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The Christian and the State *March 27, 2022*

Sermon Text: Romans 13

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:1-22

As long as a Christian lives in this present world, he or she is necessarily going to be faced with the question of how to relate to and deal with *the state*. We heard about this already this morning from Dr. Godfrey in the Sunday class and if anyone listening now has not had the opportunity to hear that message, just go to Youtube and search under Robert Godfrey, Statism. He also has a very recent second message entitled Statism and Socialism which he must have delivered at the Ligonier Conference.

What is *the state*? It is not the same thing as that kingdom the Bible

calls *the world* whose ruler is Satan, though the state certainly can and often has become quite Satanic when wicked men come to power.

Evil rulers are characterized by the traits of their father the devil, as Jesus told the Pharisees (John 8). Murder. Lust for power. Lust to be gods. Greed. Liars who hate the truth of Christ. They are of the spirit of the antichrist, that lawless one who will one day be revealed (2 Thes 2). We see this in our own nation today, do we not? We have leaders largely in power now who:

- Promote the slaughter of babies
- Insist upon the right to practice all kinds of sexual perversions so that now a Supreme Court nominee is probably going to be appointed who cannot or will not even give a definition of

who or what a woman is. Gender studies “experts” are telling us that gender cannot be identified at birth, rejecting God’s Word and common sense.

- We have leaders in the state – and we have for a long time – demand that any mention of God (especially of Christ) be erased and forbidden in any public entity. Military chaplains have often been told they are not permitted to pray, for instance, in the name of Christ.
- Public education and the universities have long been the propaganda machines of these and many other wicked, anti-God lies.
- The corruption of bribery is rampant so that people with positions in the state use their influence to get rich.

This all leaves the Christian and the church with this question then of *how we are to relate to the State*. To kings and rulers and presidents and governors. To the police (who wicked people today seem to think

we should eliminate!). The Church and the State, you see. Study history and you will find this ongoing conflict.

- Jesus before Pilate
- The Jews in captivity in Babylon (Daniel and his 3 friends under Nebuchadnezzar)
- The Apostles and Caesar
- The Reformers and Kings who persecuted them
- Hitler, Stalin, the Asian tyrants in China, Japan, North Korea....

It is very rare in history that the state has been the ally and friend of the Christian Church.

So how are we to relate to the State? How is the State to relate to the Church? Does one have higher authority than the other? Tyrants will insist that the State has authority over the church. The Pope will insist that the “church” is to command the State.

NOTE: Here in America we have an unusual privilege of voting for

political candidates – voting for our rulers if you will. And so it can be tempting for a church to promote one candidate over another – essentially telling the members who to vote for. We are not going to do that here – you must decide. BUT in a sense we ARE going to say who we should vote for! Or perhaps who we are NOT going to vote for. If for example a candidate is:

- In favor of gender distortions and perversions of human sexuality,
- In favor of killing babies,
- In favor of historically antichrist systems such as communism (which has slaughtered millions)
- In favor of silencing prayer and the Bible in public arenas
- In favor of a one world kingdom (prohibited by God at Babel)

...then yes, we do announce that such a candidate must not be promoted or our vote cast for. In fact if someone claims to be a Christian and yet supports such

wicked positions by voting for these evils, we must ask whether they know Christ at all.

But let's return to this subject of the State and the Christian. Follow along as I read from Romans chapter 13, and remember, the Apostle Paul was writing in the days of the Roman Empire and Caesar when the norm was to have a wicked ruler and for whom no one could vote -

Rom 13:1-7 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

(2) Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

(3) For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, (4) for he is God's servant for your

good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

(5) Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

(6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. (7) Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

The Origin of the State

13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

“State – the civil power and authority vested in a country or nation.” The state of Israel. The

state of Oregon. The state of Mexico. A state typically has:

- A king or ruler or some ruling body (Parliament, etc)
- A territory defined by borders
- A citizenry
- And fundamentally the State is *authority*. That is what Paul calls the State here – *the authorities*.

But where does the state come from in the first place? And the answer is this: *those that exist have been instituted by God*. God is the one who authorizes (grants authority to) the state.

Joh 19:9-11 He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. (10) So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (11) Jesus answered him, “**You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.** Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

God grants authority to kings and governors and presidents, and why does He do so? Here it is:

Rom 13:4 for he is God's servant **for your good**. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, **an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer**.

The fundamental purpose of the state is to *bear the sword*. To be God's *avenger* upon the wrongdoer. And to do so *for the good of the people in that state*. The ruling authorities are *to rule in such a way that wrongdoers – the wicked, the lawless, the criminals – FEAR*.

Right now in our nation – all of you know this very well – lawlessness is radically increasing. And we all know why. It is because the wrongdoers have no fear of the ruling authorities. Why is that? It is because the ruling authorities in many cases are not bearing the sword. That is to say, they are not

enforcing the law and bringing down the consequences and punishments required by those laws.

We live in a fallen, wicked world filled with fallen, sinful, wicked people *who need to be restrained*. Governing authorities have been established by God to effect that restraint by ruling in such a way that criminals fear the consequences of breaking the law.

You see these same principles in child-rearing. Parents rule with authority given them by God:

Eph 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (2) “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), (3) “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Where parents do not discipline their children, lawlessness reigns because in such an environment there is no fear of breaking the law.

So lawlessness is increasing dramatically in this country because rulers are not properly exercising the very purpose for which God establishes them – to be a blessing to the law-abiding and to be a terror to the law-breaker.

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

You can see where this primary purpose of the state is going to go badly wrong then when rulers refuse to acknowledge God and act as if they are the ultimate sovereigns. They inevitably then are going to set themselves up as gods, use and abuse the people they are supposed to be serving for good, and they become criminals themselves refusing to obey God's law.

Dan 4:28-30 All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. (29) At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, (30) and the

king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"

The Limits of the State's Power

Only Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. Only God is God. Only God has all authority and power –

Mat 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

There is no doubt that typically the state exceeds its authority – delving into areas that God has not given it authority to control. For example:

- The education of our children. This has been a huge issue coming to light lately. Parents who have confronted public school officials have even been called domestic terrorists.
- Prohibiting the preaching of the gospel or dictating to the

Church what can and cannot be preached.

- Prohibiting individual freedoms such as we see in our own nation's Bill of Rights
- Making laws that are in defiance of God's Law
- Using the wealth of the nation for their own personal enrichment

The state, in other words, is established by God for the basic, fundamental purpose of *effecting justice*. For the promotion of what is right and for the punishment of what is wrong – that right and wrong defined by God. When the State ceases to be the servant God established it for, it becomes God's enemy.

The authority of the state is *limited*. Tyrants deny this. Putin denies it – he believes he is autonomous. But tyrants like him have come and gone and all have or will stand before God and find out just how small they always were and just how hot the fires of hell are going to be for them.

The Christian's Obedience to the State

Paul tells us that *when we obey, when we are in submission to, the state and the state is functioning as the servant of God that it is supposed to be, we are obeying and submitting to God*. Why? Because as we have seen, God has established the state as His servant for our good. That is to say, *when the state is in submission to God and therefore carrying out the purpose God has given it, it is a good and right thing for us to submit to the ruling authorities. In fact, we are commanded to do so.* Look at it again:

Rom 13:1-2 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. (2) Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

Lawlessness is not to be a characteristic of Christ's people. We are to be people who obey the law, who honor those to whom honor is due, and thereby to be peaceful people. I have known people who claim to be Christians but they boast about breaking the law. Such people should fear because anyone who enjoys breaking the law and has no fear of doing so, has no assurance that they belong to Christ at all. To practice lawlessness is to oppose God and incur His judgment.

1Jn 3:4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

The Christian's Disobedience to the State

We also know however that there are times when the Christian *must* disobey the state. The classic example is that which we read earlier when Peter said:

Act 4:17-20 But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak

no more to anyone in this name.” (18) So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. (19) But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, (20) for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

And again -

Act 5:27-29 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, (28) saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” (29) But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

Why? Because God's authority is absolute and when men exceed the authority they have been granted, and thus their commands are in conflict with God's, we are not bound to obey them. We obey the

state BECAUSE we want to obey God, but when the state says, for instance, “You are forbidden to preach God’s Word,” then to obey such a command is not obeying God. And it is God we must always obey.

Now, sometimes these matters are more difficult to sort out, aren’t they? For example, does the state have the authority to order us to be vaccinated against a virus? Are we sinning if we refuse such an order? I don’t think so – that seems to be a matter of individual conscience.

Or, was it right for American colonists to rebel against King George and fight against England in the Revolutionary War? What about Christians fighting against one another in the Civil War? Church and State can become a rather difficult issue, you see. And what complicates it? *Sin*. Man’s sin. Romans 13 is actually quite straight forward.

- God has established the civil authorities.
- He has done so for our good

- And He has done so to cause the wicked to fear, to effect justice
- It is lawful for the civil authorities to levy taxes, and we are to pay them – if they are lawful.
- But the state must also acknowledge all of this, particularly that they are *God’s servant* and therefore accountable to Him, to carry out the purpose He has given them.
- When the state becomes Godless and tyrannical, it can even become our duty to resist it and fight against it. Imagine for example being a general in Putin’s army right now and being ordered to bomb and kill civilians, including children. What is the duty such a person has before God?

The Bible has many examples of God’s people exercising what we would today call “civil disobedience.” And the records of church history are filled with the names of martyrs who chose to

obey God rather than men. Let me close with one such example:

Dan 3:8-18 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. (9) They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! (10) You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. (11) And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.

(12) There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

(13) Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. (14)

Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? (15) Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

(16) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. (17) If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. (18) But if not, be it known to you, O king, that **we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.**”

May the Lord give us all His wisdom to sort out these matters which face us increasingly every single day.