

What Might Jesus Say To Our Country?

Although it's been a few weeks since we began our study of Romans chapter thirteen, you'll probably remember the basics that we covered regarding how we are to respond to the government in verses 1-3. Paul tells us that unless the government instructs us to do something that is specifically forbidden by God, or tells us not to do something that is specifically commanded by God, we are to be submissive to that government, which has been ordained by God for the protection of life and property. We may not like what the government does and because we live in a democracy we have the right to express our feelings in a variety of ways, but the bottom line is that we are still to be submissive.

Paul goes on to tell us why we should be submissive to the government. The **first** reason is found in verse 1:

1 Obey the government, for God is the one who put it there. All governments have been placed in power by God.

Government has been ordained by God. In other words it is by divine decree. If government is by divine decree, then point number two in verse 2 follows logically:

*2 So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God, and **punishment will follow**.*

Resistance to obeying government is therefore the same thing as resistance to obeying God. This leads to the **second** reason for obeying the government at the end of verse 2. Those who rebel against the government will be punished, not only by the government but by God as well. So government exists by divine decree and to resist it is to resist God, and to resist God will bring punishment.

Reason number **three** is that government serves to restrain evil. Verse 3:

*3 For the authorities do not frighten people who are doing right, but they **frighten those who do wrong**.*

Therefore, to resist the government is to resist the restraint of evil. One of the functions of government is to put fear in the hearts of people who do evil things and not to put fear into the hearts of people who do good things. Look at the last part of verse 3:

So do what they say, and you will get along well.

Now every man and woman that comes into this world has a basic knowledge of good and evil, every individual has a conscience according to Romans 2:14,15, where Paul writes:

14 Even when Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, instinctively follow what the law says, they show that in their hearts they know right

from wrong.

15 They demonstrate that God's law is written within them, for their own consciences either accuse them or tell them they are doing what is right.

People everywhere have the knowledge of good and evil. So the governments of nations know the difference between good and evil as well.

Everybody knows the difference between good and evil, but unfortunately because of Satan's ability to deceive, far too many choose evil, including rulers. But the fact still remains that no society can function if its population is going around stealing other peoples' property or injuring other people. The basic purpose of government is for the protection and preservation of mankind. Can you imagine what would happen in a society where no one was in control? If it wasn't for government restraining the willful lusts and evil desires of mankind, one would probably be better off living among the beasts in the forest.

Now let God give us a little insight into how a government is to function. And we need to remember that our study here this morning involves God's role for government not individuals. Scripture clearly separates the role of government from the way individuals are to treat one another. We are to treat one another with love and compassion. God has assigned a different set of rules for government to keep order and provide for the protection of life and property. It would be a grave mistake for any of us to confuse or misunderstand this difference. With that disclaimer in mind let's first look to Deuteronomy 19:13, where we learn that government is to act against evil doers with unswerving firmness:

*13 Do not feel sorry for that murderer! **Purge** the guilt of murder from Israel so all may go well with you.*

Before going on we need to make another important distinction here. The passages in the Bible that command the penalty for murder to be death refer to what we would call premeditated or intentional murder. There was a provision of mercy for unintentional killings that were not the result of hatred and it's found in Deuteronomy 19. But where a murder is committed as the result of hatred, the government is to do to the murderer what he/she has done to his/her victim and therefore put away the guilt of the innocent blood that was shed. If the government doesn't do that, things will not go well with them.

Why does God insist that this be done? Verse 20:

20 "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you.

People will have a fear of doing evil if the law punishes evil doers according to God's Law. If you'd like further documentation regarding how God expected governments to handle serious crimes, you might read Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:14; Numbers 35:16, 17,

18, 20, 21; Deuteronomy 19:11,12;

Now let's go back even a little further to Deuteronomy 13 and we'll find another command for how the government should express its leadership. It's not only to deal harshly with those who commit serious crimes such as murder but also to act by God's design without partiality. No one is to receive any special consideration because of who they are or the situation they find themselves in. Deuteronomy 13:6-8,11:

6 "Suppose your brother, son, daughter, beloved wife, or closest friend comes to you secretly and says, 'Let us go worship other gods'—gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known.

7 They might suggest that you worship the gods of peoples who live nearby or who come from the ends of the earth.

8 If they do this, do not give in or listen, and have no pity. Do not spare or protect them.

11 Then all Israel will hear about it and be afraid, and such wickedness will never again be done among you.

It doesn't matter who it is, there's no partiality involved in carrying out the Law of God. If government would act with consistency and without partiality, it would go a long way toward convincing evildoers to change their ways. Now let's jump forward to the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy 25:1-3:

1 "Suppose two people take a dispute to court, and the judges declare that one is right and the other is wrong.

2 If the person in the wrong is sentenced to be flogged, the judge will command him to lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of lashes appropriate to the crime.

3 No more than forty lashes may ever be given; more than forty lashes would publicly humiliate your neighbor.

Such punishment may seem severe but I would like you to consider God's concern for innocent victims. What about the wife and family of a man who is murdered at the hands of a thief? What about the woman who has to live the rest of her life remembering the psychological horror she suffers because she was raped? What about the child who was physically, emotionally, or sexually abused by an adult? These lives are seriously damaged by those who prefer evil over good. And God's purpose as we'll see later is to create such fear in the hearts of those who would do evil that they decide not to do it because of the punishment that will follow.

As is consistent throughout Scripture, the punishment is to fit the crime. Verse 3 makes it clear that punishment should not be unreasonably severe. However, when the person is found guilty by the court, they are to be punished immediately. **Government is to act consistently, without partiality, and without delay.** Ezra 7:26 says:

26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.

You might be thinking to yourself, “*What about the trial process, the gathering of evidence, and the trial itself?*” Our answer would be that if we were faithful to the system of law that God has outlined for us we would not have more crime in this country than the courts have capacity to deal with. The United States is the world leader in violent crime, and the reason for that is that our legal system provides too many loopholes for the criminal.

The Bible tells us to make the punishment fit the crime and implement it immediately. Is that what we do in our criminal justice system here in the United States? No it isn't. We hear a lot of human cries in this country to pity the criminal and I can understand that, and I can understand the need for mercy in certain situations. But I also know what happens when that attitude becomes the norm and everybody thinks they can do whatever they want and escape judgment. Then there are the situations where we see certain people being given partiality and receive a much lesser punishment than someone else who committed the same type of crime. Then we also see how long punishment can be delayed in our system.

However, in spite of the government's flaws the Bible is clear that we are still to submit to God's ordination of government. To rebel against government is to resist God, and to resist God is to result in punishment. Now let's go back to Romans 13 where we see a **fourth** reason as to why we should be submissive to the government, and that is that government promotes good. Look at the last part of Romans 13:3 NRSV:

Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive the government's approval.

Do what is good and those who are in authority will give you praise. Christ gave us an excellent example of this principle in the Sermon on the Mount. Let's look at some of it and imagine how it could not only apply to those we encounter every day but also in our relations with the government. Matthew 5:38-43:

38 “You have heard that the law of Moses says, ‘If an eye is injured, injure the eye of the person who did it. If a tooth gets knocked out, knock out the tooth of the person who did it.’

39 But I say, don't resist an evil person! If you are slapped on the right cheek, turn the other, too.

40 If you are ordered to court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too.

41 If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles.

42 Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

43 *“You have heard that the law of Moses says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy.*

44 *But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!*

I'd like to share with you something I read regarding verse 41: *“If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles.”* Roman soldiers would often stop people on the road and it was expected that they would carry the soldier's gear for one mile. But Jesus said, *“Don't just go the one mile with the soldier. Show him how special Christians can be and offer to go the extra mile.”* It's my understanding that many Roman soldiers became Christians themselves because of such behavior. Makes sense doesn't it? Can you imagine the reaction of a person who is in financial need and they ask you for \$10 and you give them \$50. That is the type of behavior that reflects the light of Christ to the world.

If you enjoy a quiet, peaceful life and you're not a trouble maker, you will find that you receive praise and you will find what is written in verse 4:

*4 for it (the government)¹ is God's **SERVANT** for your good.*

So government is not only to punish the evildoers consistently but to help and praise those who live their lives doing good. The President of the United States is a servant of God. The senators, congressman, judges, governors, mayors, etc. are all servants of God. Unfortunately far too many of them aren't aware of that fact. Yet they are the government, and we who call ourselves evangelical Christians are to be the models of what a citizen should be in a society. Those that hold government offices should **see in us something that makes the country a better place** and that they would like to see in all the citizenry.

If we are dissatisfied with the conduct of our government leaders, we have the opportunity in a democracy to express our views by insuring that those we vote for share our values. We can write our representatives expressing our opinions. But there's one way to change things that is far better than any of those and it's guaranteed by God to produce results. We find it in 2 Chronicles 7:13,14:

13 At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or I might command locusts to devour your crops, or I might send plagues among you.

*14 Then if **my people** who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land.*

Do you know who God's people are? Those who believe Jesus Christ is their Savior and their Lord. They can bring about a healing of the country if they pray seeking God's will and do what is right. I'm not quite sure how to bring that about, but if we could get the word out and believers would respond accordingly, God would bring about the necessary

¹ Parentheses added.

changes to heal the United States.

When you see a coup in a country or a revolution and the government is overturned, it will not be the elimination of government but only the exchange of government because humanity cannot exist without some form of government.

A **fifth** reason for obeying government is that **rulers are empowered by God to inflict punishment, including capital punishment.** Verse 4:

But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.

If you do what is evil, you have every reason to be afraid. Government is given the authority to exercise capital punishment. Leviticus 20 gives us a widespread scope for punishment of serious crimes, including the death penalty. It was not reserved for murder, but was also meted out for striking a parent, for blasphemy, for witchcraft, for dabbling in the occult, for false prophecy, rape, homosexuality, and idolatry. That's how serious God considered these violations to be to the well-being of the nation. Individuals are not given this right but governments are.

It is essential that the government make it very, very clear that if anyone deliberately takes a life they will immediately lose theirs. That protects the sanctity of life. When this isn't done a nation comes under what the Bible refers to as *blood guiltiness*. Go with me if you will back to Genesis 4, verses 9-11 NRSV, where Cain has just killed Abel:

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

*10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; **your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!**"*

When Cain killed Abel, Abel's blood cried out to God. So in Genesis 9:6 NRSV, God says:

*6 Yes, **YOU MUST EXECUTE ANYONE WHO MURDERS ANOTHER PERSON, for to kill a person is to kill a living being made in God's image.***

Murder is wrong because it is a sin against God and the human made in God's image. Although God did not take Cain's life immediately, He sent him out as a wanderer and vagabond in an agrarian society where it was very possible he himself would be murdered (Genesis 4:14). It's also true that God had not yet clearly established the penalty for taking a life. One more verse we need to understand here is Ezekiel 7:23:

*23 **"PREPARE CHAINS** for my people, for the land is bloodied by terrible crimes. Jerusalem is filled with violence.*

One of the reasons that God brought judgment on the nation of Israel and sent them into captivity in Babylon was because the nation was full of bloody crimes. In other words murder for which there was no retribution. The blood of the people who had been murdered without punishing the murderer was crying out to God. Show me a place where they don't deal with murderers and they don't execute those that commit severe crimes and I'll show you a place **full of violence**. That is exactly what Ezekiel saw. Then he writes in verse 27:

I will bring against them the evil they have done to others, and they will receive the punishment they so richly deserve. Then they will know that I am the Lord!"

God says I am going to exercise a terrible judgment on the nation of Judah because their land is filled with **bloody crimes**, where punishment has not been exercised on those who do evil. Why does God do this? Does He do it because He enjoys punishing people? No, He does it because He knows when executed properly this punishment becomes frightening to those who would do evil and restrains them from doing such evil, and people need restraints because so many are evil (Romans 1:24ff).

God requires the death penalty so people will not have to die, so that there are no victims and no criminals. If you make the law of the land according to the Law of God it restrains the criminal and then there are no victims and there are no lawbreakers.

But where there is bloodshed and no corresponding penalty, the nation itself becomes guilty and God will judge the nation.

Listen to Numbers 35:33:

*33 This will ensure that the land where you live will not be polluted, for murder pollutes the land. **And no atonement can be made for murder except by the execution of the murderer.***

34 You must not defile the land where you are going to live, for I live there myself. I am the Lord, who lives among the people.

If you occasionally ask yourself why the United States is in the mess that it's in, I could give you a number of answers, and one that would be near the top of the list would be that this nation is under the judgment of God for *unrequited blood*. The ground of the United States cries out to God for retribution against murder and these other crimes that God considered worthy of death. Do you remember them? We listed them earlier: murder, cursing or striking a parent, blasphemy, witchcraft, dabbling in the occult, false prophecy, rape, homosexuality, and idolatry. Were these offenders properly dealt with it would reduce the number of such crimes committed. But instead we do the very opposite and our land is *blood guilty*.

For instance, from a biblical point of view abortion is murder. The fetus is a person

according to Psalm 139:13-16:

13 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it.

15 You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

16 You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

Jeremiah 1:5:

5 "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the world."

Isaiah 49:1:

I Listen to me, all of you in far-off lands! The Lord called me before my birth; from within the womb he called me by name.

Luke 1:15,44, referring to John the Baptist:

15 for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or hard liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth.

44 When you came in and greeted me, my baby jumped for joy the instant I heard your voice!

This country is therefore guilty to an inconceivable extent in massacring unborn children. The blood of these innocent and helpless victims is calling out to God for justice and because the government of the United States not only refuses to consider punishing such people, but supports the right of people to do such things, our nation according to the Bible must right now be under the judgment of God for millions of unpunished murders. And things will only get worse as long as this country allows itself to be controlled by a dictatorial legal system. Our courts have tossed aside the system of constitutional law that was originally formed as a reflection of a nation that desired to live under the will and the Law of God, and it has established laws that either eliminate all together or minimize the penalties for the crimes listed above.

There are literally millions of women who have allowed their unborn children to be aborted for their own individual convenience or because they allow others to force them into it. There are thousands of abortion doctors who have callously committed those murders. There are judges who established laws to allow such abortions to be committed, and a government that allows them to continue without taking steps to stop it. The blood of these victims is crying out to God for justice and none is being administered, so the nation as a whole is under God's judgment. This is reason enough for God to bring judgment against America even as He did Israel, for we have become a land full of

bloody crimes, a land filled with violence. Just look at television shows, movies, and the evening news.

The murder this week of Terry Schiavo, which according to most polls was supported by seventy percent of the people in this country, can only bring further judgment on our nation as a whole. And I don't think I'd be exaggerating if I estimated that ninety-nine percent, and that might be a conservative estimate, of our government leaders don't make any connection between the mess this country is in and the text of our message here today. Few of them understand the Bible and the greatest majority of them have no idea that it is God's instruction manual for living. So as long as the people of this country are willing to embrace and support this kind of leadership, we had better prepare ourselves to live under the judgment of God. I believe it is every Christian's duty to make their feelings known in a courteous manner about such atrocities to every government official they can contact, and even though they may scoff at it, to make reference to this text. And you have our permission to use any or all of this message in your correspondence. The complete message is always available for anyone to download from our website.

In conclusion, the final reason for submitting to the government is for conscience sake, Romans 13:5:

*5 So you must obey the government for two reasons: to keep from being punished and to **keep a clear conscience.***

You need to submit to the government not only because you fear God as God acts through the government, but also for the sake of a **clear conscience**. You do it not only because you fear the consequences but because you know what is the right thing to do. We as Christians should consider our highest motivation to do what we know God would want us to do. Yes, there has to be a fear factor, a judgment factor, a vengeance factor; and yes, there has to be punishment with consistency, without partiality, and without delay. And yes, each crime is to have an appropriate punishment so that the lawless will not prevail. Yes, we are to conform because of fear but what a much higher motive it is to conform for the sake of our conscience because we know what is right, because we have a conscious regard of love for the law, because **we have a conscious commitment to obey God. As Christians we are to live lives in obedience. We are to turn away from former behaviors** (Ephesians 4:22-28; I Corinthians 6:9-11) This is what Peter meant in 1 Peter 2:13-25:

*13 For the Lord's sake, **accept all authority**—the king as head of state,
14 and the officials he has appointed. For the **king has sent them to punish all who do wrong and to honor those who do right.***

15 It is God's will that your good lives should silence those who make foolish accusations against you.

*16 You are not slaves; you are free. But your freedom is not an excuse to do evil. **You are free to live as God's slaves.***

*17 Show respect for everyone. Love your Christian brothers and sisters. **Fear God. Show respect for the king.***

*18 You who are slaves must accept the authority of your masters. Do whatever they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but **even if they are harsh.***

19 For God is pleased with you when, for the sake of your conscience, you patiently endure unfair treatment.

20 Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing right and are patient beneath the blows, God is pleased with you.

*21 This suffering is all part of what God has called you to. **Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps.***

22 He never sinned, and he never deceived anyone.

23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted. When he suffered, he did not threaten to get even. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.

*24 He personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. **You have been healed by his wounds!***

25 Once you were wandering like lost sheep. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.

Conscience is that inner voice that we studied earlier in Romans, that little place inside of us that speaks to us of what is right and what is wrong. It is in that place that honors God that we should find our strongest motivation. There's no place for lawbreaking on the part of a Christian, no place for uprising and resistance. We're to do what we know is right.