

37. Learning How to Relate to Governments

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example how to minister to others by the things that we do. We saw that as we learn to be led by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit gives us both a desire and specific ways to reach out to others and help them to experience the love of Christ in their lives. In our topic today, we are going to see how to show our children how to let the Holy Spirit lead us as we relate to our governments.

Romans 13:1-2 says, “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 judgment on themselves.” We begin this section by seeing that we are to place ourselves under the leadership of those that God has appointed over us. Here, we see that God had given various levels of government to lead us in our lives. We see that God is the source of all authority. We also see that He is the One who has given each leader their position of authority. This would relate to any level of government.

Here, we see that those who rebel or fight against the leaders God has allowed are actually rejecting the ordinance of God. This means they are fighting against the God-given authority that God has placed over them. Titus 3:1 says, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.” Here, we see that if we are a leader in the church, we have a responsibility to teach those in the church that God has placed government authorities over us and we are to submit to them. If we fight against the government that God has placed over us, we can expect to be judged by that government.

Then, we go on to see how government leaders will respond if we choose to fight against them. Romans 13:3-4 says, “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.” Government leaders do not cause fear to those who are doing good works. Instead, because governments are established to provide civil authority in any country, their leaders do cause fear in the lives of those who are doing evil because such leaders have been placed in authority to maintain order in any nation.

As a result, we do not have to be afraid of those who have been given authority to rule and carry out the functions of government. If we are doing the things that are good and useful in the society in which we live, we will receive praise instead of judgment from government leaders. Romans 15:2 says, “Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification.” Here, we see that we are to do the things that will be for the benefit of our neighbors. We are to do the things that will build them up instead of destroy them. That is why government officials are the servants of God to do the things that are beneficial for our lives.

In contrast, if we do the things that are evil, we have a good reason to be afraid and fearful. God

says that government authorities do not bear the sword in vain. Here, we see that it is their responsibility to carry out judgment against those who do evil. Right after Noah came off the ark, in Genesis 9:6, God said, “Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.” Here, we see that God established the principle that judgment for sin would be carried out by people under the authority of human government. God has given government authorities the responsibility to maintain order in society by carrying out punishment against those who do evil. Whether the rulers serve God or not, this is a responsibility that governments carry out against those who are doing evil.

However, we go on to see that there is a greater reason to be in submission to the government that God has allowed to be in authority over us. Romans 13:5 says, “Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.” In this verse, we see that we are not just to be subject because of a fear of punishment. A much greater reason to be in submission is to have a clear conscience. 2 Corinthians 1:12 says, “For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.” Paul could say the things that he said because he had a clear conscience before God.

Here, we see a very important principle that we want to help our children understand. At the moment we become a Christian, the Holy Spirit comes into our human spirit and renews our human spirit. As a result, we have a desire to do good and do the things that please God. God also renews our conscience so that it begins to work properly again. Romans 2:14-15 says, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*.” We may have seared our conscience before we placed our faith in Christ. However, at the moment of salvation God renewed our conscience. As a result, our conscience will accuse us when we do wrong as a Christian.

However, when we are pleasing God, we will have a clear conscience. 2 Timothy 1:3 says, “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as *my* forefathers *did*, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.” Here, we see that Paul was thankful because he knew that his conscience was pure in the sight of God. As Christians, the Lord gives us a good conscience when we are doing the things that are right and pleasing to Him. 1 Peter 3:16 says, “Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.” When people accuse us falsely, we see that Christ will cause our good conduct to cause others to be ashamed for accusing us falsely.

In 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, we read, “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” In 2 Corinthians 3:8-18, we see that as Christians we have been given the ministry of the New Covenant. This is the message of sharing the Gospel with others. Here, we see another reason why it is important to have a clear conscience

both with other people and with our government.

The life that we live in relationship to our government and to other people determines whether our message will have an impact when we share the Gospel with others. The Lord has shown His mercy to us and has also given us this ministry. As a result, we do not give up or get discouraged. We also see that we have turned away from the hidden sins that would bring shame. We do not twist the Word of God or try to make it fit our ideas. Instead, we make certain that we speak the truth. We do this so that we can have a clear conscience before God, before our government and before other people so that our message will have an impact.

Romans 13:6-7 says, “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.” Here, we see the reasons why we pay taxes. First, we see that we pay taxes because God has given governments the authority that they have. Second, we see that we pay taxes so that we can have a good conscience before God. Third, we see that we pay taxes because governments are actually the servants of God who keep civil order on the earth.

The word “render” means *to give or to pay*. Taxes are the first thing mentioned that we are to pay to our government. Christ was asked if people should pay taxes. We see His answer in Matthew 22:21 which says, “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.’” We also give other things to our governments in addition to our taxes. Second, we are to give customs to those to whom they belong. This word was used to speak of things like tolls and other indirect taxes on goods.

In addition to taxes and customs, we also give the government two additional things. Third, we see that we are to give fear or respect to those who are in various positions of government. Here, we see that we are to treat people who serve the government with respect because of the position that God has given them in the government. Fourth, we see that we are to give honor to those to whom honor is due. Honor is the placing of a high value on those who lead us because of the fact that God has placed them in that position for the benefit of all people.

As we help our children learn to relate properly to the government and to the people who hold positions in government, we are helping them to realize how God works through governments to keep order in society. The respect that they show also opens a door of opportunity for them to share the Gospel. This will include both opportunities to share with government officials and also with people who see our respect. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to relate to governments.