

**Ecclesiastes 3: 16; “Just and Corrupt Government”, Sermon # 21 in the series –
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on
April 23rd, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

It is very important that the Christian, of all people, have a proper view of authority; the authority which is over him on all levels. And so that is where I would like to lead you in our study this afternoon. I want to look at the reasons why corruption in government takes place on all levels of society. Then in the next studies we will look at God’s judgment, of both of the wicked and the righteous authorities. (Verse 17) And we will also be looking at the subject of God’s testing men; that they might see that they are beasts. (Verses 18 to the end of the Chapter)

1st of all – Corruption in government takes place because of poor spiritual discernment.

“Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.” The subject that Solomon is speaking about is related to what he terms – “the place of Judgment”. By this I do not think that Solomon is so much speaking of his own judgment as king over Jerusalem, although I believe that by the time that he wrote this book he well knew his own sinfulness and the plague of his own heart. But I rather think that he is making a general statement. He is speaking of judgments that are made by everyone in positions of authority, whether in the work place or in government; whether in the family or in the Church; on any, and all levels. He is saying that there are some righteous men in positions of authority, and as a result there are some righteous judgments that are being made. But he is also saying there are many wicked people in the world, and that because of their wicked way of thinking and doing things, wickedness has a way of worming itself into the very office that they hold, and the way that their authority is exercised. He is saying that in the positions of authority, where there should be righteous judgment being exercised, there is wickedness there. This was a very grievous thing for him to behold. And it ought to be a very great grief to our own hearts to know that this verse is true in relation to our own dear country in our day, and our time.

When I say that there is wickedness in high places, I am not merely speaking of some of those persons who may have been elected to positions of government on the state and national level. These verses are referring to wicked persons holding those kinds of positions. And we have seen in our day, there has been a great deal of corruption in the judgment of people holding high political offices in every branch of government from the President, to the Congress, to the Judiciary. Of each of these branches of government it could rightly be said in our day, “In the place of judgment, wickedness is there.” We will have opportunity to develop the implications of these verses in terms of the various branches of government as we go through this book. The particulars we will save for later. But let me mention two other places in this book, among many, where wickedness in political government is spoken of. In Chapter 5, verse 8, Solomon speaks of the oppression of the poor and the perversion of justice, and the role of various levels of government in relation to that. In Chapter 8, verse 4, he speaks of the power of the King and his need of wisdom to rule righteously. He has great power and there is the temptation to abuse it. “Where the word of king is, there is power.” That is; both for good and for bad. And so, it is a very good thing for us to pray for those who hold political office. And it is good to pray for ourselves in relation to what the right thing to do would be.

A good portion of this book is devoted to sorting out the implications of righteous and unrighteous rule by kings and judges, and our coming to the right conclusion about how we are to react to them in their exercise of authority over us. Solomon saw something about how governments become corrupt. Corruption in government takes place because sin is at work in the hearts of those who are leaders. “Iniquity was there.” Look at Proverbs 14: 34. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” Sin is a reproach because sin dishonors God

and it corrupts the hearts of men so that they cannot find good leaders among themselves. The essence of good leadership is righteous discernment both in the leaders and the people. When true and right discernment is found, in both the leader and the people, hopefully then, certain good actions based upon that clear discernment will come forth in that society. Of course this is an easy thing for people to state that they will do this; that they will be wise and righteous, but it is actually much harder to actually carry through with it. Actually it is impossible without the grace of God.

There has never been a government of men which has been perfectly righteous in the history of mankind. But the better governments have been those who have been ruled by righteous men. A righteous man is one who is governed by God and wants it to be that way, not only for himself, but also for the people that he holds office and authority in relation to. He does not believe in the separation of Church and State when it comes to the decisions that he makes when he rules. He does believe in the separation of Church and State in the sense that Thomas Jefferson thought of it when he mentioned it in one of his letters. He says in his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists in Connecticut – “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.” “Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.”

It appears to me that when the 1st Amendment to our Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or the free exercise of the same”, that there is an implied concern that was being addressed. It was, that one denomination of Christians, such as the Episcopal or Catholic Church, or some other denomination, would gain control of both branches of Congress by electing men of their denomination to public office. They could thereby establish their religious agenda and force other people to comply with it through legislation that they would put forth. A righteous man would not, or should not attempt to do this; to suppress and persecute other Christians. But a righteous man does bring the law of the Lord to bear upon all the decisions that he personally makes, if he holds public office, because he knows righteous laws will affect all the people in that society, believing and unbelieving in a good and righteous sense. The truth of what is morally right was forever decided by God giving His law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The principle that is just and true is this: that a righteous man in office in any society or nation, will enact righteous laws which are based, not upon a particular denominational belief of certain Christians, but upon the unalterable moral law of God as found in the 10 commandments.

I believe that the founding fathers would not have approved of a separation of church and state that would prevent the establishment of the Christian religion or the free exercise of the same. They would not have approved of forbidding prayer in the public schools or laws being enacted that would prevent Christians from the free exercise of their religion. I do not believe that they would have approved of the tenants of a false religion being propagated, or laws enacted which would contradict the moral law of the 10 commandments. Let us remember this in our current situation of fighting Islamic terrorism. Theirs is not a valid religion according to the Bible. Their God is the God of the Bible. It is a false religion whose teachings should be resisted, not accepted. The citizens of this country who are Islamic should understand that this country was not founded on the principle that all religions are equally valid. It was founded on the principle of this nation being under, in submission to, the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible.

2nd – Corruption in government takes place when everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

Turn with me to Judges 17: 1-13. “Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah.” “And he said to his mother, ‘The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears – here is the silver with me; I took it.’” “And his mother said, ‘May you be blessed by the LORD, my son!’” “So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, ‘I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you.’” “Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah.” “The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.” “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” “Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there.” “The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place.” “Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.” “And Micah said to him, ‘Where do you come from?’” “So he said to him, ‘I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay.’” “Micah said to him, ‘Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance.’” “So the Levite went in. “Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him.” “So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah.” “Then Micah said, ‘Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!’”

Now you can see here that this kind of behavior that characterized this man Micah was not pleasing to God. But Micah thought that it was. This man had taken 1,300 shekels of silver from his mother. When he realized that his mother had placed a curse on the one who stole it; he then returns it to her. His stealing and his superstitious belief in the curse she placed on the thief was bad enough. But when he restored the money to her, she then proceeded to tell him that she had intended to dedicate this money to make a carved image. The reason that this is in the Scripture is because it is the first recorded instance of idolatry recorded among the people of Israel after Joshua had died, and the generation after him. It is always the beginning of corruption of a country and a government when other gods besides the True and Living God are worshipped. Micah and his mother thought that they could worship God through idols. Micah’s mother took 200 shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah.

Micah, we are told in verse 5, “also had a shrine, made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.” Then we are told why all this was happening. Verse 6 says, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” If there was no king; there was no one to enforce God’s laws against idolatry in the land. A righteous king in Israel was considered by God as good in this particular sense. He would be an authority under God; one who would enforce His laws. This is why on our currency it is written “one nation under God”. Government may be “Of the people, by the people and for the people”, but it was intended to be “under God”. But here at this time, there was no authority to prevent corruption in worship or corruption of government among the people. There was no king in Israel. God had ordained that He Himself would be their King and rule directly over them. Micah not only set up idolatrous worship but also ordained his own ministry. He consecrated his own son to become a priest, and he enlisted a young man from Bethlehem in Judah of the family of Judah to be his personal priest and to live as a member of his family. Micah thought that the Lord would be good to him, “since he had a Levite as a priest”. The principle of truth that we should remember here is that government of men becomes corrupt when everyone does what is right in his own eyes. It leads to false worship, idolatry, and into men taking matters of justice into their own hands. God is dishonored and many people are hurt and affected by it.

Then 3rd – Corruption in government will only be stayed when righteous people will speak to others about the law and the gospel.

Look at Proverbs Chapter 28: 28. “When the wicked arise men hide themselves; but when they perish the righteous increase.” Now look over at Proverbs 29: 16. “When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increases; but the righteous will see their fall.” There is a tendency among people, the first verse tells us, for people to hide when the wicked arise. But the second verse tells us that the righteous should hold fast his way, and continue on, in faithful obedience to God, for in due time he will see their fall. God’s principle of truth and right are inviolable. God has told men what they should do; by means of His word which is called His law. And God does not expect men to ignore Him or His law. The 10 commandments are not 10 suggestions. The God who is real and true is the One who made us all, and He expects everyone to obey Him. And He does this; not simply because He would force us to it; but because He would bless us in it. Turn with me to Psalm 119, verse 1. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord!” “Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!” “They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.” You see, here is the blessing. The righteous man or woman walks in the law of the Lord. He thinks, and evaluates, and does things in obedience to God’s law; His word. They walk in it.

This is also what Christians talk to others about; even to unbelievers about. It is; that in God’s sight, there ought to be in every man a steady course of obedience to the things which the Lord commands should be done. There ought to be prayer taking place in his or her life on a continual basis so that they might know that they are doing the right thing in relation to what they have been reading in God’s word. Righteous decisions and righteous actions flow from a right heart. And a right heart comes from believing in Jesus Christ our Lord, and being willing to submit to His words and rule. It is when righteous men govern by the righteous principles of God’s word, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that good government on every level comes to be established. This is what we as Christians should be relating, to people around us. These things should be related, both by our lips and by our lives; in the way that we speak, and do the things that we do. We do them so that the right way, which is God’s way, can be seen.

Turn with me to Proverbs Chapter 16: 12. “It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness.” “Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks what is right.” Corruption comes to government when wickedness is committed on the part of the king; the one who is ruling, permitting and promoting wickedness. This is first seen in what kind of speech is approved of by the king, and how the king himself speaks. This passage is speaking of a righteous king. A righteous king is one who knows and loves God’s law, knows what wickedness will do to himself and to his kingdom if it is committed, and so he looks for those who speak what is right. He himself prays that God will help him to speak what is right. Righteous speech is a sure indication of a right heart. A man will speak that which fills his heart. “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks,” the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 12: 34. Now, look down at verses 21-25. “The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning.” “Understanding is a wellspring of life to him who has it.” “But the correction of fools is folly.” “The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips.” “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.” Those are the positive things in righteousness that establish good government and authority on all levels. Good and righteous speech and actions flowing from a right heart. So let us hold fast to the one true and living God; the God of the Bible; the One who sent His Son to be our Savior, and the One who gave us the 10 commandments to keep from a thankful heart. We are thankful that Christ fulfilled the law and we rejoice that He gives us grace to love and keep God’s commandments.