

TEACHING GOAL

To study the enforcement of the fifth commandment as seen particularly in civil government.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

- Q. What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?
- A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment, is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.

S.C. 66, L.C. 133, W.C. of F. XXIII, Savoy 24, Young 92

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Romans 13:1-7

Support Passages: I Peter 2:13-18; Matthew 22:15-22; Genesis 9:5-7; Numbers 35:29-34; Luke 3:7-14; Acts 4:19-21, 5:27-32

BIBLE STORY

Acts 17:1-9; Jason is arrested for his allegiance to King Jesus.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

Isaiah 33:22

22 For the LORD *is* our Judge, The LORD *is* our Lawgiver, The LORD *is* our King; He will save us;

APPLICATION

God requires loyalty to the civil government which is in authority over us as our superior. However this loyalty is limited by and controlled by our obedience to YAHWEH. We must give honor to whom honor is due.

SUMMARY

The proper relationship of the Christian to civil government is one of the most difficult inferior - superior relationships to maintain. "So extensive and important, and so many questions arise as to its limits and nature, the propriety of holding office, the powers exercised by the magistrate,"¹ that we need to be well grounded in the scriptural concepts concerning civil government.

Our study text states directly that we are to be "in subjection to the governing authorities." Paul, of course, refers to civil government and indeed in Paul's day history records one of the most repressive tyrannies the world has ever known. Authorities have the right to govern and the subjection demanded of the governed derive entirely from the fact that God instituted human civil government. As Paul writes, "There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."² The problems we have with civil government generally derive from the evil which all humanistic governments have promoted. On the other hand, God is not the author of moral evil. Therefore, God is not the author of evil tyrannies. What then are these authorities that God establishes?

According to the study text, the authorities to which we must subject ourselves are not a cause of fear for good behavior. These authorities praise us for doing what is good and bring wrath upon those who practice evil. Good and evil, of course, are defined by God's Law not by human majority opinion nor by human authorities. These particular ministers to which Paul refers, are ministers of God to us for good, not ministers of the devil to us for evil.

Because, as Paul writes, the authorities that exist are from God and are established by Him, some have taken the position that royalty enjoys Divine privilege. They assert that no matter how oppressive or unjust the government may be, the citizen has no duty nor right but passive submission, and that the divinely selected form is hereditary monarchy. But this position in fact sets forth two extremes that are not biblical and that need to be avoided. The first error is that human government (royalty) is Divine and the second that citizens must give unlimited submission to their government.

We read the account of Jason,³ who was arrested for his submission to King Jesus. The charge was that "they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another King, Jesus". This was not a false charge. It was, in fact, what Paul the apostle had taught them and follows from the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. There is a King who is higher in authority than Caesar. Jason's King is also Caesar's King. Furthermore, we note the principle that regulates and limits

our submission to human government.⁴

It is this, "whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard", or "We must obey God rather than men". We cannot submit to our government to the point of sin against the True and Living God.

On the other hand, the government does have the right of taxation,⁵ punishment including capital for capital crimes,⁶ and defensive war.⁷ The authorities of Romans 13 have the power of the sword with which they are to bring wrath upon evil doers as an avenger of God. So then as Jesus Himself taught us regarding our relationship to governmental authorities, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."

¹ Robert L. Dabney, Lectures in Systematic Theology, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972, p862.

² Romans 13:1

³ Acts 17:1-9

⁴ Acts 4:19-21 and 5:27-32

⁵ Matthew 22:21

⁶ Numbers 35:30-31

⁷ Exodus 17:9 and similar passages, Luke 3:14-15, Acts 10:1-2