

WHAT ARE THE BASIC FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT?

Certainly government today is more complex than when Paul wrote this, but the principle he expresses remains. From vs. 3-5 it's clear that government's function is rewarding good and restraining evil. When the government does this it is certainly God's servant. But we need to guard against two false views of government: One is the view that it is the most powerful force there is, and the other is viewing it as worthless, helpless, inept. Both views take God out of the picture. We have to keep God at the center.

Learning the meaning of "sword" as "authority" in vs. 4 puts this teaching in the context of everyday life. Paul has all of us in mind here (vs. 1 – "everyone") rather than military swords and weapons. And the point is if you want to live free of fear then line up with the basic laws of the land – pay your taxes, report your income, obey traffic laws, follow codes and ordinances.

Application

A. That's so easy to say, isn't it? At a time when laws and codes are piled upon laws and codes and judges fail to uphold the moral will of the people it is not easy to always know what to do. Romans 13 is not a manual that tells us what to do in every situation. The future of some of your businesses are literally threatened by what appear to be ridiculous, if not unnecessary codes. We need help to discern when to stand against the government and when God asks us to bend our will for his sake.

1. Ask God for insight – oh how we need wisdom to live well these days. We want to honor God above all others. Ask God to show you what he's doing and follow him daily.
2. Ask God for courage – ever since Constantine declared Christianity the official religion in 313AD the line between church and state has been fuzzy. I pray that armies will never again carry the cross, for the Kingdom of God is not advanced by weapons of war. Armies carry flags, the church carries the cross.
3. Ask God for a submissive heart – Remember that submission is not something done to you. It is a willful lining up under the authority that God has allowed in your life. The world needs examples of strong, bold Christians who are humble, submissive and God-honoring in life. Mature Christians and model citizens are cut from the same cloth.

B. Someone once said that most nations get the government they deserve. I believe that means if we want to have the best government, then we must do our best to influence it for the best. Let people see there is something different about you. Be thankful for what we have, be cheerful in keeping our laws, and pray for God to demonstrate his great purposes in our land.

"The Christian and Authority" 2/07/10
Romans 13:1-7

RMBC
Pastor Dennis

Introduction

A. Scientists implanted the part of the quail brain that they believed controlled sound into five chicken embryos. Guess what - - When the chicks hatched they made quail sounds instead of chicken sounds. It's not the same, but when we accept Christ he implants his mind into ours. We are a new creation (II Cor. 5:17).

B. As we move into Romans 13 try to remember that Paul didn't put in the chapter breaks when he wrote this letter. What we'll read this morning is a continuation of the last four weeks of study that began with Romans 12:1-2 – the call to be transformed by the renewing of our minds – God's mind implanted in ours.

C. The Christians in Rome lived under a pagan, evil government. Paul wrote, "Do not be overcome by evil" in Romans 12:21. In 13:1-7 we learn how to do that in our relationship to authority. (Read text – Romans 13:1-7)

Government Today

A. Pastor Marlin showed me this the other day:
"The budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest Rome become bankrupt. People must again learn to work, instead of living on public assistance."

I thought it was a letter to the Fresno Bee until I noticed it was written by Cicero - 55 BC. Some things just don't change. (Government scientists recently crossed a hyacinth with a spreading taxus plant. It's called "hyataxus" – higher taxes)

B. It is not uncommon to be upset about the government today. It's regrettable that so many of us have lost trust in the leaders of our nation. It is unsettling when so much seems so out of balance. The Statue of Liberty proudly lifts her lamp for those who come to our east coast. Do you think someone could create a Statue of Responsibility for the west coast lest we forget what got us here?

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States had two purposes: One, that there would be no national religion or denomination, and two, that there would be freedom of expression for all religions. Today re-interpretation of that amendment threatens to take away any expression of religion, especially Christian faith in a secular world. These and many other things trouble us to day under the authority of our government. Romans 13 instructs us how to live with such uncertainties.

Key Words

A. Let's look at several important words in this text. Understanding word meanings and the ways they have been or could have been translated can make a big difference in understanding this paragraph.

SUBMIT – VS. 1

The word used for “submit” is made from the prefix “upo” which means “under” and “tasso” which means “to arrange in an orderly fashion. The Holy Spirit guided Paul to use this word instead of three others words. One meant to obey, another meant to bend your will, and a third was usually used for obeying a ruler. Instead Paul used “upotasso”. We are called to place ourselves under someone's authority or leadership.

ESTABLISHED/INSTITUTED – VS. 1-2

With the word “instituted” we must decide whether this means “ordained” or “ordered.” To ordain is to put into office and is close to the word for creating or instituting. To order is to take what already is and direct it; use it.

One discovery for me has been that the word establish is just the prefix for submit – “upo”. When I realized that it helped me see that “established” in this context has more to do with arranging. Instituted is from a word meaning “to mark out, like a boundary.” At least in this specific text, Paul is saying that God orders those in authority and lines them up for his purposes.

SWORD – VS. 4

In vs. 4 we read the phrase, “He does not bear the sword for nothing.” In the N.T. we find two basic words for sword. One is “romphaia” which refers to a saber used as a military weapon. It's the word used in Hebrews 5:12 for the “Word of God is like a two-edged sword. . .”

The other word for sword is “machaira” which refers to a dagger or knife. As we study it's use it came to be like a symbol of authority. We could compare it to a policeman's badge or his pistol, both of which symbolize his authority. This is the word used here in Romans 13:4 – “machaira”.

B. Looking at these words helped me change my title from asking how a Christian responds to the government, to “The Christian and Authority.” It's the same sermon, but it broadens our application realizing the meaning of these words. Paul is helping us see God at work in and through the authorities in our lives, government included. But don't we live under a variety of authorities as adults and as children? School, business, retirement – every level brings authority into our lives. The emphasis may be government here in the text – but the application is far reaching.

Important Questions

WHAT IS THE BASIC MESSAGE OF THIS TEXT?

To me it is clear that this text calls us to submit to the authority under which we find ourselves. For Paul and his readers that was the tyranny of a Roman dictator. Keep that in mind when you wince under authority. When we understand the meaning of “submit” and “establish” we see that we can “arrange ourselves under what God has already arranged, or is arranging.”

Please don't get tired of this, but once more, look at this instruction in light of 12:1-2. This is one more in a long list of applications to offering our bodies and being transformed. To submit to a governing authority is secondary to submitting to our highest authority – to God. When allegiance to God means disobedience to authority the Christian accepts the consequences. But our starting point should be accepting the responsibility of lining up under that authority, good or bad, under which we find ourselves. This is the first and basic lesson of this text.

HOW DOES GOD WORK WITH GOVERNMENT TODAY?

In vs. 4, 5, and 6 the authority/government is referred to as the servant of God. Here's what I believe: If we accept the definition of “established” and “instituted” which I recommended, and combine that with the idea of authorities being servants, we begin to see a picture of God at work in our world and in governments.

Some of you may differ with me here, but my conclusion is that God doesn't necessarily place rulers in office (I'm thinking particularly of evil minded emperors, morally corrupt dictators, and perverted, sick tyrants – Hitler, Stalin, Amin of Uganda, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Ahmadinejad of Iran). But, and this is actually exciting in view of world history and current events, God does not allow their actions or their policies to escape being used by his own hand. God uses what is to accomplish what is not.

- Isaiah 39 – Godless Babylon used to fulfill God's work
- Isaiah 45:1 – King Cyrus of Persia is called “God's anointed.” God says, “I take hold of his right hand to subdue nations before him.”
- Luke 2 – Augustus used to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem and fulfill the prophecy of Jesus' birth

When I fret over the growth of Islam I remember God is in charge. When I listen to our current president's rhetoric I remember that God institutes leaders. When I get discouraged that we sent troops to Kuwait almost 20 years ago and they are still in that region, I remind myself that God does not waste an opportunity for his purposes. Yes I'm tempted to worry about the future for my children and grandchildren. But God invites us to first submit to him and then trust him to the end.

Introduction

When we accept Christ he _____ his mind into ours.
Romans 13 is a _____ of Romans 12
Romans 13:1-7 is an _____ of Romans 12:1-2 and 12:21

Government Today

What are your _____ with government?
We have the Statue of _____ We need a Statue of _____
The 1st Amendment: No _____ religion; Freedom of _____

Key Words

Submit: _____ -- to arrange under (voluntarily)

Establish: _____
Institute: does it mean to _____ or to _____?

Sword: romphaia – a _____ weapon
machaira – a _____ (authority)

We all live under some _____.

Important Questions

What is the basic message of this text?

How does God work with government today?

What are the basic functions of government?

Ask God

For insight
For courage
For a submissive heart