

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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This month's topic is appropriate subject matter in view of the recent campaigns and elections taking place in our country. The question that will be considered is: **What are citizens' duties toward civil government and those who hold positions of authority therein?** The Holy Bible will supply the guidance, insight, and answers we need.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." (Romans 13:1-2 KJV)

Comment: The above quoted Bible verses are from the book of Romans— the words given by inspiration of God, penned by the Apostle Paul, and being first addressed to the Christians at Rome. And yet, it's a fact that the Roman civil government generally treated Christians with contempt and persecution. Jesus Christ Himself was sentenced to be crucified by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate even though he knew and admitted that Jesus was completely innocent of any wrongdoing. Nevertheless, observe that the Roman civil authorities were in power at that time because God ordained that it be so.

Now, let's think about the words of Romans 13:1-2 and apply them to the present day. Regardless of which political party's candidates win election to various civil offices, each and every one of us is to be subject to the civil authorities who rule over us since they are ordained of God. Yes, the powers that be are ordained by God— that's a present participle. Oh, we may not always like the rulers we have or approve of everything they do; howbeit, we are to subject ourselves to them. Furthermore, note the seriousness of the issue if we resist those powers ordained of God: damnation will result upon all resistors of God-ordained rulers!

Therefore Holy Writ also says: "My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?" (Proverbs 24:21-22 KJV) "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men." (Titus 3:1-2 KJV) "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God." (1 Peter 2:13-16 KJV) Hence, it is obvious that violent protesting and rioting against civil authorities are grievous sins, and the impenitent will bear punishment from God.

"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." (Romans 13:3-5 KJV)

Comment: It's important that we know the God-ordained purpose of civil governmental authorities: to keep order and to punish evil behavior while rewarding good behavior. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame." (Proverbs 14:34-35 KJV) Therefore, we owe obedience to the civil authorities under which we live— the only exception being when they command that which God forbids, for then: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29 KJV) Note that civil government has the God-given right to wage just wars and inflict the death-penalty upon murderers and other perpetrators of capital crimes: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." (Genesis 9:6 KJV)

"For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." (Romans 13:6-7 KJV)

Comment: Observe that we as Christian citizens are to pay all the taxes placed upon us by the civil government under which we live, whether sales taxes, property taxes, or income taxes and the like. Consider the following: "And they send unto him [i.e. Jesus] certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him." (Mark 12:13-17 KJV)

By example Jesus personally demonstrated taxes are to be paid: "And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee." (Matthew 17:24-27 KJV)

Additionally, we owe fear and honor to those holding civil governmental offices because they hold those offices— not because of their persons or their political party, but because God says so! "Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people." (Exodus 22:28 KJV) Note that "gods" with a lower case "g" refers to the people who rule over us in government. "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." (Ecclesiastes 10:20 KJV) "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." (1 Peter 2:17 KJV)

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (1 Timothy 2:1-2 KJV)

Comment: We are to pray for all those in authority over us, which includes our civil leaders at the local, county, state, and federal levels. Those folks have great responsibilities! Yes, we are to pray FOR our civil governmental leaders; but, we are NOT to pray WITH them unless they share the same faith we have in Jesus Christ, for Holy Writ commands: "...mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." (Romans 16:17 KJV)

"Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity." (Isaiah 40:13-17 KJV)

"Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another." (Psalm 75:5-7 KJV)

Comment: Let us always take comfort in knowing that the Lord God is the infinitely greatest leader who is ultimately in control of all things regardless of who holds positions of authority in civil government, for, "...the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." (Daniel 4:17 KJV) "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36 KJV)

Sometimes God places certain leaders in office to punish ungodliness and ungratefulness among a nation's people. For example, consider the history of the people of Judah, for when they rebelled again and again against the Lord, Holy writ reports that "...the LORD carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar." (1 Chronicles 6:15 KJV) For, "it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about." (2 Kings 25:1 KJV) Thus, the Lord used a pagan king to punish the rebellious Jews.

Later, mighty Babylon was high on itself, and so the Lord corrected those people too, as the Holy Bible reports in the book of Jeremiah: "Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind; And will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her, and shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her round about. Against him that bendeth let the archer bend his bow, and against him that lifteth himself up in his brigandine: and spare ye not her young men; destroy ye utterly all her host. Thus the slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and they that are thrust through in her streets. For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the LORD of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the LORD'S vengeance; he will render unto her a

recompence. Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies. The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God. Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple.”
(Jeremiah 51:1-11 KJV) *Yes, the Lord raised up the Medes and Persians; consequently, mighty Babylon was no more. Thus, the LORD GOD IS TRULY ULTIMATELY IN CONTROL!*

Let us Christians therefore be good citizens as God instructs in His Word. Let us be faithful to the Lord God above all else, for “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4 KJV) And let us never forget, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:16-18 KJV) “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10 KJV) Let us cling to Christ in heart-deep faith and strive to be fruitful in that faith, living in the manner the Lord prescribes in His Word.

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