
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

One of the fundamental principles underlying the entire Bible is that God almighty – the creator of the heavens and the earth – is the ruler and judge of all the earth. Despite the fact that this world abounds with injustices, the Bible never once concludes that events or situations are beyond God's sovereign and providential care. Since God is a just and righteous God who is faithful to his promises, believers can rest assured that justice will ultimately be accomplished according to the timetable of God's plan. These truths are stated, implied and assumed throughout the entire Bible. The Book of Hebrews sums up the biblical perspective concerning God's ultimate judgment of the world:

Nothing in all of creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:13 NIV).

God is the creator, ruler and judge of all the earth. Nothing can be hidden from his sight; and, it is to him that we must each, as individuals, one day give account. This is a sobering truth that should bring comfort to all that love truth and long for justice. But it should also be a truth that motivates us to live our lives in godly reverence towards God and our fellowman.

Biblically, the fundamental principle upon which justice is based is the truth that God created man in his own image and likeness in order for man to rule over the earth in a godlike manner on God's behalf (Gen. 1:26-27). Man is, therefore, first and

foremost responsible to God his creator. In addition, since each human being is made in the image of God every person is deserving of the dignity, respect and honor associated with that status. In fact, it is precisely on the basis of man being created in God's image that the death penalty was first instituted for murder and all biblical justice follows from that same principle (Gen. 9:6). When man's relationship with God and his fellowman breaks down chaos results and ultimately God's final judgment is demanded in order to restore proper justice and order to God's creation (Rom. 1:18-2:11).

Though God has ordained that there be governing authorities in this life to suppress and punish evil as well as to provide for the common good of society, it is obvious that this is a short-term and imperfect measure until the time of God's final judgment of the world. Jesus, in fact, taught that according to the Old Testament there *must* be a future resurrection and a final judgment of the world in order for God's promises to come true and for his justice to ultimately prevail (Luke 20:34-38). This can be seen in many OT verses such as the following:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing, whether it is good or bad (Eccl. 12:13-14).

All of the NT writers lived their lives in the light of this great truth of the ultimate judgment and justice of God. As Paul says:

I admit that I worship the God of our Fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man (Acts 24:14-16; cf. Dan. 12:2; John 5:).

Even as a Christian believer, saved by God's grace, Paul knew that,

... we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (II Cor. 5:10).

In fact, it was plain to Paul that a Christian believer could actually live his life in a way so irresponsible that at their final judgment they would be,

saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (I Cor. 3:15).

The logic of this truth is carried a significant step further by the apostle Peter:

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And,

“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good (I Peter 4:17-19).

If even believers who have been justified by God's grace are still subject to judgment, where then does that leave the ungodly? The answer is that God's justice will certainly prevail at the final judgment; therefore, God's people should commit themselves to fulfilling God's purposes – despite sufferings - in full awareness of this truth.

Manifestly, injustices in this world abound; but Christian believers should not allow themselves to be consumed by these injustices. Instead, as citizens of God's heavenly kingdom - which will one day come upon earth in all its glory - we should devote ourselves to proclaiming God's saving justice in Christ to the world. For as the Bible clearly teaches, the root problem of mankind is not injustice brought about because of ethnic race, nationalism, economic in-equalities or even differing religious affiliations. Instead, the root problem of mankind is sin and injustices are the fruit of that. The only lasting solution is God's redemptive work in Christ. On the cross, God's saving justice has been revealed on behalf of all mankind. As Paul states in his Letter to the Romans,

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:21-26).

Face to face with the righteous standard of God's law we all fall short. Nevertheless, God has acted in Christ to bring about man's redemption. For those who accept Christ, judgment still awaits; but it is not a judgment unto condemnation. In Christ, we have passed from death to life and the fear of condemnation has been extinguished (John 5:24; Rom. 5:1-11; 8:1-2)). In its place should be a supreme confidence that God's justice will be done. For the day is surely coming when God's kingdom will come and God's will, will be done, “on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9-10).

Richie Temple

Christian Citizenship:

Romans 13

By Chuck LaMattina
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The Bible teaches us that Christians are not a part of this world, even though we live in it. In his high priestly prayer, in John 17, Jesus Christ prayed for all who would believe in him saying, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world (vs. 16)." And his prayer request for us was not that we would be taken out of this world but that God would keep us "from the evil one (vs. 15)."

In saying that we are not of this world Jesus meant that we are not bound to this life alone. We are not like the unbeliever, who is a one dimensional earth dweller, whose wisdom is faulty, and whose hopes rest only in what he or she can see, hear, smell, taste or touch, in this lifetime. As Christians we have the very life of God within us in the gift of the Spirit. We have available to us divine wisdom and strength for daily living. And we have a sure and certain hope of eternal life and glory in the coming kingdom of God. Philippians 3:20 says,

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ [All scripture is cited from the NKJV].

When Christ returns he will establish the kingdom of heaven, of which we are citizens, on this earth. There is a New World order coming!

Yet, even though we are not **of** this world, at this moment in time, we still live **in** it. And since we do there is a tension that comes into our lives concerning how to live as citizens of heaven, even while we are now citizens of some earthly government. In fact this was a problem that Christ faced when he ministered in Israel. At that time, most Israeli's chafed under the dominion of Roman rule. Many hoped to overthrow Rome and restore the Davidic kingdom.

In the light of this a delegation of Pharisees and Herodians (the religious and political elite of the day) went to Jesus to try and trap him in a controversial question. The question recorded in Matthew 22:17 was this:

"Tell us, therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

Their question was devilishly clever! If Christ answered, "No." he would have been branded an insurrectionist – a rebel against Rome. If he answered "Yes." He would have been seen by many as an enemy of God's people. Christ's enemies were sure they had him, but he had them instead.

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. And he said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (vss. 18-21)

Christ's answer was brilliant and full of divine wisdom. With a single sentence our Lord made clear the power and rights of human governments, while at the same time limiting its power under God. There is a proper domain and function for civil government. But it must be seen in the light of the overall government of God.

Romans 13 explains to us how we as Christians are to relate to the worldly governments in which we find ourselves. The 13th chapter of Romans has been controversial to say the least. It has been used to prop up evil governments, and as a result attempts have been made to make the "governing authorities" that Paul writes of either church authorities or angelic powers. This has led to abuses as well! The truth is that the "governing authorities" dealt with in Romans 13 are the authorities of civil governments. As we study this section of God's Word in a biblically balanced way, we will receive great spiritual profit. Let's begin:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgement on themselves. (Romans 13:1, 2)

Christians are to be subject to the civil government in which they may find themselves, for

there is no right to rule except from God. In other words, government is not just a man-made institution; the idea of human government and authority comes from God. Civil governments are a means ordained by God for the right regulation of human affairs. Just as parents are to exercise authority in the home, and church leaders in the church, so civil governments are to exercise authority in public, community life.

Now, this is not to imply that all forms of government are intrinsically good, or that every government does the will of God in the best sense. But in an ultimate sense, the government's authority to rule comes from God. Psalm 62:11 says, "Power belongs to God" – Amen! All power does. Therefore no one can have any power to rule at all without God's ordaining of it, or permitting of it.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar learned this the hard way. He thought that he ruled his vast empire because of his own greatness, but finally he was driven to his senses and he learned,

"That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."
(Daniel 4:32)

We know also from Luke 4 that Satan can give kingdoms and power to those who serve him. Yet, even Satan's authority is subject to God's ruling and overruling. For example, in John 19, Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and Pilate says to Jesus,

"Do you not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"
Jesus answered and said,

"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above."
(vss. 10, 11)

The reason Christ answered Pilate as he did was his strong and accurate belief in God's sovereign rule in the affairs of men. Nothing exists apart from God's will. All things, ultimately trace their being back to God, including the power to govern.

Again, this does not mean that all governments are intrinsically good, or that every official does God's will in the best sense. God is not responsible for the sins of governments or civil officials any more than He is responsible for our

sins. But the right of governments to rule and to bring order and stability to public life is the will of God. In the best sense government is ordained of God for the benefit of humanity, for our common good. And since this is true, we as believers in Christ should be model citizens following the laws of the land and praying for our local, state, provincial, and national leaders. In fact this is stated elsewhere in the New Testament with great clarity.

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak evil against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men – as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:11-17).

And not only should we submit to the laws of our country, we should be praying for our leaders. In 1 Timothy 2, the apostle Paul writes,

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

For 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. (vss. 1-4)

Notice that God's Word doesn't say, "Pray for the leaders you like" or even, "Pray for your leaders except those who are incompetent, or bad." No! In fact if we feel that our rulers are ungodly, this should

cause us to pray for them even more fervently! This principal of praying for our civil authorities is seen even in the Old Testament. When Israel was held in captivity in Babylon God said,

“Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.” (Jer. 29:7)

Now, let’s return to Romans 13 and look at the God-given tasks of good government.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. (vss. 3, 4)

From these two verses (as well as from 1 Peter 2:14) the most basic role of civil government is to support and promote and praise what is good and right. The government should help promote good civil virtues, they should keep the peace, and promote the common welfare of its citizens. Plus the civil authorities are to punish those who engage in evil acts against the community. The use of force to punish evil doers, or criminals is a God-given right. In a sense, the wrath of the state against evil, is a foretaste of God’s ultimate wrath against evil at the final judgement. Government is to be an instrument of justice that promotes what is good, protects the innocent, and punishes criminals.

The whole point here in Romans 13 is that God’s ideal for civil government is that it is to bring some form of harmony and peace and order to life. The state however, has no authority from God to terrorize or manipulate its people. It has no right to overturn longstanding moral standards and values. It has no right to change or overturn honorable institutions like marriage and the family. The state has no God-given right to declare what is moral. It only has the right to uphold the moral standards of God that are common to all. The state does not even have the ability, or the God-given right to reform evil doers. It only has the authority to punish them.

Therefore as long as the governing authorities exercises their power in keeping with God’s intent, they are God’s servants for the common good of society. If however the state runs counter to what is good and right you and I have the right and the moral obligation to disobey. Let me say this as clearly as I can – we as Christians are to submit to all civil law, except where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to the will of God.

For example, when Israel was in slavery in Egypt, the Bible says that the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, and they became very mighty (Exodus 1). But a new Pharaoh arrived on the scene who did not know the history of Joseph and Israel. So in an attempt to diminish Israel’s numbers and keep control, he afflicted them with heavy labor. But Israel grew and flourished. Finally, Pharaoh ordered the Jewish midwives to kill all the Jewish boys who were born. It was his version of planned population control! But Exodus 1:17 says,

But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive.

Another example is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Daniel 3. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered everyone to fall down and worship his golden image, or be thrown in a fiery furnace. The three young men refused to obey the king even in the face of death. The same was true for Daniel. King Darius made a decree that for 30 days no petition or prayer could be made to any god, or man except to the king himself. Daniel disobeyed and kept his prayer time with God, and God delivered him from the lion’s den.

In the New Testament, in the book of Acts, chapter 4, Peter and John heal a man who had been crippled since his birth, and begin to preach Christ to the people. As news of this reaches the religious leaders in Jerusalem they have Peter and John arrested, and they threaten them with punishment should they continue to preach in Jesus’ name. Here’s their response:

But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (vss. 18-20)

It is extremely important to understand that in each case of disobedience given as examples here, the purpose of these heroic refusals to obey the governing authorities, was not to just simply defy the government, but to demonstrate their submission to the higher laws of God! As Christians we have a divine right and a moral obligation to speak out against and oppose what is morally wrong, and to do what is right in order to correct what is wrong. Yet, the point remains that in general, we are to be good citizens and help support the government for the good it can do.

Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:5-7)

By obeying the laws of the land we stay out of trouble, keep our conscience clear before God, and keep the doors open for the gospel of Christ. And yes, we should pay our taxes! If you have the right to oppose taxes before they become law, or if you have the right to repeal unfair taxes, then by all means do so. But you have no right to cheat on your taxes. And remember to give honor and respect to those in authority that deserve that respect because of their office. A government that does not have the respect of its people is doomed to impotence and it will ultimately collapse.

Loyalty and honor and respect for those in authority have more than sentimental value. If there is no respect for those who ought to receive respect like parents, teachers, judges, legislators, church leaders and so on, the public welfare stands in jeopardy! Our society today would not be as much of the jungle that it is if proper respect for authority was taught to our children. All of us must learn to respect those who are in authority whether it is in the home, the church, or the government.

It may be difficult to feel respect for officials whose standards or actions we do not support. But it will always be difficult to secure worthy leaders unless the community is at least prepared to regard those in government with the

respect to which they are entitled. If we teach our children the truth about honoring those in authority, they will come to understand that they themselves must strive to be worthy should they desire to hold positions of authority in the home and church or in government.

Finally, what Paul wrote in Romans 13 about our duty to the governing authorities of this world is only temporary! In verse 12 he says, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." What day? The day of Christ's return and the establishment of the kingdom of God! That great day draws closer with each new morning. On that day Jesus Christ will be King of kings and Lord of lords, and believers will be in public office. That's right! We will help administer the justice and peace of the kingdom of God.

In the meantime our primary task as the church is not politics, but preaching the good news concerning Christ and the kingdom of God. To become obsessed with political success or failures, at the expense of bringing people to faith in Christ, is as foolish as a skilled heart surgeon abandoning his profession to become a make up artist, spending time making people look better, rather than saving lives. Only changed people change society. In the realm of civil authorities, its not so much that we need better institutions, as we need better men and women in those institutions. If we show ourselves as the salt and light of the world that we are, we can bring glory to God and good to His people.

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Weekly Thoughts:
Biblical Principles in our Everyday
Lives

By Adam Kleczkowski,
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[From our Web-site at: www.unity-of-spirit.org]

Romans 10:9-10 states the foundational verse for our Christian lives:

[9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

When we proclaimed that Jesus is our Lord for the first time, we all had some preconceptions of what that really means. Very often, however, it is not exactly what God has planned for us. As He slowly starts working in our lives, we discover that things not always work the way we planned. We then usually start pushing it 'our own way' and become first surprised then annoyed when it does not work. As a result we start blaming God, other people and ourselves.

The Bible, however, has a simple answer to it. When you proclaim Jesus as a Lord of your life, you mean exactly what you say: **He is now the Lord of your life**. In other words, He can do with your life whatever suits Him. And this is not what you necessarily planned or hoped for - however wonderful your plan and ideas might sound! Let us look at the example of Joseph.

GE 37:2 This is the account of Jacob.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

GE 37:3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. [4] When

his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

God in fact had a wonderful plan for Joseph's life. He also showed Joseph a glimpse of his wonderful future.

GE 37:5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. [6] He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: [7] We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

GE 37:8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

GE 37:9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

GE 37:10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" [11] His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

However, Joseph was not yet ready to take on such a privilege and the associated responsibility - he needed 20 more years to understand that it was not he himself who was going to shape his own success. He needed to learn - painfully - that it is God who was in control of his life. Then - and only then - he was able to confess the following truths:

*GE 45:4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! [5] And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that **God sent me** ahead of you. [6] For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five*

*years there will not be plowing and reaping. [7] But **God sent** me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*

*GE 45:8 "So then, **it was not you who sent me here, but God.** He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. [9] Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: **God has made me** lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.*

Think about this: if there was a better 'self-made-man', a 'prince-from-rags' story. Joseph was smart, intelligent, not afraid of making quick decisions and very consequent in work, diligent and hard working. **Yet, in these 6 verses he uses God's name four times, and attributes everything he has ever achieved to God.**

Adam Kleczkowski, Cambridge, March 19, 1999

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Have you ever been prosecuted unjustly? Has anybody ever accused you of something you haven't done? Have you been thrown to jail without any reason? Have you ever lost your family, your friends? Has anybody close to you wronged you? Have you been left to die by your closest friends? Have you done some good to somebody yet this person never helped you? Have you been forgotten?

If any or all of these happened to you, would you still say, 'the LORD is with me'? Yet, all of these happened to Joseph. He was betrayed and left to die by his own brothers, then sold to Egypt. He did not see his family and friends for more than 20 years. He subsequently was betrayed again, accused unjustly and thrown into an Egyptian jail. Then, somebody he had helped, forgotten completely to repay the debt. Yet, in the passages that describe his fate in Egypt (Gen. 39), three times it is said 'The LORD was with him' (verses: 3, 21, 23). How could this be? When we are blessed in our lives, we usually thank God for all He has done for us. It is, however, not easy to thank God if things do not work in our lives. Would you say with Habakkuk:

HAB 3:17-18 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,

though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. ?

Yet, this is exactly what we are told to do:

*RO 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. [3] Not only so, but **we also rejoice in our sufferings**, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; [4] perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

Think of this, **we have peace with God !**

Therefore, we can rejoice – even in the midst of sufferings:

PHP 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! [5] Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. [6] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [7] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Adam Kleczkowski, Cambridge, March 30, 1999.

[Adam Kleczkowski is from Krakow, Poland. He currently lives and works in Cambridge, England together with his wife Marta and their three (soon to be four) children. Adam also designed and administers our web-site which we invite you to visit at: www.unity-of-spirit.org]

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Notes & Quotes on the Bible

Biblical Justice in the Light of the Biblical World-view

The Biblical World-view

In order to understand the biblical concept of justice we must first understand the biblical world-view and the corresponding shared assumptions held by all of the biblical writers from Genesis to Revelation. In Biblical thinking there are certain fundamental principles that are agreed upon by all the biblical writers and, therefore, do not need to be continually explained - they are simply “givens” that are assumed to be true. All of these principles are established in the Old Testament – beginning with the creation account in Genesis - and then confirmed and expanded upon in the rest of the scriptures. Amongst the most important of these are the following:

- (1). God almighty, the creator of the heavens and the earth, is sovereign over all and is the ultimate judge of all the earth (Gen. 1ff; Ps. 103:19; etc.).
- (2). Mankind, created in the image of God, is responsible to God for his conduct in this life: both in relationship to God as well as in his relationship with his fellowman (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:4-6; etc.).
- (3). God’s purposes will be accomplished and his justice will prevail (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-14; Rev. 11:15-18; etc.).

It is these fundamental principles of biblical theology that must be understood in order to properly understand many biblical sections. Biblical writers spoke from certain assumptions dependant on this worldview that was based on God’s revelation as recorded in the Old Testament scriptures. No biblical writer would have ever questioned God’s sovereignty and his ability to accomplish his purposes; nor at the same time, would they have ever questioned man’s responsibility for his own actions before God. In contrast to Greek philosophy, or later Western ways of thinking, from the biblical perspective these principles – God’s sovereign power and man’s responsibility - simply did not conflict.

In addition to these fundamental principles of a biblical worldview, biblical statements must be understood in accordance with how biblical writers thought and spoke. Statements of truth in the Bible are often phrased – according to Semitic custom - in the language of absolutes or overstatement. This leaves it to the readers or hearers to work out the specific “qualifications” of these statements in their own situations. The New Testament scholar George B. Caird emphasized this in his book *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*:

Hyperbole or overstatement is a figure of speech common to all languages. But among the Semitic peoples its frequent use arises out of a habitual cast of mind, which I have called absoluteness - a tendency to think in extremes without qualification, in black and white without intervening shades of gray ... It is characteristic of Semitic style to express ideas absolutely and to leave the listener to fill in for himself the implicit qualifications. [p. 110, 57]

Readers of the biblical documents must come to grips with this biblical use of language and with the biblical worldview that forms its background. When we read scriptures we must learn to think as the biblical writers thought; otherwise, we will often misinterpret many passages because we are reading from a different world-view or else we do not understand the biblical style of language in which ideas are expressed absolutely without explaining the qualifications. As we shall see, reading from such a biblical perspective is absolutely essential to understand passages dealing with biblical justice such as Matthew 5-7 or Romans 13:1-7

Biblical Justice in the Old Testament

The biblical basis for justice is set forth in the Book of Genesis. God created man in his own image so that man could live in fellowship with God and rule over the earth in a god-like manner on God’s behalf (Gen. 1:26-27). Man is, therefore, first and foremost responsible to God the creator. Secondly, he is responsible to treat his fellowman in a manner worthy of the dignity, honor and respect that being created in God’s image demands. Biblical justice proceeds from this basis (Gen. 9:4-7). The Old Testament Mosaic Law was given in the Book of Exodus to promote and ensure that these two principles were upheld in the life of the nation of Israel (Ex. 18-24; etc.). This is why Jesus could sum

up the Mosaic Law in the two great commandments of loving God and loving one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:34-40). In short, the Mosaic Law, including the Ten Commandments, was an application of these two great truths of loving God and loving one's neighbor – that were implicit in Genesis 1-2 - to the specific situation and historical circumstances of the nation of Israel.

Though many people think that the Old Testament principle of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” is the only Old Testament standard for justice, there is a lot more to this subject than that. The Old Testament standard of an eye for eye and tooth for a tooth was meant to *limit* the excesses of personal retaliation common in ancient cultures and which often lead to blood feuds. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was a principle of fairness upon which justice could be based. It was normally not carried out in a literal manner; instead as the context in which it was originally set forth shows, monetary compensation or other forms of compensation were often used instead:

If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely [or, “has a miscarriage”], but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, bruise for bruise.

If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth (cp. Ex. 21:23-27).

As with any code of Law, the Old Testament Mosaic Law set forth principles of justice – based on the two great commandments and embodied in the ten commandments especially – that normally had to be interpreted and applied by the judges of that era in the light of specific situations. Though there were strict standards for fairness, mercy and various means for repentance and forgiveness were also built into the system. As the situations of the Old Testament Israelites changed – i.e., first under judges, then under kings, in exile, and return from

exile – the application of the Mosaic Law had to be modified according to the new and different circumstances. Though the principles of truth continued to be the same, new situations called for new applications of these same truths. However, in all cases, whether under their own judges or kings, or else under foreign rulers, the Israelites were instructed to honor, reverence and obey their rulers. For in Israelitic thought,

... the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes ... (Dan. 4:17).

Only when obedience to these rulers conflicted with obedience to God himself was it their right and duty to disobey.

Biblical Justice in the New Testament

The New Testament's teaching about justice and the role of governing authorities follows directly in line with that of the Old Testament. Though the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew 5-7 is often thought to be a new Law of Christ which abrogates or replaces the Mosaic Law, this is certainly not correct. In truth, Jesus' statements simply interpret the principles of the Mosaic Law in the light of the first-principles of God's original intent for mankind as recorded in Genesis 1-2. The Mosaic Law contains the original truth of God as set forth in Genesis 1-2 but it was given in a way that applied to Israel's specific situation; therefore, some of its provisions were given due to Israel's specific circumstances or else because of the hardness of their hearts. However, when correctly understood and applied, the Old Testament Law – together with the Prophets - set forth God's original will beautifully (e.g. Hosea 6:6). It was this *true intent* of the Law that Jesus was setting forth in the Sermon on the Mount and which he demonstrated in his own life. This true intent is encapsulated in the two great commandments of loving God and loving one's fellowman – principles that are the underlying basis for godly living throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In fact, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus summed-up his entire ethical teaching with the simple and well-known phrase:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 7:12).

It is particularly important that the language of the Sermon on the Mount be understood in its true Semitic light. Its well-known statements are set forth one after another in the language of overstatement and often with hyperbole. In this section Jesus is teaching and illustrating principles of truth that were already embedded in the Old Testament Law and Prophets but which had been misinterpreted or misapplied – often due the oral “tradition of the elders” that had been built up around the OT Law by the Pharisees (e.g. Matt. 15). Jesus’ well-known statements such as “do not resist evil”, “judge not” and “love your enemies” were *not* meant to be understood as absolutes without any qualifications. Otherwise, this would contradict other biblical statements and principles - even in the Sermon on the Mount itself. Instead, such statements were meant to correct abuses of Old Testament principles of justice and restore the original intent of God’s created order to the interpretation and application of the principles of the Mosaic Law. In short, Jesus’ teaching was made in the light of principles that were already deeply embedded in the Old Testament and no one would have thought that they meant that other provisions in the Old Testament for the just administration of law and justice should be abrogated.

It is not surprising then to see the apostle Paul in Romans 12 expound the same types of personal ethics as Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and then to immediately follow it up in Romans 13 with an exposition about the proper role of governing authorities who act as God’s agents in the promotion of justice. Certainly, the situation of the Christian believer after Pentecost is different than that of the believer before Pentecost. With Christ’s life, death and resurrection the new covenant era of salvation has begun; therefore, the old covenant shadow of animal sacrifices, Sabbaths, religious festivals, etc. has passed (Col. 2:16-17). Christians are now a part of God’s new creation in Christ and they should not get caught up in petty arguments, lawsuits, etc. - especially with fellow Christians! – or, in an endless pursuit of justice over worldly matters (I Cor. 6:1-5). Nevertheless, the God-given role for governing authorities to promote justice and punish criminal behavior continues on in continuity with the Old Testament. In fact, immediately after calling on Christians to not carry out personal vengeance (Rom. 12:14-21), Paul specifically taught

that Christian believers were to pay taxes for the godly purpose of enabling governing authorities to act as God’s “agents of wrath” in punishing evildoers as well as to promote the general good of society (Rom. 13:1-7).

Certainly, if a Christian holds such a position as a governing authority in the secular realm then it is his/her responsibility to fulfill those duties as well (cp. Joseph, Daniel, etc.). To say, as some do, that Christians cannot participate in a government role in punishing evil-doers – especially if that means using the sword – while at the same time acknowledging that they are commanded to pay taxes for this specific purpose would be the height of hypocrisy. In Romans 13 the punishment of evil-doers by governing authorities – even with the sword - is depicted as a *godly* activity, not ungodly. Would it really make sense that Paul is telling Christians to pay unbelievers to do their dirty work for them?! We may certainly debate the proper methods and means of governing, punishing, etc. but there can be no debate as to whether punishing evil-doers is intrinsically godly or not (after all, this is what God himself will do at the final judgment); nor can there be any debate as to whether it is the God-given role of governing authorities to carry out these duties.

In short, Paul’s exposition of the role of civil government in Romans 13 is based directly on Old Testament principles and is a prime example of biblical thinking and speaking. Like Jesus, Paul does not pause to give qualifications to many of his statements. Qualifications are a “given”; they are implied by other biblical passages as well as by real-life situations which demand that individual believers think for themselves. When a person lives with the mind of Christ, - i.e., walks by the Spirit - this way of thinking and living is simply a normal way of life (Rom. 12:1-2).

In conclusion, I present the following comments by NT scholar F.F. Bruce on Romans 13:1-7 from his wonderful commentary, *Romans*, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* [Eerdmans, pp. 220-226]:

Paul places the whole question [of governing authorities in Rom. 13:1-7] on the highest plane. God is the fount of all authority, and those who exercise authority on earth do so by delegation from him; therefore to disobey them is to disobey God.

Human government is a divine ordinance, and the powers of coercion and commendation which it exercises have been entrusted to it by God, for the repression of crime and the encouragement of righteousness. Christians of all people, then, ought to obey the laws, pay their taxes and respect authorities – not because it will be the worse for them if they do not, but because this is one way of serving God.

But what if the authorities themselves are unrighteous? What if Caesar, not content with receiving what is rightfully his, lays claim to “the things that are God’s”? Paul does not deal with this question here ... But Christians will voice their “No” to Caesar’s unauthorized demands the more effectively if they have shown themselves ready to say “Yes” to his authorized demands.

It is plain from the immediate context, as from the general context of the apostolic writings, that the state can rightly command obedience only within the limits of the purposes for which it has been divinely instituted – in particular, the state not only may but must be resisted when it demands the allegiance due to God alone.

[In Romans 13:4] the state is ... charged with a function which has been explicitly forbidden to the Christian (12:17a, 19). The Christian state of later days lay, of course, outside the range of Paul’s admonition, and no express direction is given by which the Christian ruler or judge may reconcile his duty as Christian to leave the exacting of vengeance to “the wrath of God” and his official duty to “execute his wrath”. This is not to say that he cannot extract principles to guide him from this and similar passages. But it is plain that two distinct spheres of “service” to God are envisaged.

“The sanction that the Bible, here and elsewhere, gives to the forcible restraint of evil puzzles many modern Christians, because of its apparent contradiction of Christ’s way of love and His precept of non-resistance to evil. But this comes from failing to distinguish the preservation of the world from the salvation of the world. The truth is that the Bible affirms both the Law “which worketh wrath” (Rom. 4:15) and the “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6): both Christ’s strange work and his proper work.” [A.R. Vidler, *Christ’s Strange work* (1944), p. 28].

... But the following verses [Rom. 13:8-14] show that the duty of obedience to secular authorities is a temporary one, lasting only for the present period of “night” (v. 12); in the “day” which “is at hand” a new order of government will be introduced, when “the saints will judge the world” (I Cor. 6:2). The state is to wither away (on this Paul and Karl Marx agree); “the city of God remaineth”.

[For more information on this subject see the commentaries on Matthew and Romans recommended in Vol. 4 Issue 3, Fall 1998 of *The Unity of the Spirit*]

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