

Commentary on Romans 13-14

by Chuck Smith

Transcript

Shall we turn in our Bibles to Romans 13.

As Christians, what should be our attitude towards government? Paul declares,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: and the powers that be are ordained of God (Rom 13:1).

The Bible does not allow for civil disobedience. For we are commanded by the scriptures to be in obedience to those governing bodies that are over us. Paul wrote this at the time in which Nero was ruling in Rome. And we oftentimes, say, "Well, you know, we should be in obedience as long as we agree with what is being legislated." I do feel that there are rare occasions where the law of God does supercede the law of man, and on those occasions I must be obedient to God. In this period of the early church, when they were required to declare that Caesar was lord or be executed, they chose death by martyrdom rather than acknowledging the lordship of Caesar. When Peter was ordered by the magistrates, or by the council, actually, of the Jews not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus, he said, "Whether it is right to obey God or man, you judge, we know that we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). And so when it becomes a matter of my conscience, then I must be obedient to God. But for the most part I am to be obedient to those governmental forces over me. I am to obey the law. Being a Christian does not give me an immunity from the law, for the powers that be are ordained by God.

Now this is a issue that we sometimes are prone to question. Did God ordain this particular government? The Bible tells us that the powers that exist are ordained by God. It is interesting to me that Nebuchadnezzar challenged that truth. When he was told by Daniel, who was interpreting his dream, that the great image that he saw was the ruling empires that would govern the world, and he said "Thou, O Nebuchadnezzar, are the head of gold, but your kingdom is going to be replaced by an inferior kingdom, the shoulders and the chest of silver. And that will be replaced by yet an inferior kingdom, the stomach of brass and that by a kingdom of iron, the legs." Nebuchadnezzar turned right around and made an image ninety feet high of all gold and demanded that the people worship it, which was open defiance to the declaration that your kingdom is going to be replaced by the Medo-Persian Empire. And as a result of this defiance of God by Nebuchadnezzar, because of his pride, the Lord allowed him insanity until seven seasons had passed over him, until he knew that the Most High God ruled in the governments of man and set over them those whom He would. That was the lesson that God was teaching him during that period of insanity, where he went out and lived with the animals in the fields and ate grass with the oxen. The purpose of that was that he might recognize that God rules, and God establishes those on the throne

whom He will, and he was only on the throne of Babylon by the divine decree of God. And after his insane period he acknowledged that the God of heaven ruled, and those who exalt themselves, He is able to abase. For he had surly been abased, but he recognized that God is the one who establishes the kingdoms and the thrones of man.

Why does God, then, allow evil men to reign if God is the one who establishes it? Basically, because men want evil men to reign over them, and in order that they might be brought to judgment, God will allow those evil rulers to lead the people in order that they might receive that rightful judgment of God. But I am told here as a child of God to be subject unto those higher powers because they have been established there by God.

Whosoever therefore is resisting the power is resisting the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation [or condemnation] (Rom 13:2).

That is, you will be brought into judgment and thrown in jail, is actually what he telling us here.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Will thou then be afraid of the powers? do that which is good, and you will have praise of the same (Rom 13:3):

In other words, be a decent law-abiding citizen and you don\

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