**Government and the Christian**

Romans 13:1-7

The Rev. Jeff Stivason, Ph.D.

November 8, 2024

**Jeff:** All right. Well I have an 8:00 class this morning; I had to move it up from 9 to 8. So I told them that I’ll get there five minutes late and I’ll be here five minutes early; I’m just about on time. So that’s how this worked out.

So today I want to talk to you about Romans 13. And obviously I want to talk to you about Romans 13 because we’re post-election, and I think it’s a good time for us to just settle in and think about what Scripture has to say about civil government. This is probably the quintessential text on civil government with what the Bible has to say. Although it’s not the only text, it’s an important text. And so let’s turn to it now and we’ll read Romans 13:1-7. And so let me have you listen to the word of God. This is the infallible and inerrant word of God; it’s authoritative and binding for our lives, and so hear it.

*“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. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*

*“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, 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. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.*

*“For because of this you also pay taxes. For the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 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.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Brave Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** How about that!

**Ted Wood:** Good! Great! *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** All right. So we’ll just think about this by way of our outline today. We’re going to think about government’s power, government’s purpose, and government’s privilege. Now first of all I want us to think about an introduction, so let’s get started.

We have often heard this lately: Jesus is King. And the question that I want us to wrestle with is how do we understand that? I want to talk about what is known theologically as the essential Kingship of God and the mediatorial Kingship of God. We’re going to wrestle through those and think about what they mean. But we’re going to start at a higher level; we’re going to start a little higher above the clouds and ask: How should we understand this? And when I say “high above the clouds,” we’re going to take the 30,000-foot view and we’re going to start with Adam in the garden for just a minute, because I think it’s important for us to think about.

In fact, I’m going to say this to you. I think it’s important for us to think about Adam in the garden, Israel, and what the purpose of the theonomy was. And then what about Jesus?

Now I’m going to spend very little time thinking about Adam and thinking about Israel. But I want us to spend most of our time thinking about Romans 13. So again this is a very high-level way of looking at these things so that at least we can get the context in our minds.

So what about Adam’s purpose in the garden? Well he was to cultivate the garden. In other words, if you think about it like this, when you think about what Adam was supposed to do, he was supposed to do a number of things. He was also supposed to protect and guard the garden. But remember: God planted a garden east of Eden. He made man outside the garden and placed him in the garden.

Now placing him in the garden He gave him a task. And that task was to cultivate the garden so that the garden would spread over the face of the whole earth. In fact when you think about it, the imagery is actually very beautiful, because the garden was on the mountain of God. And the garden was said to flow down the mountain, over the face of the whole earth. So the garden was to be cultivated such that it cultivated the earth that was seemingly uncultivated.

Now that’s what Adam is to do. He is also put in a probationary situation. “If you resist from eating from the tree that is in the middle of the garden I’ll give you life. If you don’t resist then you will receive death.” And obviously Adam eats and receives death, and so his cultivation endeavors end pretty quickly.

Now what about Israel? Let’s think about Israel. This is Adam the first; what about Israel? You know, everybody who thinks about government obviously turns to Israel. Why? Because Israel is a theonomy. And everybody wants to mirror or mimic what’s happening in Israel.

Yet we ask the question: What’s going on in Israel? Well Israel is really supposed to mimic the first Adam’s failure and forecast the second Adam’s success.

Now when I say that he is to look back upon the failure of the first Adam, what do I mean? I mean that God gave them a land, the land of Israel. He created the people of Israel, His son outside of the garden. Remember, He created them in Egypt. He places them in the land, gives them a law, tells them “if you keep the law you’ll stay in the land. But if you don’t you’ll be exiled,” very much like the story of the first Adam. That’s the exact story line that we see happening in Israel.

Now here’s the real question for us. When we look at ancient Israel one of the things that we ask is: Is there a difference between the way that ancient Israel was to—and I’ll just use this word—evangelize here and the way we are to evangelize here? And I think the answer to that is yes, there is a difference.

And what was the difference? The difference was this: I think that Israel was functioning very much like a garden. In other words, they weren’t necessarily to send people out. But they were to cultivate Israel such that its borders extended and overflowed into the other nations.

And that’s what you see, for instance, in giving the land. And by the time you get to Solomon which is the very pinnacle of the Old Testament empire before the division comes and then the exiles to Assyria and Babylon happen, one of the things that you see by the time you get to Solomon is that the borders of Israel have extended even beyond the borders of David. And so Israel like a garden was blossoming and reaching out.

Now that’s different by the time you get to Christ. But before I go to Christ let me just ask. What are the questions that you might have up to that point? This is just my way of setting the context; I want to make sure that you at least understand the basics of what I’ve said.

**Ted:** What is a theonomy? I know what a theocracy is, but I don’t know what a theonomy is.

**Jeff:** Theonomy is God’s law. But I’m using “theonomy” and “theocracy” very similarly. That is, God is the King over the nation or God’s law rules. Theonomy would obviously be slightly different in its nuance of God’s law ruling or God’s Person ruling in a theocracy, but it would be very similar.

**Ted:** But then Solomon’s reign and Solomon’s territory was actually limited to a very small area.

**Jeff:** Oh, sure.

**Ted:** But I think about Eve and Adam. That was meant for the whole earth. Solomon’s promise is to the Promised Land which is not the whole earth. Now I know they said they would be a light to many nations. But this is a small territory.

**Jeff:** Yeah. The promises were all conditioned to the land. But that land was to extend and to be a blessing to the other lands, right?

**Ted:** But there is nothing in Scripture that says that basically it was to go beyond the Middle East, while our mission is to the whole world.

**Jeff:** Yeah. I think that the imagery is different. The nations in Isaiah 2 were to flow to it, right? I think the idea is that the four rivers flowed out of Eden; the garden flows like those rivers. The interesting thing is that as Israel is faithful to God in both the keeping of the law and the sacrificial system—and you can’t be faithful to the law without the sacrificial system;--they are a light to the nations and the nations flow to them. And as the nations flow to them the nations are believing nations; that’s the idea.

Okay. Now they’re going to fail, and that’s their appointment: Romans 5, Galatians 3? Is it 3? I was gonna say 3 but I second-guessed myself; I think it’s 3. Why the law? The law was given so that sin might be teased out, so that sin might be manifest. In other words, if I can put it like this, the law was given so that we could see our need for the promise.

All right. Now Christ is the second Adam. And the second Adam comes along and He takes dominion over the world. You know, you’ll hear a lot today that we’re men; we need to take dominion! Okay, I’ve got news for you: Technically speaking, only one of two men could have taken dominion. Adam the first had the opportunity to take dominion, or Adam the second had the opportunity to take dominion. Adam the second took dominion; you don’t take dominion. You live in the dominion that’s already been taken by the second Adam. And the question is: How faithfully do you live in that dominion?

This whole nonsense about “we have to take dominion” is supplanting the work of Christ, and it’s a shame. I’m sorry to say it’s bad theology, and you hear it a lot, especially among men.

I want you to know that there is a problem. There are men who I want to disassociate myself from; they are the group that says they will take dominion instead of acknowledging that it has been taken in Christ, and I think that’s a shame.

But anyway Christ took dominion, and I’ll just say there’s a double duty. Why? Because He not only had to keep the law perfectly, but He also had to be punished for Adam having failed to keep the law. So there was a double duty for Him in order to keep it and take dominion.

So that’s what the second Adam does. And when the second Adam does this, here’s the important thing. There are three crucial texts that we need to look at, three crucial texts that pertain to our topic.

The first one is Psalm 2. Now this is a Messianic Psalm; it’s prophetic in character. It’s about the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is what it says. It says a number of things. But it asks: *“Why do the nations rage?”* That’s the Psalmist. But then God speaks in verse 4:

*“He who sits in the heavens laughs;*

*The LORD holds them in derision.*

*Then He will speak to them in His wrath,*

*And terrify them in His fury, saying:”*

*Remember, this is God the Father speaking:*

*“As for Me, I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill.”*

Now who is the King? Well in the next set of verses we have the King speaking, and the King is the Son. Now listen to what it says.

*“I will tell of the decree:*

*The LORD said to Me:*

*‘You are My Son.’”*

This is Yahweh. We see this fulfilled in the New Testament at the baptism of Jesus. Remember, God the Father says:

*“You are My Son;*

*Today I have begotten You.”*

That’s exactly what comes next. Now here’s the important thing:

*“Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage,*

*And the ends of the earth Your possession.*

*You shall break them with a rod of iron,*

*And dash them in pieces like the potter’s vessel.”*

Now here we have God the Father saying to His Son, His mediatorial Son, “Ask of Me and I’ll give You the nations as Your inheritance.”

The next text is Daniel. In Daniel chapter 7 we see what is prophetic in character. In other words, this is going to happen but I’m going to deal with it now.

What’s going to happen? Well it says here that the Son of Man is going to go to the Ancient of Days, and that’s exactly what we see. Now the question is: What’s happening here? Is this a Second Coming text?

The answer to that is no; it’s not a Second Coming text. This is an Ascension text. This is the Lord Jesus Christ at His ascension going to the Father, the Ancient of Days.

Now what happens? Listen to what happens. *“I saw in the visions of the night. And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came One like the Son of Man. And He came to the Ancient of Days.”* He didn’t come to the earth; He came to the Ancient of Days. *“And was presented before Him.”*

Now listen to this. *“And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that should not be destroyed.”*

In other words, the prayer that was considered in Psalm 2 is now answered in Daniel 7:13 and 14. Jesus the Mediator asked for the nations. And here God the Father is giving Him the nations.

Now here’s the interesting thing. The interesting thing is that when you look back above verse 13, what do you see? You see an interesting thing. You see in verse 9 that here is the Ancient of Days taking His seat; a beautiful picture of the court.

But then this; look at verse 11: *“I looked, and then because of the sound of the great words that was speaking.”* Now the horn is the bad guy, remember? *“And as I looked the beast was killed and its body destroyed, and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away. But their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.”*

Now here’s the imagery. The image of the ungodly nations is the beast. And the beasts’ dominion is taken from them.

What happened? The cross happened. It’s taken from them and given to the Son of Man as He came before the Ancient of Days. The dominion was taken from them and given to the Son.

And so now go with me to the last text; it’s Matthew chapter 28. Now this is obviously before the Ascension. But I said that we’re looking at the prophetic aspect first. But here’s Jesus anticipating Daniel 7:13 and 14. And this is what He says to His disciples as He is ready to ascend into heaven.

*“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him they worshiped Him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them: ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

In other words, what is Jesus saying? “Dominion has been given to Me. Now go and disciple the nations.”

Now here’s the difference between what I was saying earlier about taking dominion or living in dominion. A lot of people kind of give the impression today that are kind of in the camp that says that we as men have to take dominion. They’re in the camp that acts as if these are the berserkers who are going into a foreign territory, and we are taking dominion.

But that’s not what the image of the New Testament provides for us. What the image of the New Testament is is this: Go into these nations and tell them that they now have a King that is better than their old king. He’s a godly King; He’s a merciful King; He’s a gracious King. Be ambassadors for the new King as you take dominion of the nations. That’s the image of Matthew 28.

Now my point to you is this. My point is that this is essentially what it means when we talk about Jesus as King. We’re going to flesh it out a little bit more, especially as we get into Romans 13. But I think we have to have this as sort of our backdrop for talking about civil government. Jesus is King of the nations. Dominion has been given to Him, and we can’t miss that.

Now that is not missed when the preaching of the gospel happens. In Thessalonica for instance they go in. Paul preaches in the synagogue for three months. And then there’s this great stir, and they go and tell the town clerk. They say, “Hey, do you know what’s happening here? This guy is preaching that there is another King, and His name is Jesus!” They get the implication, don’t they? The implication is that there is a new King in town, and He supplants Caesar.

Let me read this to you because you’re looking doubtfully at me; you look like you’re unbelieving. *(Laughter)* You’re not sure that what I’m saying is right.

*“They dragged Jason to the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men have turned the world upside down and have come here also! Jason has received them, and they are acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another King, Jesus.’”*

Now here’s the question that I just want us to briefly consider. What are we talking about when we talk about the Kingship of Jesus? Now this is an old dispute within Presbyterianism. Essential Kingship basically means that God is sovereign, that He is the sovereign King over all things; that’s essential Kingship.

Now I don’t deny that; I believe that. God is essentially King. But many want to stop at that point. What the mediatorial Kingship says is this. It does not mean that Jesus is the Mediator of the nations; that is not what the term “mediatorial Kingship” means. It means that as Mediator, as the mediatorial Son, in His office of Mediator, Jesus is actually now King of the nations.

It means what I said to you earlier: as Mediator in Psalms chapter 2, God the Father told the Son: *“Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations as Your inheritance.”*

Not as God; not as the ontological God seated in the heavenlies and sovereign over all things. No, this is the Son who takes on human flesh. The Father says to that mediatorial Son: “Ask of Me and I will give You the nations.”

And then we see it in Daniel 7, when in the accomplishment of all His redemptive work the Father gives Him the nations. And so Jesus says to us in Matthew 28, “The authority of all the nations has been given to Me; I am King. Go and disciple them.”

Now that means something. What does that mean? Psalm 2 actually tells us the implication of what that means. Now a lot of people don’t like this because they’re not sure what to do with it. Psalm 2 says this; now listen to this; He’s st4ill talking to the nations. Verse 10-12:

*“Now therefore, O kings, be wise;*

*Be warned, O rulers of the earth!*

*Serve the LORD with fear,*

*And rejoice with trembling.*

*Kiss the Son, lest He be angry*

*And you perish in the way,*

*For His wrath is quickly kindled.*

*Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.”*

In other words, here the Psalmist lines up, saying to the rulers of the world: “This Son who is going to ask Me for the nations is going to be given the nations. And so it behooves you, oh nations, to kiss the Son, lest He turn in wrath upon you.” That’s the idea; that’s the implication.

So what are the nations to do? The nations—all nations—are supposed to kiss the Son! They’re supposed to acknowledge that Jesus is their King! Now I think I’m just presenting to you what the Scriptures say.

Now if that’s the case, I’m just telling you that America has a systemic problem. And the systemic problem of America is not what you may think. The systemic problem of America is that it names the people as lord, and not Jesus. That’s the systemic problem that comes from our Constitution: we don’t name the Lord as King.

Now let me just hit the pause button and tell you that I’d rather live in this nation than any other nation in the world; I love it. I went to Belarus at one point and I came back. And the first thing I did was pop in a John Wayne movie. *(Laughter)* But our problem is the same problem as any other nation at this point; it doesn’t kiss the Son. I think one of the reasons that we have the problems we have in this country is that we have not kissed the Son.

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Jeff:** And so that is the backdrop for Romans 13. Okay, any questions or comments that you all have thus far?

**Ted:** And hence in my opinion the American Revolution was a terrible mistake.

**Jeff:** Listen! We all know that you are an Englishman for life.

**Ted:** It was a rebellion against the authorities that God had appointed, period. *(Sighs, whistles and laughter)*

**Jeff:** Whoa! Too many people are talking at once; I can’t hear.

**Brave Man:** One of the historical things I learned that they don’t teach in the schools is that on George Washington’s inaugural day, after his inaugural address he sent his whole cabinet down to that church that’s by the 9/11 memorial. There he dedicated the United States to God in that church.

**Jeff:** Yeah, I understand that. The only problem is that they should have put that in the founding documents of our nation.

**Brave Man:** I understand where you’re coming from there. But the Bill of Rights in the way that our Constitution was originally authored was with the understanding that God was the leader of all and that we should worship Him. They had the morals and ethics behind them. Benjamin Franklin once said that anybody that is running our government cannot do so without the strong rules and inevitable values of the Christian faith.

**Jeff:** I totally agree.

**Brave Man:** I think that while our nation was a nation under God and believed in the God of the Bible we experienced growth like no other nation had. But in modern times we have certainly separated ourselves, and people do certainly separate themselves from God, and that is why we’ve gotten ourselves into the position that we are in.

**Jeff:** So I agree with you that our founding fathers thought that the morality of the Bible was the best, and founded the morality of the nation on what they perceived from the Bible and brought that along. But they did not take the God of the Bible and bring Him into the Constitution; that’s the problem. What happened and what they wanted to do was to keep church and state separate. And the issue was not that they wanted to keep the influence of the church out of the state; they wanted to keep the influence of the state out of the church, because they didn’t want to go back to establishmentarianism. So what they did was, they established a nation that had a Biblical morality but didn’t have the God of that morality built into the founding documents. I think it was assumed by many of the founding fathers, but not all.

But t hen what happens is that when that moves away then you have our country basically clinging to natural law. And now you’ve probably all seen that quip of Joe Biden; remember when he was interviewing Clarence Thomas? He was saying that natural law is a thing of the past. So we’ve moved from sort of having a peripheral interest in the God of the Bible as sort of the founder of our ethics to natural law, which law is now rejected. And now we’re really in a post-modern era.

But you know, there were attempts. Interestingly the Reformed Presbyterian Church had an opportunity to talk to Lincoln and try to persuade him to make an amendment to the Constitution including in it the authority and Kingship of Christ, and he was actually considering it. But his cabinet came around and said, “Do not do this,” and so he didn’t press it.

But anyway, that’s the backdrop; let me press forward. Let’s talk about the government’s power. Let’s ask the question: Who is God? Now I want you to think about this. I’ve been telling you who God is; it’s the Son. But I want you to see it now.

It’s assumed in Romans chapter 9. Look at the text here; this is a great text. Verse 5: *“To them belong the patriarchs. And from their race according to the flesh is Christ who is God over all blessed forever. Amen.”*

Now I think that what we have to understand is that Paul is working from the perspective that Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity; He is God. And so when we get to Romans chapter 13 and it says: *“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God,”* he means not just God abstractly, not just God the triune God, but in particular he means Jesus Christ who is God over all, and more specifically than that who is God over all, Mediator of the nations, having dominion over them through Jesus Christ. I think that’s the idea that stands behind this.

Now there are four statements here that are important when we think about the power of government. First of all, *government is from God.* That’s the preposition that’s used. Verse 1 says that there is no authority except from God.

Now we’re going to talk about this a little bit more, so we’re going to put it off right now. But the question that we’re going to talk about is one of prescription or description. Now we’ll get back to that in just a minute. But first of all, government is from God; there is no authority except from God.

And then *government is instituted by God.* In other words, it says that those that exist have been instituted by God. So government is from God and it’s instituted by God.

Okay. The third statement is that *to resist government is to resist God:* verse 2. To resist government is to resist God. Why? Well because Jesus Christ, the mediatorial King over the nations because all nations have been given to Him; governments are supposed to bow the knee to Him, that is, to kiss the Son. And therefore government is the servant of the King. And so to resist the servant of the King is to resist God.

Now here’s the question that we have to ask. What happens when the king is not acting in a way that is commensurate with his own King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he demands something of us that is outside of the pale of Christian morality? What happens then?

You would think the answer is obvious. But the problem is that maybe you’re going to see a movie; I don’t know if you’re going to see “Bonhoeffer” or not. But the movie “Bonhoeffer” is probably going to deal with the German Christians. And the German Christian church appealed—I think wrongly—to Martin Luther. They appealed to a couple of statements that Martin Luther made when the peasant revolt came about and they said, “We can’t resist the government. Resisting government is resisting God, and we must do what the government says no matter what.” And so the German Christians actually went along with the Nazi government because they said that to resist government is to resist God.

Now we all know,--or at least I hope we know,--that if the government asks us to do something that is contrary to God’s law we must resist; it is our duty to resist.

**Brave Man:** Like in the case of England, right?

**Ted:** Not at all! *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** No, not at all! We are *not* getting into that conversation today! *(Laughter)* You can go over and spend all the time you want over in England, Ted. *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** What time period are you speaking of? *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Ah you know, that’s cheating, Ted. *(Laughter)*

**Brave Man:** That’s Pittsburghese. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** That’s right. You take that back home the next time you go over there! *(Laughter)* *We must obey government authorities for conscience’s sake.* In other words, our consciences instruct us in this. Our consciences act according to the law of God. And as the law of God says, government is a servant of God and therefore we must obey the servant of God.

But—and here’s the but!—if the servant of God is demanding something that God does not Himself demand, it is incumbent upon us to disobey. And we see this in Scripture. Remember that Darius says, “No longer are you allowed to pray.” And Daniel goes and he prays. Darius said, “Bow to the 90-foot statue.”

**Don Maurer:** Nebuchadnezzar said, “Bow to the 90-foot statue.”

**Jeff:** Where is Darius in all this?

**John Gratner:** Daniel 6.

**Ted:** They all look the same. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Nebuchadnezzar says, “Bow down to the statue.” Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego say, “We’re not gonna do that.” Anyway Darius is at the lion’s den and Daniel is an official. I’ll just say a little more about this, but go ahead.

**Jordan Obaker:** I’m curious as to how far we extrapolate not resisting government unless they are telling us to disobey God. I think someone could make the argument in this country, let’s just say, that Kamala won the election.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Jordan:** If I’m paying taxes to the government, she’s in the government. She’s using those taxes for—

**Ted:** Ungodly uses.

**Jordan:** Abortion, whatever. I’m not going to pay my taxes.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Jordan:** Can you as a Christian go that far? Where do you draw the line as far as resisting the government? Do you put yourself up as judge as to what is and is not good to do?

**Jeff:** Yes. I think verse 7 applies to that question. He says about the Roman government which is using their taxes for both godly and ungodly purposes: “Pay your taxes.” Why? Because this is what the government authority is asking of you. You are responsible to pay those taxes to a legitimate authority. But it’s their responsibility to make use of those in a godly way, in the service of God. That becomes not your problem at that point.

Now it is our problem, but you know what I mean. I can’t think of the word right now, but that becomes a second-level issue. You have fulfilled your obligation to the authority. Now it’s their obligation to fulfill and to use those means wisely and in a godly way.

**Jordan:** So let me give another example. I’m not saying I agree with this; I’m just using it.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Jordan:** I think I read recently about Geneva College’s response back to the government in relation to their need to provide abortion as part of their health care.

**Jeff:** Yes. Right.

**Jordan:** I mean, could you use the same argument to say, “Well we can provide it, but we don’t encourage any of our employees to take that stand.”

**Jeff:** So now what you have is that we pay our taxes. Now the government comes back and says, “Now you are obligated. In whatever insurance you provide for your employees you are obligated to insure that they have the ability to have an abortion that is from the insurance supplied by you.” And at that point they’re asking you to become responsible.

At that point Geneva College said, “no, no. We would rather that you not use our tax money to fund abortion. But that’s on you before God; we paid our taxes. Now you’re asking us to become like you and we’re not going to do that.” So that’s where they say no; we’re not going to do that. Does that help?

**Jordan:** Yes, I think that helps. I just see a slippery slope.

**Jeff:** It is a slippery slope. I think this is why we’re going to get into this. Let me just say this: This is why we’re going to get into is Romans 13 a prescription for government, or is it a description? In other words, is this a prescription? Does that mean that this text can be used say that we are allowed to revolt and rebel? *(Laughter)* This is what people do. They look at this and they say, here is a prescription for civil government. And my government is not matching up to the prescription. And now therefore I legitimately have Biblical reasons to rebel against the existing government that’s living like you described.

Now here’s my problem with that: I think it is a prescription. I think that if you look at things like theories of what government is to do—and we’ll take a look at them;--you also have to go back to the beginning verse and look at what it says. It says: *“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God.”* Now listen to this: *“And those that exist have been instituted by God.”*

In other words this takes it out of the realm of prescription and puts it into the realm of description. In other words the Roman government, with Nero as its head at this point, is in view here. Nero is over a legitimate authority established by God. It’s instituted by God and he’s My servant. Yes?

**Matt Reichart:** So we know there is no perfect system until Jesus Christ reigns over the earth. That will be for another day, but in our system the ultimate authority is through the people. This is a bold statement, but how can you call yourself a Christian and support abortion which is murder? So how can we as a church (support this?) There are so many churches which are pro-death. And so ultimately the responsibility is our responsibility as believers, even in our homes. You think about all the different issues of LGBT and the mutilation of our kids’ bodies. So it comes back to us as the family and as the church.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Matt:** If we were to influence our whole society, if we really were a Christian nation where every kid was honoring Jesus Christ, we would have ultimate authority, so that at any time we could call up the archbishop and say that we’ll get this lady out of here.

**Jeff:** Yes, I understand; let me do this. If you want to think about government and church from an Old Testament perspective, think about it like this. The government from a New Testament perspective is like the king in the Old Testament. And the church is the prophetic voice in the Old Testament. It’s like David the king being told by Nathan the prophet: “You are that man!” You know that whole scenario. And so we are the prophetic voice today that speaks into the life of the king. That would be one image that we ought to think about.

The question is this, and Matt, you’re right. The prophetic voice is pretty weak today, speaking into the king’s life. But I’ll tell you what else is weak. What else is weak is that we think about the king. And then we think about lesser magistrates. And the doctrine of lesser magistrates was alive in the Reformation, but it’s lost today.

And the point of lesser magistrates is this: When the king fails to do his job correctly and faithfully before God, lesser magistrates—people below him—have to hold him accountable.

So do you remember back in 2015? Do you remember the woman in Kentucky who was the county clerk? When they came to her and said, “We want a marriage license for LGBTQ marriage,” and she said, “I’m not issuing it.” They put her in jail. She was a lesser magistrate doing her job rightly.

**Matt:** Yes.

**Jeff:** She was actually holding the king accountable at that point. We do not have that today. What we have today is this. For instance, do you remember during the riots? I can remember during the riots in—

**Don:** 2020?

**Jeff:** 2020. Do you remember a family? I think they were in Missouri. They were made to stay home and they lived in a big house and the whole crowd came through, and they just went out and stood with their guns. When the police were told, “Go take their guns,” the police should have said, “We’re not gonna do that. We’re lesser magistrates upholding the law. It is lawful for them to have them; we’re not taking them.” Lesser magistrates need to be willing to put their necks on the chopping block when the king doesn’t do his work faithfully and properly.

But here’s the thing. How many super voters are there out there who vote in lesser elections? Not many, right? But my point is that if we’re going to take this seriously as a nation to affect the king, we need to be taking elections more seriously when it comes to lesser elections; that’s just all there is to it. We need to know who is getting these lesser magistrate positions in order for us to put strong men in there that can undergird this sort of thing. I think that’s where we are.

But I think what we’re dealing with here is that we’re dealing with both prescription and description when it comes to civil government. Let me say this to you. What’s the prescriptive element? The prescriptive element is that the government rewards the good and punishes evil.

You know, that’s the simplest description of responsibility that I can find when it comes to anyone’s responsibility! I mean, think about this! When you think about civil government it comes up again in 1 Peter chapter 2. And the same thing is reiterated, except that we’re told there that the king is not doing what is good; he’s calling good evil and evil good. And yet it’s still the responsibility of the Christian to obey insofar as he’s able. And they are obeying to their own hurt; remember, they were exiled.

So the government’s job as the servant of God is to reward good and punish evil. Our problem today is that we are in a situation where good is evil and evil is good.

For instance, I don’t know about you. But when I think about abortion, and it’s being called “reproductive care.” I think at that point that we are calling evil good.

**Brave Men:** Yes, of course.

**Jeff:** This is a statement that mirrors something that comes from my own church tradition, but I think it’s helpful here. *“Pursue rulership; fear God; love the truth in justice; hate evil, and be publicly committed to Scriptural principles of civil government.”* I think the Scriptural principles of civil government are in Romans 13 and Psalm 2: Kiss the Son.

But what I want you to know is this: Here we have “love truth and justice.” That is, call good good and reward it, and hate evil. And that is, punish evil.

But before that we have “Fear God.” Now listen; I want to talk to you point blank about this. I realize that I’ve got to go here. But I’m going to talk to you really quickly about this.

We have a lot of discussion about Donald Trump in this country. And I’ll say this to you: I don’t believe that Donald Trump is a believer, okay? But I think that if you look at Donald Trump, he fears God more than the opposition. And what I mean by that is not a filial fear; I mean a servile fear.

He functions in a pagan-like way, right? He fears God as a servant fears God, as a pagan fears God.

I have family and friends who are bikers, who are not believers. You walk into the house and they have a shrine to Jesus. That’s servile fear. They don’t live their lives according to the precepts of Jesus, but they fear Him; that’s a kind of fear.

And the question that I have is this: What is required of our leaders? I would say this. I would say that you don’t have to be born again in order to recognize and reward good and punish evil. I would say that you have to fear God and have some recognition of good and evil as a result.

So on that note I’m going to simply say that the state is not the church and we are not calling ministers to serve. We’re calling servants of God to recognize good and punish evil; that’s what we’re about.

Let me ask you a question. If somebody breaks into your house tonight, are you going to call 911 and say, “Now when you send out the police I want you to send the most godly men you can send out here; I’ll have to check his credentials?” No, you’re going to say, “Send me the police. Send me somebody who is going to uphold good and punish evil.” That’s what we’re dealing with in the arena of the civil magistrate.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Ted raises his hand.

**Jeff:** All right; you’ve taken enough of my time. *(Laughter)*

**Brave Man:** Can you go to that last slide real quick?

**Ted:** Can you continue this next Friday?

**Jeff:** Maybe we can’t. *(Laughter)*

**Brave Men:** Aw!

**Jeff:** Okay, we’ll go one more time.

**Ted:** We’ll do it tomorrow. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** All right, let’s pray. Father, thank You for this day and for the blessing of life in Christ and our time together. Lord, bless us as a nation. Lord, call us to Yourself and enable us to repent. Lord, grant that to us. We pray that we might look to you and that Your face might shine upon us, for we ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*