

Dear friend,

In this series we have considered God's providential control of weather, food production, our birth and our death and last month, wealth and poverty, that is, our economic condition. It is fitting, in light of our recent elections to consider what the Scriptures tell us about God's providential control of government. The Bible speaks frequently and directly to God's relationship to governing authorities. Consider these few examples:

Exodus 9:16 (God speaking to Pharaoh, king of Egypt), "But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." **Isaiah 40:22-23**, "He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers... He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing." **Isaiah 45:1**, "This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.." **Ezra 1:1**, "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: **Proverbs 21:1**, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." **Romans 13:1-6**, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted... (the one in authority) is God's servant to do you good.... He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer... This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing."

One of the clearest things that the Bible says about governing authorities is that each and every one of them is personally appointed by the Lord. We see this in the numerous statements regarding God's appointment of particular men to be kings (like Pharaoh and Cyrus) and to the more general statements like in Romans where we are simply told that "there is no authority except that which God has established." And it is not only that God establishes every governing authority but he also directs every governing authority in their decisions and actions. Again, we see this in the case of particular kings, like Cyrus and in general statements like Proverbs 21:1.

It is important to note that the Scriptures are not only speaking about the highest rulers in a nation, like kings and Presidents, but also God appoints and directs all governing authorities, down to the local school board member, the local police officer, the principal of your child's elementary school. In addition, the manner by which God puts authorities in power varies. There were many of Israel's kings who were put in place through armed rebellion, like Jeroboam the 1st, others came to power through political intrigue and assassination, like Joab, general of the armies of David, others came to power by appointment as David putting Benaiah in charge of his body guard and others came to power through a peaceful transition from father to son. In our own day God puts many rulers in place through the democratic process. Regardless of the means God uses, every authority is established by God and God is directing their decisions and actions. He rules us through the rulers he has appointed.

Obviously, this clearly stated fact in the Scriptures raises profound questions regarding God's relationship to evil because it is quite clear both in biblical history and in world history that rulers often do evil. Again, I'm going to ask that we postpone our discussion of this critical topic until a later article as it relates to every aspect of God's providence. I want us to consider what difference it should make in our lives to know that God has established all authorities, that he

rules us through our rulers. Our first duty is to submit to and obey the authorities God has placed over us. We are to obey because the authorities govern for our good. It is God's intention to do good to us and for us through our rulers. Civil government is a mark of God's grace towards us in that he intends to do good to us by means of the civil and other authorities.

In both Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 we are told that the civil authorities exist to punish those who do wrong and to reward those who do right. So God does good to us by restraining and punishing evil through our government and he rewards us for the good lives we lead through our government. I think most of us know that if we did not have a police force governed by civil authority and law we would all be much less safe. In addition the government does me good by picking up my trash and my recycling and my leaves if I do the right thing by taking it all out to the curb. The government makes sure I have clean drinking water and that the wastewater from my house is treated and returned safely into the Rock River as I do the right thing by paying my taxes and my water bill. All of these activities are God caring for me and my family through the governing authorities.

A second but closely related duty we have to government is to respect the governing authorities. This only makes sense. If the authorities are God's servants through whom God exercises his rule over us, then to disrespect the authority is to disrespect God and to "honor the king" is to honor God. There is an interesting example of how important this is in the book of Acts (23:1ff.). The apostle Paul is in front of the Jewish ruling council and he is being falsely accused by them. After he tells the council that he is simply serving God the high priest, Anannias, commands that he be slapped. Paul responds by saying, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck." Several people immediately say to Paul, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" Whereupon Paul apologizes and asks forgiveness from the entire council for his disrespect because he says he did not know that Annanias was the high priest and he knows that the law says, "Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people."

There is a serious question that is to be raised at this point: do I have the right to ever criticize, disagree with or even resist the governing authorities? This is a far bigger question than I have space to deal with here. Let me simply draw your attention to Peter's response to the same Jewish ruling council when they commanded that he and John no longer preach the gospel. He says, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." In other words, when the governing authorities command us to do that which would be disobedience to God, we must disobey them. Yet, even then we must do so with respect as the rulers still have been established by God.

Seeking to "honor the king" with you,