

Tuesday's Touch #60

...from Pastor Ed ...March 16, 2010

God, Caesar, and You

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. ...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. Romans 13:1,4

He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. 2 Samuel 2:23

Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. Matthew 22:21

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. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, Who would have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

As our nation is embroiled in an epic struggle concerning the proper role of government, the Christian must understand the biblical perspective upon which our founding fathers gave us a nation. We need not debate about who among them was a 'true Christian' in the evangelical sense. The fact is, from their own prolific writings it is clear that their view of government emerged from a comprehensive grasp of broad biblical principles, and was a radical departure from the governments of history. Foundational to their envisioned government was the precept that "all men are *created* equal, and are endowed by their *Creator* with certain inalienable rights; that *among* these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (self-determined well-being). The pervading biblical emphasis on the worth and responsibility of the *individual* to his Creator was paramount. The entire structure of the new nation was to be built upon that concept of the individual. Government, therefore, was to exist to protect, defend, and promote the God-given rights of each person, and to visit justice and judgment upon those who would seek to violate another's inalienable rights.

The delineation of those rights rested squarely on the *Ten Commandments* (Exodus 20:3-17). The founders, in the end, did *not* desire to make the Ten Commandments, verbatim, the 'law of the land.' But they saw clearly the consequential necessity of the *individual liberty* required if one was to apply the commandments to his life *according to the dictates of his own free conscience*. The first four commandments required *freedom of (not from) religion, free speech, and the right to peaceably assemble*. Clearly embedded in the other six commandments were the *individual's right to life* (6th), the *sanctity of marriage and the autonomy of the family unit* (5th & 7th), the *individual's right to fair and truthful application of justice* (9th), and the *right to private ownership of property and the ability to defend it* (8th & 10th). These fundamental concepts defined *liberty* for them (as opposed to *license*). The founders recognized that government must be the defender, but never the bestower, of these rights. Even though the *Bill of Rights* was added after the completion of the *Constitution*, the *Constitution*, itself, was designed to establish a government which afforded the protection of the *individual liberties* by which these rights could be assured.

And so, we were given a *Constitutional Republic* – NOT a democracy. In a democracy, half-plus-one can trample the rights of the individual *and* of the minority. A representative Republic, resting upon the *Constitution* as the *law of the land*, was to assure the God-given

right of *'liberty and justice for all.'* For that reason every government official and servant takes an oath to protect and defend the *Constitution of the United States* (an oath which seems to be made a mockery of, today).

Now, this brings us to an extremely important truth as Christians. When Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," he clearly teaches us the fact that there are two distinct kingdoms in which every Christian must live – that which is defined by earthly government, and that in which his/her true citizenship and allegiance must lie. *Both*, are established by God, and ultimately accountable to Him. Every individual bears particular responsibilities to each. But when we confuse the responsibilities of government with that of the individual, we bring upon ourselves great harm and confusion. Government is established to punish evildoers (those who violate the rights of others), and to reward the individual with the protection of his/her rights. It has *no other authority or responsibility* under God. To the individual is given life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, through which, ideally, he is to come to know and glorify God (ultimately in Christ), *but*, all according to the *liberty of his own conscience*. Government was to have no authority to coerce the individual in his faith or obedience to God; nor was it to take to *itself* the individual's rights and responsibilities in relationship to others. Every one is accountable to God, alone, for his own life, and the labors of it (Romans 13:10-12). Thus, ironically, the blessings of liberty would be preserved for *all* faiths, and, for both believer and non-believer alike. Government was to intrude *only* when one violates, or seeks to violate, the rights of others.

The moment we lose sight of the individual's responsibilities and liberties, and begin to transfer responsibility to government, we incrementally begin enslaving ourselves to government, and to its own *elitist* defining of the rights and responsibilities of (and to!) *'the collective'* whole. Too many Christians make the tragic mistake of trying to take the commands of Christ to his disciples, and thereby, His Church, and apply them to the government. The government does not exist to feed the poor, to be kind to it's enemies, to turn the other cheek, to forgive all criminal trespasses, to raise and educate our children, to manage our money, to rule over our property, to define our families, to provide us jobs, to make our health and safety choices *for us*, to arbitrarily bestow the blood-bought rights and privileges of its citizens upon non-citizens, etc., etc., etc. It *must* protect and defend the rights of the individual citizens under its jurisdiction, from whom it derives its power and existence – period!

When, in the providence of God, our freedom is taken away, and we become enslaved to governments, or individuals - *when we have no choice* - we are to consider ourselves freemen in Christ, embrace the cross, and serve with an excellent spirit as unto the Lord, *1 Peter 2:18-23, 1 Corinthians 7:21-23* (Remember Joseph and Daniel?). But while we have choice, we are fools, and do not honor God, if, for the sake of immediate personal benefit or supposed security, we refuse to embrace and defend liberty. If we are free, or have the opportunity to be, let us use it to the glory of God and the blessing of others.

Author of Liberty,

May our greatest security and liberty be always in Thee, through Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen