

THE CHRISTIAN AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT

by

Bruce Keizer

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Divinity in
Grace Theological Seminary
May 1980

Title: THE CHRISTIAN AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT
Author: Bruce A. Keizer
Degree: Master of Divinity
Date: May 1980
Advisor: Prof. Richard Mayhue

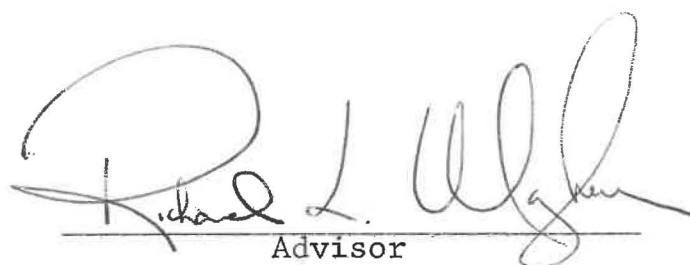
The relationship between the Christian and civil government is a multi-faceted relationship. In the general course of his conduct the Christian must exemplify civil obedience. However, under certain circumstances the Christian must disobey the demands of civil government. But aside from these points of tension the Christian must also determine what attitude he should have towards government and to what degree may be involved in the governmental process. Thus, it is important to arrive at a workable framework by which a Christian may function in the arenas of civil obedience, civil disobedience, and general civil conduct.

In the arena of civil obedience Romans 13:1-7 is the guiding biblical passage. The overall purpose of this passage is to emphasize the responsibilities of both the Christian and the state in promoting an environment that is conducive for civil obedience. The Christian's responsibility is to be obedient to the state. The state's responsibility is to properly execute their societal and judicial responsibilities. Consequently, the passage speaks in absolute terms to define the responsibilities of both the subject and the state. Romans 13:1-7 then contains the absolute standard for civil obedience when both the responsibilities of the Christian and the state are met.

However, there may be a time when the believer must be disobedient to the civil government. The point at which the Christian must disobey is when the state represented by the governing authorities demands an attitude or action that is contrary to God's inscripturated Word. Submission to God and His Word must always have precedence over the unjust demands of the state. But even in this disobedience the Christian must be willing to suffer the consequences and may under no circumstance revolt against the government.

The general conduct of the Christian with regard to the state must have prayer as its foundational principle. The believer is to pray that the government will provide an atmosphere that is conducive for the success of the Christian's primary task: the Great Commission. The most effective means by which to change society is to change men's hearts with a pure gospel message. Last, the Church as a corporate entity must not be involved in politics. The very nature of biblical expository preaching is in and of itself a commentary on proper conduct.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity



Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

There are existing issues that relate to the relationship between the civil government and the Christian; such as: what is the nature and extent of the authority of the civil government? To what degree is the Christian to be in submission to the civil authorities? Who are the legitimate civil authorities? Does the Christian have the option to disobey the civil government? What is the general conduct of the Christian to be with regard to civil government and society as a whole?

All of these questions are important because they are central to one's understanding of his commitment to his community, and to his own concept of world ministry. They are also important because the Christian may face a situation as the early church did and the Reformers in which he will have to choose between civil obedience and disobedience. But even if the Christian does not face such a situation it is still vital for the Christian to understand his role with regard to civil government.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the Christian's responsibilities with regard to the biblical standard of civil obedience, disobedience and conduct.

CHAPTER I

THE BIBLICAL STANDARD FOR CIVIL OBEDIENCE

In defining the biblical standard for civil obedience one could turn to several New Testament texts such as 1 Corinthians 2:6-8; 6:1-10; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 3:1-3; and 1 Peter 2:13-17. While all of these include many clear statements concerning civil obedience, none of these approach the clarity and preciseness of Romans 13:1-7. Therefore, the substance of this chapter will concern itself with Romans 13:1-7, but will also incorporate parallel and additional thoughts from other biblical texts, which are pertinent to the understanding of civil obedience. Since Romans 13:1-7 is the major text to be examined, it is essential to consider its context and purpose.

The Context of Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13:1-7 is a subdivision of the section of the epistle that begins with 12:1 and extends to 15:13.¹ In 12:1 and following there is a direct call to worship God in our everyday life which demands a "spiritual sacrificial service."²

¹ Herman Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 320.

² Ibid.

This service requires that the Christian submit to God and one another, recognizing the divinely established order. When one has submitted properly to this divine order, he has approved "that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

While it is vital to attribute an essential connection between 12:1-21 and 13:1-7, it is also significant that Romans 13:1-7 introduces a new, distinct topic. Chapter 12 describes the service of the Christian in personal conduct, whereas Romans 13:1-7 defines the service of the Christian with regard to civil conduct.¹ As one commentator concludes:

A new topic now emerges, distinct, yet in close and natural connection. We have been listening to precepts for personal and social life, all rooted in that inmost characteristic of Christian morals, self-surrender, self-submission to God. . . . The same principle is now carried into his relations with the State.²

Consequently, there is no need to directly connect 13:1-7 with the immediate preceding context (12:17-21), but rather to

¹ John Peter Lange and F. R. Fay, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, trans. from the German by J. F. Hurst, Vol. XX of A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, rev., enlarged, and ed. by P. Schaff and M. B. Riddle (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 401.

² Moule, Handley C. G. The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903), p. 348.

view Romans 13:1-7 as a subdivision of the section that begins with 12:1ff and ends with 15:13.¹

The Purpose for the Writing of Romans 13:1-7

After reading Romans 13:1-7, one has the impression that there was a specific need for the writing of this important passage. The need for this passage is found in the fact that a large number of Jews who had been converted to Christianity had a history of resistance to Roman authority.² Thus, submission to a Gentile prince was an extremely difficult doctrine to obey.³

There were reasons for the Jewish resistance to Roman authority. First, the Old Testament expressly stated that the nation of Israel was not to "put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman" (Dt. 17:15). Second the Jews placed great emphasis on their independence and freedom from religious and political enslavement (Jn. 8:33). Therefore,

¹Certain scholars such as McClain, Bahnsen, and Sanday teach that the basis of 13:1-7 is found in the practical exhortation of 12:19-20. They argue that since Paul exhorts the Christian not to take vengeance against civil personal enemies (12:19-20), he also makes the same exhortation in 13:1-7 concerning evil magistrates. See John Murray, "The Epistle to the Romans," p. 146; and Ernst Kasemann, New Testament Questions of Today, p. 199, for a refutation of this view.

²Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 406.

³James M. Stifler, The Epistle to the Romans (Nutley, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1897), p. 231.

it is not surprising that converts from such a background needed the teaching of Romans 13:1-7.

As a result of these factors and others, Jewish elements in the Roman empire engaged in seditious movements, and activities (Acts 5:36, 37). As one historian has stated:

St. Paul wrote this admonition at a time when the animosity of Jewish nationalists toward the Roman Empire was nearing the explosion point. Rome was portrayed in Jewish apocalypses as a heinous monster, and in 66 A.D. Palestinian Jews rose in revolt. It is apparent that the Apostle repudiated the Jewish zealot attitude toward Gentile government.¹

In fact, the situation had deteriorated to the extent that "Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome" (Acts 18:2). Therefore, it is not surprising that converts from such a background needed the teaching of Romans 13:1-7.

Thus, Paul was understandably concerned that Christians converted from Judaism conduct themselves in such a manner that the governing authorities would not associate Christianity with certain seditious elements of Judaism.² It then became necessary for Christians to abstain from any revolutionary movements and, also, to give proper respect to the civil magistrate. The fact that Paul and Peter wrote three other passages dealing with the Christian responsibility to

¹James E. McGoldrick, "A Christian Loyalist View," Fides et Historia, Vol. II (Fall, 1977), 26-42.

²John Murray, "The Epistle to the Romans," (hereinafter referred to as Romans), in the New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 146.

civil authority suggests that there was a continuing need for such teaching.

While the Judaistic connection was the primary rationale for the penning of Romans 13:1-7, there were certain other secondary purposes. First, Christians may have had the notion to exploit their Christian liberty based upon an improper concept of the Lordship of Christ. This resulted in the attitude that the Lordship of Christ negated one's responsibility to civil authority.¹ Second, Old Testament Messianic prophecies concerning the Kingdom were popular among early Christians, and there was a tendency to interpret them in a purely material sense (Acts 1:6). Reasoning of this order could produce an attitude that deemphasized the role of the civil authorities in this age.² Last, the Apostle felt the need to define the boundaries between obedience and disobedience to the civil magistrate because of the suffering that had come at the hand of certain civil authorities (cf. Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29).³

¹Herman Ridderbos in his fine work, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, p. 320, denies such an interpretation. However, this interpretation does indeed seem natural and is worthy of inclusion.

²W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, The Epistle to the Romans (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1915), p. 369.

³Murray, Romans, p. 147.

After this preliminary examination of the context and background of Romans 13:1-7, it is expedient to examine the content of the passage as it relates to the State and the responsibility of the Christian to do it. It will be good to recognize that the following examination of the content of the passage will be topical rather than sequential.

The Identity of the State

In order to determine the standard of civil obedience, it is necessary to identify the authorities to whom the Christian is to subject himself. To facilitate the identification of the civil authorities, one must examine the word ἐξουσία as it is used in Romans 13:1-7.

The Use of ἐξουσία

The demonic or Christological interpretation

The view that ἐξουσία refers to human rulers has been the traditional view. However, in recent years, a view has developed (generally held by Neo-Orthodox scholars) which suggests that ἐξουσία in Romans 13 refers to "demonic powers." This view has been referred to as the demonic or Christological view. As one proponent has claimed, "In Pauline literature 'authorities' is consistently used to refer to the spiritual

powers."¹ The idea proposed is that the State is the organ of invisible demonic angelic powers. The line of argument is that Christ has subdued the demonic angelic powers and has inducted them into His service. Thus, in actuality, when the Christian submits to the State, he is submitting to a divine institution administered by controlled demonic powers.² It must be admitted that in other contexts, ἐξουσία may refer to angelic beings (Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15). Also, in certain passages when the Lordship of Christ is emphasized there are references to suprahuman agents (Eph. 1:21; Col. 2:10).³

However, the demonic or Christological interpretation must be rejected. First, as Greg Bahnsen points out, whenever "powers" is used with reference to the angelic world, there is a string of synonyms to denote a supernatural interpretation.⁴

¹Clinton Morrison, The Powers That Be (London: SCM Press LTD., 1960), p. 25. The main advocate of the demonic or Christological view had been Oscar Cullmann. His line of argument is basically outlined in his book on the subject of Christ and time. See Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time (Philadelphia: E.T., 1950), pp. 193ff. Much of Cullmann's argument is based upon the use of the plural and the pluralistic usage of the singular to denote supernatural, invisible authorities. For an indepth criticism of this view, see John Murray's excellent critique on the authorities of Romans 13:1. Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 252-56.

²Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, p. 326.

³Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 253.

⁴Greg L. Bahnsen, Theonomy in Christian Ethics (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1977), p. 374.

But, as Bahnsen so aptly states, "that string of synonyms is absent in Romans 13; there would then be no warrant for importing a cosmological meaning into Paul's words at this point."¹ Second, ἐξουσία often refers to non-supernatural powers (Mt. 8:9; 10:1; Mk. 13:34; Lk. 19:7; 23:7; Jn. 1:12; 1 Cor. 7:37; 8:9; 9:4; 11:10; 2 Thess. 3:9).² Third, it is inconceivable that demonic powers would be used as servants of good or ministers of God as described in Romans 13. In other words, such an interpretation is at the least unnatural if not bizarre. Last, a proper interpretation of ἐξουσία is that interpretation which evaluates the word solely within the context that it is used. This then leads the writer to examine the traditional interpretation of ἐξουσία.

The traditional interpretation

From the content of Romans 13:1-7, the higher powers (ἐξουσίαι ὑπερεχούσαι) clearly refers to governmental officers. The governing authorities refer to those who are invested with political power and authority. This is clear from Romans 13: 3, 4, 6, when ἐξουσία is defined as "rulers" (ἄρχοντες) and

¹Ibid. Bahnsen also very appropriately adds as he continues his statement, "unless one illegitimately treats a word like a concept and thinks that a word carries the accumulation of its various senses in every instance of its appearance."

²Murray, Romans, p. 253.

ministers (διάκονός and λειτουργοί). Thus, ἐξουσία are governmental rulers invested with political authority in society. They are holders of power and the governmental officers of the state.¹ These are the magistrates commanding position, including all of the offices of the state.² The traditional view is then compatible with Luke 12:11 and Titus 3:1 where ἐξουσία directly refers to the exercise of political authority through human rulers.

John Murray correctly describes the situation when he writes,

"The higher powers" refer without question to the governing authorities in the commonwealth. . . . The governing authorities are those in whom are rested the right and the power of ruling in the commonwealth and the evidence does not indicate that any other than human agents are in view.³

Consequently, the governing authorities are the powers to whom the Christian owes obedience and honor.

The Divine Ordination of the State

The divine ordination of the State is the essential foundation for "The Biblical Standard For Civil Obedience."

¹ Culver, Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government, p. 250.

² 1 Peter 2:13-14 states that the king and his representatives are to be submitted to along with "every human institution" (2:13).

³ Murray, Romans, p. 147.

When the Christian recognizes that civil authority is ordained of God for the continued maintenance of order in society, he will then realize his responsibility to submit to God's instrument of order. Therefore, since an understanding of the divine ordination of the state is central to the discussion of civil obedience, it will be examined as to its fact, nature, method, necessity and extent.

The Fact of the Divine Ordination

In Romans 13:1-2 there are three references to the fact the State is divinely ordained. The first reference occurs in 13:1 after Paul has lucidly commanded the Christian to submit himself to the governing authorities. Paul's use of γάρ explains the reason for submission, namely "there is no authority except from God." Therefore, our submission to the governing authorities is based upon the precept that all authority (ἐξουσία) is from God. When the apostle pronounces that authority is from God, he means that authority derives its origin and source from God, ὑπὸ θεοῦ.¹

The second reference appears at the end of verse 1 when Paul explains that the existing authorities are established or ordained by God. The perfect participle τεταγμένα

¹ Murray, Romans, p. 148. Note: See also Dana and Mantey, p. 112. This could be the genitive of agency demonstrating that God is the agent who invests the civil authorities with power.

is the word used to describe the divine ordination. It is derived from the verb τάσσω, which is used in the New Testament to mean "to determine," Acts 15:2, "to appoint," Acts 28:23, "to order," Matt. 28:16.¹ Thus all of these would refer to a divine appointment, institution or ordering from God (ὑπὸ θεοῦ). Also, the perfect participle must be used with αἱ δὲ οὐσαι denoting the governing authorities have been ordained in their present state.² Consequently, Paul has emphasized the fact that the existing powers have a divine appointment, institution, and order from the sovereign God of the universe.

The third reference ensues at the end of 12:2 when the apostle concludes (ὥστε) that the one who resists authority has resisted the "ordinance" of God. The noun διαταγή is a derivative of τάσσω and refers to an ordinance or something instituted.³ Thus, Paul has intensely taught in this case the hazard of withstanding the official authority which

¹G. Dellling, "Τάσσω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VIII, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 29.

²James Denny, "The Epistle to the Romans," (hereinafter referred to as Romans), in Vol. II of Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), p. 696.

³Dellling, "Τάσσω," p. 36.

has been ordained of God. Opposition to existing powers is in fact an opposition to the very ordinance of God.

The impact of the fact of God's divine ordination of this is especially solemn when the State is especially solemn. One refers to the words of Jesus in John 19:10 after Pilate stated that he had power to release or crucify Christ, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above."

The Nature and Method of Divine Ordination

The three references to God's divine ordination of governing authorities in 13:1-2 demands that the believer acknowledge God's providential work in history in establishing human governmental rule on earth. Therefore, the nature and method of God's ordination of governing authorities is through the exercise of His sovereign will in history. While God allows for many forms of governments to exist on earth, no philosophy of the "will of the State" or "power of the people" can stand before God's sovereign control of history.¹

There is ample biblical evidence for God's sovereign work in providentially continuing the affairs of human government. Daniel 2:21 states of God, "He removes kings and establishes kings." And later in the chapter (Dan. 2:37), Daniel

¹Abraham Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 89. For an interesting discussion concerning modern humanistic political theories, see pp. 89ff.

states that even Nebuchadnezzar had received his kingdom from the hand of God. Proverbs 21:1 teaches, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes." Psalm 75:7 adds, "But God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another." Proverbs 8:15-16 declares, "By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly." Acts 4: 27-28 attributes the crucifixion of Christ to both Herod and Pilate whom God had appointed to accomplish His purposes (βουλή). Other passages that contribute to this discussion are Daniel 4:34-35; 5:22-28; and John 19:10.

The sovereign will of God worked providentially in history is then the basis for all governmental rule. This precept is a natural outflowing of Romans 13:1-2's ordination of governing authorities as Robert Culver so adequately summarizes:

There is no biblical theory of human political sovereignty --monarchial, aristocratic, plutocratic, democratic, republican, or otherwise. God is the only sovereignty recognized in the Bible. In biblical doctrine, all political sovereignty is bestowed by God. Biblically speaking, there

¹ Abraham Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 89. For an interesting discussion concerning modern humanistic political theories, see pp. 89ff.

is no such thing as either popular sovereignty as in Western democracies, or state sovereignty as in the various totalitarian states.¹

The Necessity of the Divine Ordination

The necessity for the divine ordination of governing authorities is by reason of sin.² The entrance of sin into God's created domain has attacked "God's handiwork, God's plan, God's justice, God's honor as the supreme Artificer and Builder."³ Man's sinful nature had created a situation in which his natural disposition produces anarchy and rebellion rather than order and submission.

Thus, the effects of sin have necessitated the ordination of civil powers so that through delegated authority, order may be established in society.⁴ Evil men must be restrained in society. Without some authoritative mechanism, man's depravity will result in chaos and unparalleled wickedness. Thus, God's ordination of the State in Romans 13:2 is a necessary mechanism to restrain sin and to establish a standard of order in the universe.

¹Robert Duncan Culver, Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 53.

²Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, p. 81.

³Ibid., p. 83.

⁴James L. Raikes, "The Biblical Concept of Civil Authority," (Unpublished Master of Theology Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973), p. 22.

The Extent of the Divine Ordination

At the outset it must be recognized that the divine ordination of the State extends to all existing authority. The basis for this fact is the phrase, αἱ δὲ οὖσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ. By the use of this phrase, the Apostle passes from the general term ἐξουσία, and presents a more concrete principle.¹ Thus, when Paul states "and those which exist" (Rom. 13:1) are ordained of God, he is referring to the divine ordination of all existing governmental authorities.²

The import of this principle is: all defacto governments are legitimate institutions worthy of obedience. However, they are worthy of obedience not because of their intrinsic nature, but because of their God ordained position. The Apostle is not interested in making a distinction between legitimate or rightful authorities, but is rather insisting that the actual appearance of the State, in its existing form, is to be obeyed. As H. P. Liddon correctly comments, "All that is requisite to cultivate the obligation of obedience to a government is that it is οὖσαι."³ Therefore, the form in which a government manifests itself does not effect the fact

¹ Denny, Romans, p. 696.

² Murray, Romans, p. 148.

³ H. P. Liddon, Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, (hereinafter referred to as Romans), p. 248.

of its ordination. It is not of importance whether the magistrate is supreme or subordinate, executive, judicial, or legislative, tyrannical, elective, or monarchical. The reality of the existence of a political power is sufficient to warrant obedience. Any view then, that advocates submission only to a certain preferred political form is mistaken.¹

The fact, nature, method, necessity, and extent of the Divine ordination of the State all point to God's desire that the Christian recognize the necessity of obedience to His established authorities. As has been mentioned, when the Christian realizes this principle, he should have an increased awareness of his responsibility to obey God's appointed human authorities.

The Ordained Responsibilities of the State

In addition to the Christian's responsibility, the state also has certain divinely ordained responsibilities. Even in its fallen state God upholds the order of His universe. The measure of tranquility and order that exists in the world, is because God has instituted civil authority. Because of this institution, there is a common benefit that all enjoy, whether

¹Clarence L. Abercrombie III, "Barth and Bonhoeffer: Resistance to the Unjust State," Religion in Life, 42:3 (Autumn, 1973), pp. 344-59. This article is a fine presentation of Barth's view that only the just state is to be obeyed.

Christian or non-Christian.¹ Therefore, the ordination of the State, along with its God-given responsibilities, go hand in hand in demanding total commitment to civil obedience. As a result, it is necessary to investigate the state's ordained responsibilities along with its God given position.

The Societal Responsibilities of the State

Romans 13:3 explicitly teaches, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil." The institution of civil authority is a divine provision that assures restraint even upon ungodly, unregenerate man. The result is the perpetuation of peace and tranquility.² The state serves God, by maintaining a moral order in society that benefits the subject.³

Thus, the maintenance of the moral order produces the Christian with the tranquility necessary for the proclamation of the gospel and an environment suitable for Christian worship.⁴ While government is not a redemptive institution, it is an institution that fosters the order necessary for the

¹Herman Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, p. 324.

²Murray, Romans, p. 112.

³Denny, Romans, p. 696.

⁴John Murray, Collected Writings of John Murray (2 vols.: Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), II, p. 112. See p. 112 for a very interesting discussion concerning common grace and the ordained responsibilities of the state.

proclamation of God's redemptive work.¹ This principle in and of itself, provides the justification for a Christian commitment to civil obedience. An important conclusion is: government is not just a necessary evil, but rather, God has instituted government for a positive purpose.²

The Judicial Responsibilities of the State

The State not only has societal responsibilities, but also has judicial responsibilities. Romans 13:4 declares that if one does evil he is to be afraid. This fear is caused by the statement: "for it does not bear the sword for nothing." James Denney comments that "φορεῖ" is wear rather than bear: the sword was carried habitually, if not by, then before the higher magistrates, and symbolized the power of life and death which they had in their hands."³ The sword which the authority wears is not only a symbol of authority, but is also the

¹ Ibid.

² James L. Raikes, "The Biblical Concept of Civil Authority" (unpublished Master of Theology Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973), pp. 20-21. Raikes disagrees when he states, "The state is not a positive or unconditional good, but rather a necessary evil. The state is an evil not only because it interferes with man's personal freedom and introduces unnatural superiority among man." Such a statement fails to understand God's purposes for the divine ordination of the state in its responsibility to maintain order in God's creative order for the benefit of all men. Agreed, it is not an unconditional good. However, it is good when viewed from God's institution in its ideal form.

³ Denney, Romans, p. 696.

rationale for his use of authority in executing justice. This sword of authority, while including capital punishment must also include authority over "other crimes short of death."¹ Thus, a central characteristic of the state is the use of judicial power for the maintenance of order in society. This judicial power not only includes the fact of capital punishment, but also all other crimes that threaten the order of civil society.²

Romans not only teaches that the civil authority wears the sword to punish evil, it also teaches that the magistrate is "an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil" (Rom. 13:4). The phrase ἔκδικος εἰς ὀργήν must refer to the avenging of God's wrath. The word "wrath" (ὀργήν) is mostly used of God's wrath in the New Testament and is likewise used eleven times in Romans itself.³

The civil magistrate knowingly or unknowingly is then the institution by which God executes His wrath upon evil men. W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam further comments that ἔκδικος εἰς ὀργήν is, "the Divine wrath as administered by

¹Murray, Romans, p. 153.

²Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, p. 93. Kuyper not only claims that capital punishment is involved with the state's use of the sword, but also includes military power and the resistance of revolutionary forces.

³Bahnsen, Theonomy in Christian Society, p. 384.

the ruler who is God's agent."¹ Taking personal vengeance is against God's will and is categorically forbidden (Lev. 19:17-18, c.f. Rom. 12:19). Consequently, God has instituted government in order to execute justice and His wrath upon evil men in order to vindicate society against evil men.²

The Ordained Position of Civil Authorities

The solemn societal and judicial responsibilities qualify the state for the title, "minister or servant of God." In the use of this title, two different Greek words are employed. The first is *διάκονός*, used twice in verse four. The basis for the title harkens back to 13:1, 2, where the *ἐξουσία* is said to be ordained of God.³ The connection with God's ordination is necessary. Without God's ordination of the authorities, there is no basis for their legitimate function. However, since they are ordained of God, their service and function is legitimate and, thus, they qualify for the honorable title of "servant of God." One writer summarizes the issue when he comments that the authorities are: "called

¹Sanday and Headlam, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 368.

²Ibid., p. 386. Bahnsen has attempted as Meredith Kline demonstrates to use the Mosaic law as the "continuing norm for mankind and that it is the duty of the civil magistrate to enforce it, precepts and penalties alike." Meredith G. Kline, review of Theonomy in Christian Ethics, by Greg L. Bahnsen, in Baptist Reformation Review, 8:4 (Fourth Quarter, 1979), 20-31. This review is a fine critical analysis of Bahnsen's work.

³Murray, Romans, p. 152.

the servants of God in the discharge of their office, since they are appointed by God and have the task of maintaining God's order in the world."¹

In the employment of *διάκονός* in verse four, it is interesting to denote that there is a two-pronged usage. In the first clause, the title "servant of God" is used with reference to the maintenance of good. However, in the latter part of the verse, the title is used to describe the work of God's servant as an avenger of wrath against evil. Therefore, "the same dignity and investiture belong to the ruler's penal prerogative as to his function in promoting good."²

The word *λειτουργοῖ* is the second word utilized to describe the civil magistrate as the servant of God (Rom. 13: 6). In the LXX, *λειτουργοῖ* is frequently used to describe the service of the priests and Levites, although this is not always the case.³ In the classical usage, *λειτουργεῖν*,

¹ Hermann W. Beyer, "*διάκονός*," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 89.

² Murray, Romans, p. 153. Dr. Alva J. McClain adds concerning rulers "whether they acknowledge Him or not, are nevertheless 'ordained of God' as 'ministers' of His; and therefore will be held responsible before God for the manner in which they discharge their duties 'for good' to mankind in general and to 'execute wrath' upon those who do evil (Rom. 13:1-6)." Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1968), p. 47.

³ Denny, Romans, p. 697.

λειτουργία, and λειτουργός referred "to public duties or services of Athens undertaken by a citizen at his own expense."¹ Thus, λειτουργός has both a religious and civil usage.

Inasmuch as λειτουργοὶ es employed in verse six to refer to the magistrate's responsibility to collect taxes, it is best to conclude that λειτουργοὶ has a primary emphasis of denoting the official character of the magistrate. However, since λειτουργοὶ is used in the LXX to refer to religious service, it is important not to exclude a religious element. This is especially true when one realizes that the magistrate carries forth a religious function knowingly or unknowingly by the execution of his divinely ordained responsibilities.²

It must be concluded that God has ordained the magistrate to administer specific societal and judicial responsibilities. The administration of these duties qualifies the magistrate for the title of servant of God. With these thoughts in mind, the believer must then realize that his responsibility is to submit himself to the civil authorities.

Submission to the Ordained State

The ordination of the state, along with its responsibilities, provide the basis for submission and obedience to

¹Ibid.

²Moule, The Epistle to St. Paul to the Romans, p. 356.

the governing authorities. Thus, the purpose and necessity for civil obedience and submission have been examined. The task remains, however, to determine the nature of the Christian's submission and obedience to the governing authorities.

The Use of "Submission" in Romans 13

ὑποτάσσω is the word used in Romans 13 to define the Christian's submission to civil authority. It appears twice in the context of Romans 13 in verses one and five. In this section primary emphasis is placed on the use of the imperative form in verse one.

ὑποτάσσω means in the general sense, "to subject oneself," "be subjected."¹ The general rule suggests that ὑποτάσσω demands a renouncing of one's own will for the benefit of another.² Lange adds concerning ὑποτάσσω, "The reflexive form describes the obedience as of a rational, voluntary, principled character in distinction from blind, servile subjection."³ Karl Barth comments that ὑποτάσσω as present

¹William F. Arndt and Wilbur F. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 854.

²Gerhard Delling, "ὑποτάσσω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VI, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 45.

³Lange and Fay, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, p. 398.

imperative, "indicates a reflex action, exercised by the man on himself."¹

This voluntary, principled, self-controlled subjection is found in the New Testament with regard to many and varying relationships. Luke 2:51 emphasizes Christ's subjection to His parents. Ephesians 5:24 enunciates the Christian's subjection to Christ. 1 Peter 5:5 teaches the subordination of the younger believer to the older. 1 Peter 2:18 and Titus 2:9 both refer to the subordination of the slave to the master.

When one evaluates these passages and others that deal with the Christian's responsibility to submit, one important principle is clear: ὑποτάσσω compels the individual to submit his will to God's divinely willed order in the world.² Thus, in every relationship whether child-parent, wife-husband, or Christ-Church, the believer must voluntarily submit his own will to God-instituted order.³

¹ Clarence L. Abercrombie, "Barth and Bonhoeffer: Resistance to the Unjust State," pp. 344-59.

² Gerhard Delling, "ὑποτάσσω," p. 44.

³ Murray, *Romans*, p. 148. This statement is not only the basis for submission but also for disobedience. First, when the magistrate exceeds the realm of its ordination and demands a submission that rightfully belongs to Christ, it is not to be obeyed. Therefore, in God's order, submission to Christ always takes precedence over submission to the state. Second, the ὑποτάσσω in its reflexive form is not a blind obedience, but also involves the voluntary use of the will.

Therefore, when in evaluating Romans 13 and other passages that demand submission to the governing authorities (Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13), this principle must be central to one's thinking submission, then, to the governing authorities means that one is to voluntarily acquiesce his will in subservience to the realm of the magistrate's control.¹

Practical Applications of the Principle of Submission

First, no person is exempt from the principle of submission to the state. The expression *πασα ψυχή* in Romans 13:1 refers to every individual and gives credence to this fact.² No individual has the right to indiscriminately decide to not obey the civil magistrate nor feel that it is not necessary for him to obey his decrees and ordinances.

Second, it must also be emphasized that the individual is to submit to whatever government he finds himself under. Romans 13 does not state or imply that only certain forms of government are worthy of obedience. Even if a government is something less than democratic or is ruled by less than perfect officials, it is still to be submitted to as God's

¹ Murray, Romans, p. 148. It is important to emphasize that one is to submit to "the realm of the magistrate's control." Thus, whenever a magistrate demands worship that properly belong to God, he is demanding something that is outside of his realm of control.

² Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, p. 405.

ordained institution. Handley G.G. Moule very concisely summarizes this issue when he comments concerning the Christian's responsibility,

He is to regard its actual officers, whatever their personal faults, as so far dignified by the institution that their governing work is to be considered always first in the light of the Institution. The most imperfect even the most erring, administration of civil order is still a thing to be respected before it is criticized.

Last, the Christian is to submit to the magistrate out of conscience (Romans 13:5, *συνείδησιν*) and obligation to God. It is out of conscience that the believer realizes that he must have a thankful spirit in appreciation for what God has done in society. Every day the individual reaps the benefits of an ordered society that protects the innocent from the intentions of evil men. To deny this principle and engage in disobedience to God's ordained institution is the epitome of arrogance and a virtual rejection of God's method of ruling society.

Interpreting Romans 13:1-7

The difficulty of arriving at a correct interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 arises out of a misunderstanding of Paul's use of general, unqualified, language to describe both the Christian's submission to the state and the ordination of the state. This unqualified language could cause one to wrongly conclude that Paul is demanding a blind servile obedience to civil authority.

Consequently, two main schools of thought have surfaced in order to dispel such a conclusion. It is necessary then to present the strengths and weaknesses of each school and establish some vital concluding elements that explain the difficulty of Paul's use of such general unqualified language.

The Historical View

This view attempts to solve the difficulty by claiming that Paul wrote this epistle when the Roman government had not yet begun persecuting the church. It is then argued that Paul would not have written Romans 13 had he foreseen Nero's terrible future persecution of the Church. Thus, this passage has only a purely historical application to that particular time when Paul wrote.¹ As a result, submission as outlined by Paul in Romans 13:1-7 is not a standard principle that has application to every historical situation.

While it is true that Romans 13 has primary application to the Roman Empire, there are two main factors which make this view unacceptable. First, the view is negated by the fact that several parallel passages were written during times of persecution, which, nevertheless, enjoin submission (Ti. 3:1; 1 Pt. 2:13, 14). Second, such a view attributes to

¹James E. McGoldrick, "1776: A Christian Loyalist View," Fides et Historia, 10:1 (Fall, 1977), p. 38.

Paul an extremely shallow evaluation of existing governmental authorities. Paul had experienced enough cruelty at the hand of religious and political rulers to know that ordained authorities are not always good servants of God.¹

The Normative View

The normative view purports that Romans 13 simply teaches what government ought to be. Thus, Romans 13 does not demand an unqualified obedience of every decree of the state. This is government as God has intended it to be in order to maintain the order of the world. Consequently, this would provide the reason for Paul's unqualified language of Romans 13:1-7. Romans 13:1-7 does not then intend to be a specific statement concerning the actual character of all governments, but rather is a clear statement concerning what God has intended government to be for the maintenance of His world.²

The normative approach is at the heart of a correct interpretation of Romans 13. However, it is not comprehensive enough. Romans 13 does not only teach what is the ideal purpose of government. It also teaches some very important practical ethics that result in certain necessary responsibilities for both the state and the subject. Thus, the view in and of itself does not answer all that is necessary for a correct

¹Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, p. 321.

²Bahnsen, Theonomy in Christian Ethics, p. 370.

interpretation of Romans 13. Therefore, for a correct understanding of the interpretation of Romans 13, another very important formula is needed to complete the normative view.

A Comprehensive Interpretation of

Romans 13:1-7

A comprehensive interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 accentuates the normative view in conjunction with the purpose for the writing of the passage.

The overall purpose of Romans 13:1-7 is to promote recognition of and submission to God's established order for the maintenance of society. This purpose consists of two important elements.

First, Romans 13:1-7 emphasizes the believer's responsibility to the state. This practical responsibility is submission. Second, it emphasizes the state's responsibility to society. This necessitates that the state execute its God-ordained responsibilities. Thus, the purpose is accomplished through the fulfilling of the responsibilities that God has given to both the state and the subject. As one writer has commented: "God ordained civil authority for the restraint of evil and the punishment of its perpetrators, and Christians are responsible to support the magistrates in the execution of this task."¹

¹McGoldrick, "1776: A Christian Loyalist View," p. 37.

When a proper understanding of the purpose of Romans 13:1-7 is combined with the normative approach, one is able to explain the unqualified language of the passage. The crux and focus of the passage exhorts the believer to adhere to the biblical standard for civil obedience. Consequently, the passage speaks in absolute terms to define the responsibilities of both the subject and the state. This is the justification for its absolute, unqualified language that is employed.

Therefore, it is outside of the passage's purpose and normative quality to discuss what is the Christian's response when governments do not fulfill their God-given responsibilities. Likewise, it is also inappropriate to use the passage to attempt to determine when a Christian is to disobey its government. In other words, Romans 13:1-7 is not a commentary or a standard for a biblical view of civil disobedience.¹ The passage contains a standard for civil obedience.

In order to balance the material in Romans 13:1-7, one must then evaluate other biblical data concerning civil disobedience. When this is done, the Christian will only then have a complete picture of his responsibility to God and the

¹While Romans 13:1-7 is not a standard for civil disobedience, it has many specific elements that contribute to the discussion of civil disobedience. This will be demonstrated in chapter two which addresses the issue of civil disobedience.

state. Therefore, the task at hand is to explore the data that defines the standard for civil disobedience.

CHAPTER II

THE BIBLICAL STANDARD FOR CHRISTIAN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

After examining the evidence for civil obedience, there remains the matter of how the Christian is to respond when the state demands that he act contrary to biblical principles. As a result, it is imperative for the Christian to develop a philosophy that correctly outlines the biblical basis for civil disobedience.

There have been certain views that have attempted to define when the believer is to disobey the state. Since these views have had an influence on Christian thinking, it is necessary to examine their content and offer some appropriate criticisms that will be helpful for one's own beliefs concerning civil disobedience.

The Various Views Concerning Civil Disobedience

The Humanistic Legitimacy View

The humanistic view argues that legitimate government is based upon the consent of the governed.¹ This is the Lockean view that propounds that government is a contract between the

¹McGoldrick, "1776: A Christian Loyalist View," p. 28.

state and its subjects.¹ When the government breaks this contract by not promoting the happiness of its people, the government no longer has the right to rule and must then step down or the people have the right to revolt.²

This view emphasizes the sovereignty of man rather than the sovereignty of God. It fails to realize that there is a deeper basis for government than just the efforts of man. It is, therefore, perfectly consistent for the adherents of this view to propose that government is a social contract between the state and its subjects.³ The result of this type

¹John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ed. by Thomas I. Cook (New York: Hafner, 1966), pp. 163, 239.

²McGoldrick, "1776: A Christian Loyalist View," p. 28.

³Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, p. 87. Kuyper maintains that the American Revolution is fundamentally different than the French Revolution. The American Revolution recognizes the sovereignty of God in its constitution, whereas, the French Revolution recognizes only the authority of man, in establishing government. Kuyper quotes several passages from the Declaration of Independence that speak of the sovereignty of God in human affairs. While Kuyper vigorously attempts to prove that the American governmental system is not philosophically a social contract between the subject and the state, his attempt seems far from convincing. This is especially evident when one reads from the Declaration of Independence, "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government," (Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant: A History of the Republic (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1976), p. 1069.

of view is anarchy and revolution as evidenced in the French Revolution and our own Revolution in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

The humanistic view is worthy of understanding because it has had wide influence on the Christian's own view of civil disobedience. In the early days of the American Revolution most of the religious leaders of the country adapted Lockean principles into a Christian motif for the justification of their revolutionary activities.¹

However, this influence did not end with the American Revolution. Lockean principles have influenced Christian thought concerning civil disobedience since the revolution and are extant in modern legitimacy views today. This then must lead to a discussion of the modern Christian legitimacy view.

The Christian Legitimacy View (Just, Unjust State View)

The modern Christian legitimacy view finds its source in the Puritan ethic concerning civil disobedience. While the Lockean view maintained that government was a contract between the state and the governed, the Puritans

¹McGoldrick, "1776: A Christian Loyalist View," pp. 26-42. In part of this fine article the author examines the effect of Lockean and Puritan principles upon the American clergy during the Revolution. Dr. McGoldrick contends that the educated clergy preached a combination of Lockean and Puritan principles from the pulpit which justified Christian involvement in the American Revolution.

saw government as a covenant between rulers and people with the Word of God as its basis. With God's Word as their standard, the Puritans passed judgment on civil authorities.¹

As another writer has explained, "There was now a new source of legitimacy--not conferred by nature or tradition but located in a particular book."²

Whereas the Lockean view emphasized natural law the Puritans emphasized that the legitimacy of government is reflected in a covenant (or contract) between civil government and God. Consequently, when the government violates God's law, it is no longer a legitimate government worthy of Christian obedience. Therefore, when a government becomes an illegitimate institution, the Christian then has the right and responsibility to resist its authority.

The standard for civil disobedience is a general application of the title, "illegitimate" to any government that does not measure up to God's law. Therefore, the rights of the people are protected by God's law. Any threat to these rights places the government in the dangerous position of being referred to as an illegitimate institution worthy of being overthrown.

¹McGoldrick, "1776: A Christian Loyalist View," p. 30.

²John A. Mulder, "Calvinism, Politics, and the Ironies of History," Religion In Life, 47:2 (Summer, 1978), p. 151.

The Christian Legitimacy View is not just a fossil of bygone Puritanism, but is also extant in religious circles today. For example, the Chalcedon movement led by Rousas Rushdoony¹ and more recently, Greg Bahnsen,² argue that a government is no longer a servant of God when it fails to implement the precepts of the Mosaic law into the social arena. As Dr. Bahnsen states, "When the state refuses to honor and obey the law of God in social matters, then it fails to be what God requires; . . . That is, it ceases to be a servant of God for good;"³ In other words, the government ceases to be a legitimate instrument of God.

The legitimacy view is also prominent among another circle of theologians led by Karl Barth,⁴ Oscar Cullmann,⁵ and John Hering.⁶ However, these men would define the view as the Just-Unjust ruler view, although it should be considered a divergent aspect of the legitimacy view.

¹Rousas Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1973), p.

²Bahnsen, Theonomy in Christian Ethics, p.

³Ibid., p. 395.

⁴Abercrombie, Barth and Bonhoeffer: Resistance to the Unjust State, pp. 344-59.

⁵Oscar Cullmann, The State in the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 12.

⁶John Hering, A Good and a Bad Government (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Pub., 1954), p. 17.

The Just-Unjust ruler view claims that only just governments are to be obeyed.¹ While government has a necessary function, it is nothing final or absolute. There is a limit to the degree of recognition that the believer is to give to the state.²

There are no grey areas. The state is either a just state or it is an unjust state.³ The task of the Christian is to ally itself with the just state and support its efforts.⁴ On the other hand, the Christian must resist the unjust state even to the point of revolution. Clarence Abercrombie aptly summarizes the Just-Unjust view when he states:

In the light of God's freedom, the Christian community cannot give the state an absolute unconditional affirmation. If the state flies in the face of God's commands, it loses its divine commission, the base of its very existence; the state ceases to be a state at all! In biblical terms, as a state falls into apostasy from its divine commission, it ceases to be a "higher power" and becomes instead the "beast from the abyss" (cf. Rev. 13).⁵

¹Donald D. Kaufman, What Belongs to Caesar? (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1969), p. 60.

²Cullmann, The State in the New Testament, p. 61.

³Ernle W.D. Young, "Barth's Developing Views of Church/State Relations," Religion In Life, 46:2 (Summer, 1977), p. 179.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Abercrombie, "Barth and Bonhoeffer: Resistance to the Unjust State," p. 349.

An Analysis of the Christian Legitimacy Views

All of the legitimacy views fall short of the biblical standard for civil disobedience because of several grave errors that are intrinsic to their system.

First, these views have an improper concept of the nature of God's ordination of the state. As has been demonstrated in chapter one, all existing authorities are ordained of God. Those who are in authority are the existing powers to be obeyed, (αἱ δὲ οὐσαὶ ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν), Romans 13:1. As Charles Hodge convincingly argues:

Those who are in authority are to be obeyed within their sphere, no matter how or by whom appointed. . . . That is, we are to obey all that is in actual authority over us, whether their authority be legitimate or usurped, whether they are just or unjust.¹

Therefore, all authority is God ordained, both wicked and good, just and unjust. All governmental authority by virtue of its ordination is legitimate although its particular manifestation in history may not be without its errors and wicked acts and intentions.

The apostle Paul, when mistreated by civil authorities, did not attack the state and claim that it was illegitimate, unjust, or nonrepresentative (cf. Acts 21:30; 22:24; 23:2, 5; 23:12-22). Instead, he submitted to the decisions of the civil magistrate whether these decisions were correct or incorrect.

¹Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, pp. 406-7.

The supreme example of this is Paul's attitude toward government in Acts 24-26, when he appeared before both Roman and Jewish authorities. He constantly insisted on his innocence before Felix, 24:1-7; before Festus, 25:1-12; and before Agrippa, 25:13-26:32. Yet, Paul never questioned the propriety of their decisions.¹ Thus, Paul's attitude and practice was respect for God's ordained institution for the maintenance of order in society, irrespective of its shortcomings and even persecution of the Christian faith.

Second, they fail to understand the purpose for God's ordination of the civil magistrate. God, through His providence, uses even evil rulers to accomplish His purposes on earth. The Scriptures state that the rulers which were active in the crucifixion of Christ were ordained of God to accomplish His purpose (Acts 4:27-28). Thus, although the rulers of a nation may be evil, they are still God's ordained servants. God establishes rule on earth commensurate with His purposes. It is not the responsibility or right of the Christian to suggest a subjective criteria for determining the legitimacy of a particular government. God has already done this in a manner consistent with His own desires.

¹ F. F. Bruce, The Book of the Acts, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 238.

Third, there is an ambiguity in determining when a government becomes illegitimate. At what point does a government go beyond the point of legitimacy and no longer commands the respect and obedience of its subjects?¹ If one associates legitimacy with the execution of the biblical ideal as outlined in Romans 13:1-7, then no human government has ever been legitimate, as no government is able to absolutely hold to the biblical ideal.²

Therefore, any view of civil disobedience that proposes to categorize a government in the broad general term of illegitimate or unjust, falls short of a proper view of civil disobedience. A proper view of civil disobedience emphasizes the point at which a government comes in conflict with God's law. Thus, the responsibility of civil disobedience for the Christian comes at the point where the specific demands of government violate the specific commands of God. Consequently, the point at which the Christian is to disobey God's ordained state must be defined.

The Basis for Christian Civil Disobedience

The Definition of Civil Disobedience

The point at which the Christian is to disobey civil government may be defined as follows: Whenever the state,

¹ William Stringfellow, Conscience and Obedience (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1977), p. 43.

² Robert Duncan Culver, Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 184.

represented by its governing authorities, demands an attitude or an act of the Christian that is contrary to God's inscripturated Word, it must be disobeyed. Dr. Alva J. McClain very clearly emphasized this point when he commented:

God will not contradict Himself in the expectations He reveals. If He has laid down something for me, and the state tells me to do something else, there is a conflict between God and the state. In a situation such as this there is no question as to what the choice should be for the Christian.¹

Submission to God and Civil Disobedience

Submission to God must always have precedence over submission to the state. The jurisdiction of civil government may not be used to cloak the higher responsibilities that we have to God.² Obedience to the state must not lead us away from obedience to God. John Calvin so masterfully demonstrated this point when he declared:

The Lord, therefore, is the King of Kings, who, when he has opened his sacred mouth, must alone be heard, before all and above all men; next to him we are subject to those men who are in authority over us, but only in him. If they command anything against him, let it go unesteemed.³

¹ Alva J. McClain, Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace, compiled and edited by Herman A. Hoyt (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), p. 223.

² H. P. Liddon, An Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1961), p. 250.

³ John Calvin, Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. II, ed. by John T. McNeill and trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p. 1520.

Therefore, in every realm of authority submission to God must always have priority in Christian thought and action; in every realm of authority. Yes, the Christian operates in many realms of authority, and in each of these realms he is to submit to the established authority. For example, as a slave he is to submit to the master (1 Pt. 2:18). As a young church member he is to submit to the elder (1 Pt. 5:5a). In Ephesians 5:21, Christians are to submit to one another. In the family, the wife is to submit to her husband (Eph. 5:22), and the children to their parents (Eph. 6:1).

Yet, God has established each realm of authority and the Christian is to submit to God as the ultimate source of authority. Thus, while the Christian operates in the realm of civil government and is to submit to the civil authority, his ultimate responsibility is to submit to God and His Word. Therefore, when civil government specifically institutes a decree, the Christian must submit to God and disobey the civil government.

Several biblical texts support the fact that when dealing with civil authorities, submission to God must have priority over obedience to civil authorities. In Acts 4:17-20, Peter and John were commanded not to speak in the name of Christ. However, their response was to disobey the authorities because they realized that they had a commission from God to preach the gospel, and no human authority had the right to contradict the commission.

Again in Acts 5:28-29, the Apostles were again commanded not to preach the gospel. In fact, the high priest stated, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name," Acts 4:28. Yet, the response of Peter and the apostles was strong and to the point, "We must obey God rather than men," Acts 4:29. F. F. Bruce comments:

The apostles could do no other than insist as they had done before that they must obey God rather than men. The authority of the Sanhedrin was great, but greater still was the authority of Him who had commissioned them to make this good news known.¹

Not only are there New Testament examples but also Old Testament texts that contribute to the discussion of civil disobedience. In Daniel 6:4 the evil commissioners were jealous of Daniel's power and through deceit had a law passed which forbade any prayer or injunction to any other authority beside the King. In 6:10, Daniel knowing of the injunction refused to obey the law of the land and instead conducted his daily prayer. As Dr. John Walvoord observes:

Daniel's faithfulness was such that they could not put their finger on any error or fault in the execution of his office. Some other method must be found if Daniel was to be eliminated. The men themselves came to the conclusion that the only way they could trip up Daniel was to provide a conflict between official regulations and Daniel's conscience and observance of the law of God.²

¹ F. F. Bruce, The Book of the Acts, p. 121.

² John F. Walvoord, Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 136.

It must be noted that when official regulation contradicted the law of God, Daniel obeyed God.

Another important commentary on civil disobedience is also found in the book of Daniel. It is the incident of the refusal of Shadrack, Meschach, and Abed-nego to worship the image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up. In this refusal, these three Hebrews demonstrated their courage and faith by obeying Jehovah rather than the pagan decree of the king.¹

In all of these cases it must be noted that disobedience was based upon an individual circumstance which demanded an act that was contrary to the revealed Word of God. The general conduct of each one of these men was submission to the state. They realized that government was an ordained institution of God even if at times its means were unjust. Yet, when this ordained institution demanded an action that was contrary to God's revealed will, it was to be disobeyed. This disobedience did not make the government illegitimate; it instead demonstrated that God was the supreme authority to be obeyed, rather than the specific evil decrees of a human ruler.

For the Christian, the tension point for civil obedience and disobedience is at the place where the Word of

¹Ibid., p. 89.

God and the demands of the state come into conflict.¹ It must also be understood that this is an individual matter of conscience involving one's own understanding of God's Word.

Therefore, the nature of the case demands that the Christian realize that the decision of civil disobedience is his responsibility, not the local church's, society's or any other institution's. Charles Hodge adds;

The right of deciding . . . and determining where the obligation to obedience ceases, and the duty of resistance begins, must from the nature of the case rest with the subject. . . . Like all other questions of duty, it is to be decided on our responsibility to God.²

The Christian must then evaluate the demands of the state in the light of the Word of God and decide upon a course of action in accordance with his conscience.

It has been concluded that the Christian does have the responsibility under certain circumstances to resist the civil authorities. The next issue then to be discussed is the nature of the Christian's resistance to the civil authorities.

The Nature of Christian Disobedience

When disobedience becomes necessary the nature of it must be passive and not active.³ The Christian should expect

¹McClain, Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace, p. 29. Dr. McClain adds, "The state is limited to the extent that the commands of the state agree with the duty that God lays down for you as an individual."

²Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, p. 464.

³McGoldrick, "1776: A Christian Loyalist View," p. 39.

to suffer and be subjected to persecution as a result of his disobedience. In other words, the Christian should be willing to suffer the consequences of his disobedience. Dr. James McGoldrick amplifies this position when he comments: "It seems then that the proper Christian response to oppression is to submit and suffer, following the example of Christ, who, as Peter again tells us, '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 (1 Peter 2:23).

The willingness to suffer the consequences of disobedience is evident in the lives of several biblical characters. In Acts 5, after being commanded not to preach the gospel, the Apostles John and Peter refused and subsequently were flogged and ill-treated. Their total conduct and attitude manifested a willingness to suffer for Christ as a result of their disobedience. Acts 5:41 sums up their conduct, "So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name."

The Apostle Paul is the supreme example of one who suffered at the hands of cruel Jewish and Roman authorities. In fact, after his conversion the Lord spoke to Ananias and

¹Ibid.

said of Paul, "He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16).

Yet, when Paul was mistreated by civil authorities, his response was not to instigate a revolution. He preached the gospel and was willing to bear the responsibility that went along with it. Therefore, he endured imprisonment (Acts 24-26), stoning (Acts 14:19) and all manner of persecution.

Therefore, the Christian's responsibilities of passive disobedience is antithetic to any concept of revolution.¹ If a government is evil, it is not the responsibility of the Christian to try and destroy it. Romans 12:14-21 contains some very important precepts concerning how the Christian is to respond to evil. None of these include revenge or revolution, but do speak of peace (12:18) and the fact that the Christian is not to repay evil with evil (12:17).

The Christian must realize that it is the Lord who is working in history, and He is the one who takes vengeance on evil men. John Calvin very appropriately stated: "Let us then also call this thought to mind, that it is not for us to remedy such evils; that only this remains, to implore the Lord's

¹ Ibid., p. 33. For a very excellent and practical discussion concerning the non-resistance position, see Herman A. Hoyt, Then Would My Servants Fight (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1956).

help, in whose hand are the hearts of kings, and the changing of kingdoms."¹ Therefore, our resistance should always be non-violent and passive, realizing that it is the Lord who establishes and takes down kings, both good and evil. As one writer has declared concerning evil governments and disobedience:

For though it is unjust and condemns you, yet God is just and will reward you. He will crown you for acting justly, and for suffering unjustly. Therefore, hold fast your justice, and whether the power acquits or condemns you, you will reap praise from it. If you die for the faith from its hand, you will reap glory from its fury.²

Daniel 3:17-18 very appropriately sums up the issue of civil disobedience.

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.

The three servants of God were first firm in their commitment to civil disobedience, yet, they were just as firm in their willingness to suffer as a consequence of their disobedience.

¹Calvin, Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, pp. 1516-17. One must not conclude however that Calvin did not believe in armed resistance. He believed that the lower magistrates had the right to revolt against the higher magistrates.

²John Peter Lange and F. R. Fay, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, p. 400.

CHAPTER III

THE BIBLICAL STANDARD FOR CHRISTIAN CIVIL CONDUCT

The Foundation for Civil Conduct:

Prayer--1 Timothy 2:1-2

1 Timothy 2 contains instructions for public worship. In the first seven verses, the Apostle Paul presents some practical exhortations concerning the general conduct of the Christian towards evil government.

First, the Apostle states that the Christian is to pray for kings and all who are in authority. In fact, Paul emphasizes the urgency of the admonition by employing the word παρακαλέω which may be translated, "beseech" or "exhort."¹ He also emphasizes the urgency of the message by using four different words to describe the need for Christian prayer for authorities.²

The first is δέσους which signifies a prayer from a feeling of want and has the sense of "to ask" or "to seek."³

¹Ralph Earle, "1 & 2 Timothy," in The Expositor's Bible, ed. by Frank E. Gaebeline (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1978), p. 356.

²Ibid., pp. 356-57.

³Heinrich Greeven, "δέσους," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 29.

The second is προσευχάς which is the common word for prayer to God.¹ The third, εὐτεύξεις is found only in 1 Timothy; in this passage and in 4:5. It is best to translate the word as "intercession."² The last ευχαριστίας demonstrates that the Christian is to pray in thanksgiving for God's provisions.³

These prayers are to be made for all men (πάντων), but also "for kings and all who are in authority" (2:1-2). The term βασιλέων, "was applied in that day to the emperor at Rome, as well as to lesser rulers."⁴ Also the phrase, πάντων τῶν ἐν ὑπεροχῇ ὄντων, would lead one to conclude that the Christian is not only to pray for the executive rulers, but for lesser rulers as well.

The prayers for the civil authorities have a specific purpose. The Christian is to pray for civil rulers so that they might exhibit a certain degree of grace and wisdom in their decisions and allow the Christian to lead a quiet and tranquil life.⁵ The tranquil, quiet life is a life that is unmarred by disturbance and restlessness.⁶

¹ Earle, "1 & 2 Timothy," pp. 356-57.

² Ibid. ³ Ibid. ⁴ Ibid., p. 357.

⁵ Wm. S. Plumer, Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph and Company, 1871), p. 587.

⁶ Earle, "1 & 2 Timothy," p. 357.

The question then arises: Why should the Christian pray for tranquility, unmarred by disturbance? The answer to this question is found in verses three and four, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The Christian prays for civil authorities so that they will provide an environment that is conducive for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.¹ As one writer has commented:

The church's calling is to proclaim the gospel in the world; it is the instrument of revelation in redemptive history's period of tension. . . . In the period of tension the State was ordained to provide an environment conducive to the proclamation of the Christian message and its being heard.²

Therefore, the state by the nature of its existence has an effect upon the gospel proclamation. It does not proclaim

¹ It must be stated that the great commission is not just evangelism. The great commission also includes baptism and indoctrination which involves the preaching of the whole counsel of God. For a brief but excellent discussion of this subject, see John C. Whitcomb, Christ, Our Pattern and Plan (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1976), pp. 7-8.

² Clinton Morrison, The Powers That Be, p. 38.

gospel truth, but it does provide the atmosphere that can either help or hinder the going forth of the gospel.¹

1 Timothy 2:1-4 demonstrates that the priority of the gospel is primary in determining the Christian's conduct toward civil government. It is then necessary to examine the relationship of the priority of the gospel as it relates to the Christian's involvement in civil affairs.

The Priority of the Gospel and Civil Affairs

The proclamation of the gospel as outlined in Matthew 28 is the primary responsibility of the church and the individual Christian. As James Grier states concerning Christ's commission to the church;

Having received all authority in heaven and earth, he gave a redemptive mandate to his body, namely the great commission. Pentecost brought the dynamic presence of the Spirit to the church for the fulfillment of her redemptive mandate. This task remains as our primary work today coupled with the nurture and edification of the body.²

¹Acts 18:12-17 is a very fine example of this principle. It is the occasion of Paul's appearance before the Roman proconsul at Corinth. As F. F. Bruce comments: "Had the proconsul of Achaia pronounced a verdict unfavourable to Paul, the story of the progress of Christianity during the next decade or so would have been very different from what it actually was" (F. F. Bruce, The Book of the Acts, p. 373). Thus, it is vital for Christians to pray for civil government in order to foster an atmosphere that is acceptable for the propagation of the gospel.

²James Grier, "Two Adams--Two Mandates," (Master of Theology Seminar Paper, Grace Theological Seminary, Spring, 1979), p. 23.

Therefore, the proclamation of the gospel should be the primary task of the church and the individual Christian. This fact should then regulate the extent and nature of the Christian's involvement in civil affairs. If the Christian is so involved in civil affairs that he neglects the responsibilities that are incumbent upon him, he has neglected his primary task.

However, one must realize that making disciples and indoctrinating them with the whole counsel of God does have an effect on civil affairs. In fact, the most effective way to change society is to change men's hearts through a pure gospel message. When civil rulers and members of society accept Christ as Savior they are new creatures in Christ, they have a new life (2 Cor. 5:17). This change of men's hearts through the gospel, does more to reform society than any revolution or social reform movement.

The Proclamation of the Word of God and Civil Affairs

Under normal conditions the Christian message must be, as James Grier notes: "an uncompromising proclamation of the truth of Christ. Even when the culture sets aside God's moral law or scriptural direction to the church, her message must be in its primary stress the redeeming grace of God to sinners."¹

¹Ibid., p. 20.

However, in the normal preaching of the whole counsel of God, there may be times when the Word of God specifically has an application to civil affairs. The very nature of the preaching of biblical truth is in and of itself a commentary on proper conduct. But, one must be very careful even in this arena. As John Murray correctly states: "Official ministrations must beware of turning the pulpit into a forum for the discussion of political questions especially a forum for political partisanship."¹ While it is true that the pulpit is not a forum for political involvement, it is also true that the functions of the civil magistrate do come under the authority of the Word of God just as other departments of life do. Thus, the Christian minister has an obligation to preach the Word of God concerning what is the proper role of the civil authorities. The Christian needs to be educated on matters that pertain to the ordination of cruel authority and their proper responsibilities. Also, it must be stated that the Christian must be aware of the fact that civil disobedience may be required of him under certain circumstances. Therefore, as John Murray states: "The functions of the civil magistrate, therefore come within the scope of the church's proclamation

¹John Murray, Collected Writings of John Murray, Vol. I (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 258.

in every respect in which the Word of God bears upon the proper or improper discharge of these functions."¹

Consequently, the normal preaching of the Word of God must be primarily the redeeming grace of God. However, the preaching of the Word will have an application to civil affairs just as it does to other arenas of life. Therefore, the functions of the civil magistrate do come under the Word of God, although one must be careful not to turn the pulpit into a partisan political forum.

The Christian and Political Involvement

The Individual and Political Involvement

As has been stated, the preaching of the gospel and the whole counsel of God is the primary means of affecting society and changing its moral character. But, there are other secondary ways in which the Christian can have an effect on society.

The individual Christian as a member of society can use the means available to him to put forth his opinion, guided by his own biblical convictions. Thus, he can use the ballot box to vote for those who best represent his own views, and would seem to provide an atmosphere that would be conducive for the going forth of the gospel.

¹ Ibid., p. 255.

Also, the Christian himself, as an individual member of society, has the prerogative to seek public office. If the individual is successful, he should perform in office as any other Christian would in his vocation. As one writer maintains:

Man also operates in the vocational sphere. The kind and quality of his stewardship in this area is defined by scripture. . . . The choice of vocation provides man with the opportunity for significant contribution and development of culture under Christ.¹

The Christian then as a public servant would have a tremendous opportunity to affect civil government through the exercise of his vocational task.

However, a caution must be given. The Christian must realize that his vocational task must come into captivity to the Word of God. Thus, when performing his task as a civil servant, he still must conform himself to a set of priorities that places the gospel message and Christian living first in his life. His vocational task is not primary, it is secondary to Christian living and the gospel message.

The Church and Political Involvement

In recent times, a great deal of pressure has come upon the church to get directly involved in political affairs. Christian leaders have organized political blocks that are

¹Grier, "Two Adams--Two Mandates," p. 20.

involved in partisan politics.¹ The question must then be; What is the proper Christian attitude with regard to these organizations? The answer to this question is best answered by John Murray's direct statement: "To put the matter bluntly, the church is not to engage in politics. Its members must do so, but only in their capacity as citizens of the state, not as members of the church."²

There are two main reasons why this is true. First, the church's involvement in politics detracts from the primary responsibility of the church. As has been stated, the church's primary commission is to preach the gospel and proclaim the whole counsel of God. The mixing of religion and politics only compromises the message. As James Grier states: "Internal demands for relevancy and power have accommodated the message to the twentieth century man while seeking to make the church a viable cultural force."³

Second, the effect of the Christian on a pagan society through political activity is minimal. One cannot expect society to implement the Christian ethic apart from the gospel. Society is only as good and moral as its people. The Christian

¹For an interesting article concerning the involvement of Rev. Jerry Falwell in politics see "Politicizing the Word," Time (October 1, 1979), pp. 62-68.

²Murray, Collected Writings of John Murray, p. 255.

³Grier, "Two Adams--Two Mandates," p. 19.

cannot legislate morality to a darkened heart (Eph. 4:18-19). Also, the proclamation of political positions does not change the heart of man. They may temporarily improve society's security, politically and economically, but they do not have eternal value.

Therefore, the proclamation of the gospel with the whole counsel of God is the only effective mode of changing society. When one's heart is changed, so is his manner of living, and when one's manner of living is changed, so is society.

The Christian's conduct toward civil government can be summarized as follows:

First, the foundation for civil conduct is prayer for all who are in authority, Second, the primary responsibility of the Christian with regard to civil affairs is to proclaim the gospel and the whole counsel of God. The preaching of the gospel message and the Word of God is the most effective way to change civil government and society in general. Third, the individual Christian through secondary ways, such as voting and the exercise of his vocation, can affect civil affairs. Last, the Church as a corporate entity must not be involved in politics because of their primary task in fulfilling the Great Commission.

CONCLUSION

The Christian must have at the forefront of his thinking an attitude of submission and obedience to the civil government. This is because God has ordained government in order to restrain evil and promote the good. The necessity for this ordination is found in the fact that sin has entered into the world and man's natural inclination leads to anarchy rather than order.

Therefore, government is in the hands of rulers who are sinful men. Consequently, there will be instances when the civil magistrate promotes evil and may even ask the Christian to engage in evil deeds. It is under these circumstances that the Christian must obey God rather than men.

Our conduct toward the civil government must be founded on prayer. The Christian must seek to fulfill the Great Commission as his chief task. However, he realizes that the proclamation of the gospel and the preaching of the whole council of God is the most effective tool in changing civil government and society in general. However the Christian can have an individual influence on government by the exercise of his lawful prerogatives of voting and serving in civil affairs. But he must realize that these functions are secondary to the gospel task that he has to communicate to the world.

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