

Scripture Reading:

Acts 16:35 “And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." 36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, & go in peace." 37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." 38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. 39 Then they came and pleaded with them & brought them out, & asked them to depart from the city. 40 So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.”

"Proper Submission to Civil Authorities"

We come this morning to some verses that are easily passed over here in Luke’s orderly account. We have just studied the exciting and dramatic conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household. Next week, Lord willing, we move on to chapter seventeen where we will see more trouble for the Apostles in Thessalonica, great faith in Berea and Paul’s address on Mars Hill.

- We may spend a bit of extra time on that address since it is a portion of Scriptures that greatly impacted your pastor’s life! *[give brief review]*

So this leaves us with a couple of questions about our text this morning:

- Why did Paul take the time out from his busy missionary work to confront these magistrates, when they had ordered him to do what he wanted to do anyway... Move on to the next city?
- And why does Luke include it?

IF we don’t confront these two questions, then yes these are easy verses to just pass over on our way to chapter seventeen. However, IF we do pass them over, we miss some important principles that help us in the practical work that we are called upon to do as the Spirit fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.

So today we are going to consider:

- What happened that morning
- A brief look at the proper role of civil government in any society
- And our responsibility today.

Morning has come and Paul and Silas have been returned to the prison for the sake of the jailer

- The jailer then receives what had to be in his eyes VERY good news:

Acts 16:36 “So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, & go in peace."

- I am pretty sure that Paul’s response came as quite a surprise to the jailer and the messengers:

37 “But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

- Paul is exercising his rights as a Roman Citizen.

As we discussed briefly last week, Luke gives us no indication as to why Paul did not appeal to these rights before the beating and imprisonment, but now he has chosen to hold these civil magistrates accountable

- It is obvious that they were very much in the wrong:

38 “And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.”

- They see their mistake & quickly work to set things right as well as protecting the peace of the city.

39 “Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.”

So this brings us to our second question: What is the proper role of civil government? As we look at the broad picture of Church history we have gotten this very wrong in two major ways.

In the east, the Orthodox Churches looked inward to so-called spiritual matters and did not much care what happened in the civil realm. Thus there was little resistance to the Muslim conquests of once great Christian lands in North Africa and the Middle East. And more recently, the Russian Orthodox Church offered little or no resistance to the cruelties of the communists for over seventy years.

In the West we mostly ran off into the other ditch: The Church became so entangled with the civil magistrates that it was often difficult to tell one from the other. From Emperor Constantine down to our own time kings and princes have carried out major military campaigns under religious banners or church leaders have acted like Kings & princes!

So what is the proper role of civil government and how do we avoid these two very dangerous ditches? On the one hand we have those who say we should not engage in the civil realm at all, and on the other, ones who argue that the church should run everything. As with most issues, there is a Biblical balance and to find it we need to be very familiar with the wisdom the Scriptures provide for us. Thousands of volumes have been written to support both ditches & there are many Biblical truths within each:

- God does advance His Kingdom through the Body of His Son, the Church and we will not see any real progress without the power of the Gospel changing lives and bringing new life.
- However, these “new lives” must be lived in accordance with God’s Law-Word and the Bible gives us a LOT of information on why civil governments exist & how they should function!

So I want to argue that what we see in our text this morning is the proper balance in the life of Paul... And it is reflected in two simple passages that he left us with to ponder under the inspiration of the Spirit.

- The Apostle Paul is rightly focused on the work that Jesus has called him to do, but he does not shy away from his duties in the civil realm and in the end both work well together.

This is how it should be with us as well. Pastors should be holding civil magistrates accountable in both word and deed, but they should not leave their pulpits to run for elected office. The Proverb’s woman supports her husband as he meets in the gates and instructs her children in the principles of civil government we are talking about today...

- But she should not leave her vital calling to run for political office when a magistrate fails to be faithful.

So let me quickly review the two primary passages that Paul has given us on civil government: We want to consider the simply wisdom that he shares and make sure that we do not miss the forest for the trees...

With almost twenty-five years of experience as a Christian working in the political arena, I hope that I have learned a great deal, but it is almost always these two passages that I have returned to for the proper balance and the comfort we often need.

The first is the most famous, found in Romans chapter thirteen:

“ 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.”

[Ask the children where these authorities come from]

2 “Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.”

- Now, one could rightly ask here whether Paul violated his own admonition by resisting these magistrates!
- Properly answering that question became one of the greatest fruits from the Reformation when John Calvin explained how lesser magistrates were to hold the greater magistrates accountable!

When Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen he was functioning as a lesser magistrate: A citizen of Rome. When European princes began to confront the abuses of certain Kings and even church leaders who were playing “civil ruler” they were functioning as lesser magistrates. When our founding fathers declared their independence from England they did so as lesser magistrates holding an errant King accountable. *[that long list of grievances can be your homework]*

These lesser magistrates have the authority to hold the higher magistrates accountable because of what Paul goes on to say here in Romans 13:3 “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.” Just as we as Church leaders are given certain responsibilities to care for the sheep entrusted to our care, just as parents have a responsibility to the children God blesses them with & just as masters or employers have responsibilities to those who work for them...

- So a civil magistrate does not get to do whatever they want to do!

-- We have Church councils and denominations to hold church leaders accountable

-- We have Church leaders and civil magistrates to hold parent and masters or employers accountable

- And it is the responsibility of Church leaders and lesser magistrates to hold civil leaders accountable.

As the Spirit has advanced the Kingdom of Jesus that accountability has expanded more and more. It took decades or even centuries for the powerful princes of England to finally hold the King responsible for his actions with the Magna Carta. Our American revolution was carried out by even lesser magistrates and today we have been empowered with the ability to cast votes in order to hold our elected officials accountable. As I have often told people down through the years, IF the Apostle Paul could take the time out of his busy and important missionary journey to hold these civil magistrates accountable...

- Then surely we have time to register to vote and cast informed votes whenever elections occur.

I can tell you from firsthand experience, that if the Christians of our land took that responsibility more seriously, our governments would be very different! The womb would not be the most dangerous place in childhood and the sodomites would not be basking in their new “right to be married.” Our money would be sound and our nation would be secure if we had elected officials who followed the wisdom given to civil leaders in the Bible. Now sadly, we have NOT taken that responsibility seriously and thus we now have a great deal of wicked government in our land!

- So, we need to heed the rest of what Paul says here in Romans 13:

“Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 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.

5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

- In a Godly land, taxes would be low, our property would be secure, people would fear God, and the civil magistrates would deserve to be honored.

Sadly today we have taxes that are obscene, the government has more control over our property than we do, there is no fear of God and there is little that Washington or Sacramento have done that should be honored.

- How are we to respond to such a mess AND with how much focus?
- Allow me to illustrate this with a practical example in Calvin's writings which reflect the priorities we find in the Scriptures. *[use example of the Institutes]*

It might also be good to go back and review the sermon that I preached on Jeremiah 29 when it was apparent that we were going to put President Obama in the White House. While he has been a wicked leader in many ways, he has NOT reached the same level as King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, whom God called a "bitter and hasty nation."

However, it was a nation that was to be God's instrument for judging His people and thus God told the exiles to "Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters--that you may be increased there, and not diminished. 7 And 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."

- Why on earth would God command them to pray for the peace of their oppressors?

Well, for starters it brought forth the conversion of King Nebuchadnezzar! And Babylon, the Persian Empire, the Greeks and finally the Romans, who still ruled as Paul penned this Epistle, all played an important role in the history of salvation, protecting God's people until Messiah had come...

- Providing a worldwide network of roads and languages so Paul & Silas could go on missionary journeys!

We could spend an entire sermon series on all of that, but what I don't want us to miss this morning is the fact that this principle of praying for the peace of our civil leaders did not cease with the end of the Babylonian captivity. Paul reminds us of this in another very familiar passage of Scripture in his first letter to the young man who helped him here in Philippi: Timothy.

I Timothy 2:1 "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,..."

Now this qualifies as the second most popular verse to quote only partially: "Judge not" being the first!

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority,..."

- And even those who do manage to get that much [or even quote the second part in a truncated form] still do not usually complete Paul's sentence and certainly not his thought:

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."

There was a purpose behind those instructions to the captives in Babylon. AND there is a purpose behind Paul's call to pray for those in authority:

- So we can have peace in the land.

Now it is important for us to realize, especially in our comfort filled world here in America, that we are not just to be praying for personal peace and affluence.

- Paul has a specific reason in mind and it reveals God's heart and the Spirit's mission:

3 **“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”**

- **So we are to pray for the leaders of our land, our state and our cities.**

Our desire is that they would rule well, that there would be peace as a result so that the Gospel can be preached and the fullness of the Gentiles brought in.

And thus we are brought back to the final verse in chapter sixteen:

Acts 16:40 “So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.”

Next week we will see Paul and Silas continue their missionary journey but they have left behind a young Church as well as the beloved Dr. Luke and perhaps Timothy. We will not see Luke back with Paul until he returns to Philippi in chapter twenty.

- **The power of the Gospel has brought new life to Philippi!**

We see rich fellowship among the Saints and discipleship under Luke and Timothy that would lead to maturity.

- **And we have civil magistrates that have been chastened by the Apostle Paul so there could be more civil peace in that city.**

Thus we read very encouraging words as Paul writes his epistle to the Saints here at Philippi some years later:

Philippians 1:3 “ I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

As we are commissioned today:

- **We must also remember that we are sent forth as those who have been saved by the power of the Gospel!**
- **We are sent not only as individuals but as the Church, the Body of Jesus to bring light to the world:**
- **Remembering that we will be used by the Spirit of God as He sees fit!**

It is only by God’s grace we are used as those jars of clay in the hands of the Spirit of God as He fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!

- **Thus, may we rightly remember how to pray for and properly confront the civil magistrates of our day, so there can be peace that allows preaching of the Gospel!**
- **And also that we may see in our day throughout our land and throughout all the earth, the kind of fellowship and growth that Paul rejoiced over there at Philippi!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 42:

Reflecting on the Passover meal...

Instituted at the great deliverance in Egypt

- Passover celebrated as the Tabernacle was dedicated**
- Passover celebrated as they entered the land**
- Passover celebrated as part of the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah**
- Passover celebrated with the rededication of the temple under Ezra**
 - Jesus celebrates the Passover with His disciples and institutes a new meal...**
 - A new covenant meal to be celebrated as often as we gather for worship.**