he willingly went to the lions' den. When the King found him the next day, Daniel had only respect for the king. What humility on Daniel's part. Because of Daniel's integrity the king saw through the wicked plans of those who tried to destroy Daniel, and the king executed those men by the same means with which they tried to destroy Daniel. Daniel then continued to serve the king faithfully — "so this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Daniel 6:28).

With Daniel we see an example of a man who faithfully served his leaders and obeyed the government. Yet he still held to his

biblical convictions. When the king's law clashed with what God's law said, Daniel respectfully disobeyed the king and was willing to face the consequences in a humble and godly way. What an example for us to follow!

C O N C L U S I O N

Let us summarize the major points in our discussion of a biblical perspective toward government:

1) God has established order and submission. They have always been a part of His creative plan and they will exist throughout eternity.

2) God has established every form of human government. No authority exists by accident. Every leader of every nation, state, or city is there because God has placed them there for the working out of His glory. Even wicked governments are not beyond the bounds of His sovereignty. God's sovereignty also extends over every form of government, whether a dictatorship or democracy.

3) God has delegated two main responsibilities to human government: the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. Government also has the right to impose taxes to support itself.

4) Government has the right to carry out capital punishment, for God has delegated this right to it. The reason for capital punishment is that God has made man in His own image. Whoever murders another person is striking at the image of God.

5) Believers are commanded to submit to government. This

applies to all government whether good or bad, dictatorship or democracy.

6) The only times a believer should disobey government is when the government commands him to sin. Then the Christian must obey God rather than men. But even here the attitude of the Christian must be one of non-defiance and a willingness to face the consequences.

7) Christians must keep a proper perspective on political and social involvement. We must stay informed of events around us and use the rights and privileges that have been given to us as citizens of this country. Yet, our first and ultimate priority must always be the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We should primarily focus our time and energy on eternal matters and not on the temporal.

As Christians, we must have the proper focus. We are salt and light to a dying world. God has not called us to reform society. In fact, the Bible tells us that the world will keep getting worse and worse until Jesus Christ comes again. Our duty is to take the Gospel to the whole world not to try to transform society. This does not mean that we do not care about the political and social issues of our day. Nor does it mean that we do not vote and exercise the privileges we have. It does mean, though, that we realize why we exist as a church and that our primary responsibility is spiritual. Though we know that human government will not always work with us — in fact it may often work against us — we must still obey it. That is God's will as revealed in His Word. As we serve the Lord by submitting to the authorities He has placed over us, we also look forward to that day when "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

A P P E N D I X

Government and the Mosaic Law

One important issue in the discussion of Christians and government is the relationship of the Mosaic Law to today. Some Christians believe that the Mosaic Law should be the model of how our government should function. Therefore, how the Mosaic Law relates to today can have a great impact on how government, and our responsibilities to it are viewed. That is why it is essential we understand the purpose of the Mosaic Law and its rightful use today.

Institution of the Mosaic Law

To understand the Mosaic Law, we must realize that God gave it to a certain people — Israel — not to all mankind:

- And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain saying, “Thus you shall say to the *house of Jacob* and tell the *sons of Israel*. . . . ‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples . . . and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the *sons of Israel*” (Exodus 19:3, 5-6). [emphasis mine]
- Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with *Israel* (Ex. 34:27). [emphasis mine]

God gave the Law to the Israelites at a special time in their history. He did not give it to the nations nor was it given as an example of what the other nations were to do. Since the church is not Israel, we must be careful in how we apply the Law today.

A Rule to Live By

God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel as their constitution. It was the rule by which they were to live. It specifically detailed how they were to live regarding civil matters, religious ceremony, and moral conduct. The Law detailed explicitly how Israel was to function in every capacity.

Not a Means of Salvation

The Mosaic Law was given to Israel as a rule of life, not as a means of salvation. Some mistakenly believe that salvation comes from keeping the Ten Commandments. But God did not give the Law to Israel so they could earn their salvation. As Paul stated, "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Romans 3:20). In other words, *no one has ever been saved by trying to keep the Law. Why?* No one can keep the whole Law perfectly. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). Since all men are sinners, no one will ever be saved by keeping the Law. In all ages, salvation has been by grace through faith only. Thus, the keeping of the Law was Israel's way of expressing their faith toward God.

The Christian and the Law

If the Law was given specifically to Israel as a rule for life, what then is the relationship of the Mosaic Law to Christianity today? Should Christians follow the entire Mosaic Law? Should we follow parts of it such as the moral and civil elements? Or are we not under the Law in any sense today?

No Christians advocate full institution of the entire Mosaic Law for this would mean a return to Judaism, something the writer of Hebrews severely warned against (Hebrews 10). Some, however, do believe that parts of the Law are, or should be, operative today. For example, many Christians hold that the moral commands, such as the Ten Commandments are still binding. Others think we need

to institute the civil aspects of the Law for our country today. Those who hold this believe our country should function under the same guidelines Israel did under the Law. There is a fundamental flaw, however, with trying to apply certain aspects of the Law to today. Though the Law does have three main aspects (civil, ceremonial, and moral) it still is essentially one unit and cannot be divided. The Law stands as a unit or falls as a unit. There is no justification for dividing it up. So, in spite of the claims of some who believe that the Mosaic Law (or parts of it) are in effect for this age, the Bible tells us that Christians are not under the Law in any sense today:

- For you are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14).
- What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:15)?
- For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).
- But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law (Galatians 5:18).

When Christ came, He fulfilled the Law, making it inoperative as a rule of life for today (see Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14). This does not mean the Christian is left lawless and can do whatever he wants. In fact, he now has a higher standard — the Law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). This Law of Christ includes all the instruction given in the New Testament. In the church age, therefore, the rule of conduct is not the Mosaic Law but the New Testament. This even applies to the moral commands given in the Law. Many commands given in the Mosaic Law have been picked up and applied in the New Testament. We keep these commands not because we are obligated to keep the Mosaic Law but because we are under the New Testament instruction.

The epistles also help show that we are not under the Mosaic Law in this church age. For when we compare instruction for the church in the New Testament with that found in the Old Testament for Israel we see differences. For example, in the Law, if a man slept with his father's wife, he was to be put to death (see Leviticus 20:11). But Paul's instruction for an incestuous situation in 1 Corinthians 5 is deliverance to Satan (5:7) and expulsion from the

church (5:13) not the death penalty. The Law also required death for false prophets (see Deuteronomy 18:20) but in the New Testament the command is to be aware of them (see 2 Peter 2). There is no call for false prophets to be executed. If the church were under the Law we would expect situations such as these to be handled in the same way they were in the Old Testament. But they are not.

Purpose of the Law

Knowledge of Sin

Christians are not under the Law. But if believers are not bound by the Mosaic Law, the question must be asked, “Does the Law serve any purpose today?” To this the answer is, Yes. The Law shows people their sin and their need for a Savior: “For through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

The purpose of the law, then, is to show people how sinful they really are. Paul said, “I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’” (Romans 7:7). The Law heightens our awareness of sin and shows us the judgment that comes with that sin. There is a sense in which the Law functions as a mirror reflecting the true spiritual condition of man. For example, suppose someone was extremely deformed and ravaged by disease, but that person thought they were extremely handsome. If that person were given a mirror to look in to, they would then see how disfigured they really were. The mirror would make known their flaws. That is what the Law does with sin. Many people think they are basically good and that God will allow them into heaven because they are moral people. Sometimes when I ask people why they think God will let them into heaven, many say, “Because I’m basically a good person and have not done anything really bad.” But the mirror of God’s Law shows that they are not good people. In fact, the Law shows all people to be guilty sinners before God. I may think I am acceptable in God’s sight, but when I read “You shall not steal” (Ex. 19:15) I realize that I have been guilty of stealing at some point. When I read “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 19:16) I realize that I have been guilty of lying. When I read “you shall not covet” (Ex. 19:17) I know that I have jealously wanted what someone else has. So when I read God’s Law I see that God’s evaluation of myself is totally different from my evaluation.

James 2:10 states, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." All it takes is one sin to make a person guilty in God's sight. The Law reveals that sin to me. Far from being a means for salvation, the Law shows people how desperately they need to believe in Christ to be saved. The Mosaic Law, then, does have a purpose for today. But its purpose is not as a means of salvation or as a rule for life but to show us how sinful we are and direct us to Christ.

The Proper Use of the Law

What then is the proper use of the Law today? We as Christians need to use the Law to make people aware of their sin and their need to believe in Christ by faith alone. The Law, therefore, does have a place in the presentation of the Gospel. We should not use the Law to persuade people to change their conduct, but we use it to show them their sin and thus their need for forgiveness in Christ.

For example, if a Christian were to witness to someone living in an adulterous relationship their discussion should go something like this:

PERSON 1: Do you realize that you are a sinner and living under the condemnation of God?

PERSON 2: No, I am not. I am basically a good person. I am not hurting anybody. God knows there are people who are a lot worse than I am. Besides, who are you to judge?

PERSON 1: What I think does not matter, but what God says does matter. And He has said in his Law, "You shall not commit adultery." You have broken God's commandment. The Bible says that whoever breaks even one of His laws is a "transgressor of the Law" (James 2:10). Because you have broken His law you are a sinner and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). You are lost and on your way to hell unless you put your faith in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins.

In this case, Person 1 used the Law to show Person 2 that he is a sinner in God's sight, and then points the person to faith in Christ. That is the proper use of the law.

Improper Use of the Law Today

Unfortunately, many Christians today are not using the Law in its biblical sense. Instead of using the Law in the context of the Gospel, they will sometimes use it to try to change the conduct of the unbeliever. They try to use the Law to bring society into conformity with God's standards. Yet this is not the proper use of the Law. The Bible reveals that when the Law is used incorrectly the flesh is stirred up even more:

- For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death (Romans 7:5).

Paul's point is this — sinful passions are aroused by the Law. The Law is not sinful (Rom. 7:7,12) but when the unbeliever is aware of the Law his sin multiplies. So, an improper use of the Law can actually contribute to more sin. We see this principle in practical situations. For example, my child can be out in the yard playing, but if I were to go out and tell him not to go out in the street, what would he be tempted to do? Before I brought the issue up, he was not even thinking of going out into the street. But now that he has been commanded not to, he starts thinking about it and is more tempted to do it. The same is true when the Law is presented to people outside the context of the Gospel. Some Christians are telling unbelievers, "Don't commit homosexuality." "Don't have abortions." "Stop having premarital sex." But the more we tell unbelievers to stop sinning the more their sinful passions are aroused. In fact, the more these things are talked about the worse the situation gets. This can be seen with all the sex education in schools today. The purpose of sex education is to inform young people about sex so they will be more responsible in their actions. But what has been the result? The more sex is talked about the more the young people engage in it. The problem has multiplied. Instead of curbing sexual immorality, this education has only fanned the flames.

God has not called Christians to use the Law to try to reform society. He has called them to preach the transforming message of the Gospel. The only solution to immorality and any other sin is a life transformed by the Gospel. The church has wrongly bought into the idea that God has called the church to call this country back to morality. Preaching morality at an unsaved, depraved sinner is

not the answer. Does this mean we should never tell people what God says about sin? Of course not. But these sinful issues need to be addressed in the context of the Gospel. Any other way is superficial and only makes the problem worse.

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