

CHANGING POWER STRUCTURES IN SOCIETY THROUGH THE CHURCH

Was M. L. King right to resist the way he did? Should we be doing the same? Is it right for us to resist not just racism, but other forms of injustice when the laws of our government directly conflict with the righteous laws of God? Abortion? Aid for the immigrant when the government calls them illegal? Protest marches against systemic injustice? What does Christian activism look like? What is permissible, biblical? What is our relationship to the governing authorities and what does it mean to “honor and obey those in authority over us” coupled with “we must obey God rather than man?” And specifically, how does this fit in our understanding of Romans 13?

MY INTENTION THIS MORNING IS TO TRY AND REMOVE ONE HURDLE THAT CAN KEEP MANY WELL MEANING EVANGELICALS FROM BEING ENGAGED IN BROADER SOCIAL ACTIVISM: AN UNDERSTANDING OF ROMANS 13 THAT CAN BE INTERPRETED TO MEAN *THAT ANY KIND OF RESISTANCE* AGAINST THE LEGITIMACY OF THE DECREES OF A GOVERNMENT WILL BE JUDGED BY GOD AS REBELLIOUS, AND EVEN A REBELLION AGAINST GOD HIMSELF.

IN THE LARGER BIBLICAL CONTEXT, THE SCRIPTURES ADDRESS THE GOVERNING STRUCTURES OF THE WORLD FROM SEVERAL DIFFERENT VIEW POINTS, INCLUDING-

- 1) RESPONSIBLE BEFORE GOD FOR PRACTICING JUSTICE FOR THE POOR AND OPPRESSED
PSALM 82, DANIEL 4:27**
- 2) NEEDING TO SUBMIT TO THE OVERARCHING RULE OF GOD’S SON AND A PROMISED
JUDGMENT FROM GOD FOR REFUSAL TO DO SO PSALM 2**
- 3) WITNESSES AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF GOD FOR THEIR FAILURE TO BE A PEOPLE OF JUSTICE
AMOS 2**
- 4) A TOOL IN THE HAND OF GOD TO FULFILL HIS (NOT THEIR) PURPOSES EXODUS 9:16, ISA 45**
- 5) BUT MOST OFTEN AND MOST GENERALLY AS PART OF THE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES OF
THIS WORLD THAT OPPOSE GOD AND NEED TO BE CONQUERED AND REDEEMED BY CHRIST 1
CORINTHIANS 2:6-10; EPHESIANS 6:10-12; COLOSSIANS 2:9-15; REVELATION 13, 17-19**

AS WE NARROW OUR FOCUS TO ROMANS 13, PART OF THE GUIDING QUESTION THAT WILL HELP SHAPE OUR INTERPRETATION IS TO ASK OURSELVES IF PAUL IS TAKING A MOMENT IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS DISCUSSION IN ROMANS 12-15 TO GIVE US AN “ABSTRACT THEOLOGY OF GOVERNMENT” OR, IS HE NOT SEEKING TO ADDRESS THAT QUESTION, BUT INSTEAD ADDRESSING THE QUESTION OF HOW THE OPPRESSED CHURCH IS TO LIVE KINGDOM-TRANSFORMING LIVES WHILE THEY ARE UNDER THE RULE OF AN OPRESSIVE GOVERNMENT? THAT STARING POINT ADDS TO THE INTERPREATION OF THE TEXT AND ITS APPLICATION FOR US.

Romans 13 in Biblical-Theological Context

A. Re-Contexting Romans 13. This is not a break in the flow of Rom 12-15

1. The context: Rom 12:1,2 is the call to fully receive the reconciling mercies of God described in Romans 1-11 and not conform to the accepted patterns of this world. Instead, having our minds renewed and our lives transformed by understanding what God is doing in the world to bring his kingdom, redemption and healing, we are called to enter in to the “new humanity” expressed in the church, under the rule of God in Jesus the Messiah. As the people of God, we are to demonstrate the restoration of all things that has already begun and will ultimately lead to the new heavens and new earth, the final inheritance of God’s people.

a) 12:1-2 Sacrificial Servant- living sacrifices for God’s purposes of renewal in all things - THIS SACRIFICIAL SERVANTHOOD IS ESSENTIAL TO THE IMMEDIATE BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR INTERPRETING ROMANS 13

b) 12:3-8 The new humanity is expressed in now belonging to one another in the body, acknowledging and benefiting from differing gifts

c) 12:9-21 The heart of Covenantal, sacrificial love- to one another and, as a kingdom of priests, to the world, even to our enemies

KEY: CHIEF AMONG THE ENEMIES WERE THE JEWISH AND ROMAN STATE

d) THEREFORE, IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE THAT PAUL WOULD NEXT ADDRESS HOW TO DEAL WITH THOSE OPPOSING GOVERNING AUTHORITIES-

THIS IS THE CONTEXT: NOT AN ABSTRACT TREATISE ON GOVERNMENT- BUT AN EXPLANATION OF HOW GOD WILL USE GOVERNMENTS – EVEN EVIL, OPPOSING GOVERNMENTS- TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSES, AND HOW OUR SACRIFICIAL LOVE AND OBEDIENCE TO TRUST GOD AND FREELY LOVE OUR ENEMIES WHILE UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THOSE GOVERNMENTS IS PART OF HOW GOD WANTS TO BRING HIS KINGDOM INTO THIS WORLD

e) 13:8 -14 still talking about enemies from 13:9-21- doing justice and love—

1) This debt to all; All enemies- the ones in 12:20 and the ones in 13:1; to love; to do justice

2) 13:11-12 because the handwriting is on the wall- their end is near; the darkness of this oppression- the fall of Jerusalem, and the ultimate fall of Rome... nations may rage

and unjust rulers may rise, but they will all ultimately fall. Psalm 89; but also the words of Jesus- this generation shall not pass away

Fall of Jerusalem 70 Am; letter 56?? AD

- 3) Avoid the temptation, lie of the flesh, that its all useless anyway and go ahead and sin- no; be sober minded; understand the time; clothe yourself with the sacrificial love of THE KING, JESUS THE MESSIAH

B. Re-translating Romans 13

1. A summary of the current, traditional evangelical view, expressed in the translation of the text, centering on 13:1 as a key to the rest of the passage

Romans 13:1 Pa/sa yuch. evxousi,aij u`perecou,saij u`potasse,sqw ouv ga.r e:stin evxousi,a eiv mh. u`po. qeou/ ai` de. ou=sai u`po. qeou/ tetagme,nai eivsi,n\

Traditional translation: ESV **Romans 13:1** Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God

2 KEY WORDS from the Greek that *can* lend credence to this translation: in the second half of the sentence, referring to the governments, the word u`po; which can be translated “by or under” and in context, as applied to the government structures can be translated as “by” in a way that reinforces and sounds like “God is the agent who brought the government into existence: by him.” The second Greek word of note is the word tetagme,nai from the root word tassw, whose first meaning is “to appoint, in the sense of establish” and can carry the sense of “brought into existence”. AND SO YOU GET THE ABOVE TRANSLATION.

What motivates this translation? Taking into account dominant cultural influences; the Divine Right of Kings- Queen Elizabeth I 1601; King James I - 1604-1611 for persona purposes- to keep the king above the law; and for religious purposes, to keep the king free from Roman Catholic rule.

2. Alternative translation:

- a) Very simply, if we change the translation of the word u`po from “by” to “under” it already influences the understanding of the second word tetagme,nai / tassw

whose second meaning is “to order or appoint” in the sense of ‘direct’ or ‘determine’ (Arndt and Gingrich).

The alternative translation would be “for there is no authority except under God and the existing ones exist under his direction”

b) Romans 13:1a

There is a correlation between the first part of the verse and the second part that is very symmetrical and affirming if read in this light.

The word ὑποτάσσω, as applied to the citizens, is a compound word made up of ὑπο and τασσω and directly correlates to ὑπο and τεταγμένοι/ τασσω as it refers to government.

TRANSLATION: Let every person be “arranged/ordered/directed under” the existing governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which is “ordered and directed under God”

THE EMPHASIS SEEMS TO BE ON THE FACT THAT YOU CAN SUBMIT, EVEN TO ROME, BECAUSE GOD IS ORDERING THEIR ACTIONS TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSES; NOT WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SUBMITTING BECAUSE HE WAS THE ONE WHO PREORDAINED THEM TO BE IN PLACE AND SET THEM THERE.

3. The perspective of the Apostle Peter: **1 Peter 2:13** ὑποτάγητε τοῖς βασιλεῦσι ὡς ὑποτάγητε τῷ κυρίῳ, ὅτι ὁ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν βασιλέων. ἵνα ὑμεῖς ἀγαθὰ ποιῆτε τῷ κυρίῳ ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ.

NIV **1 Peter 2:13-14** ¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

The clarity of the Geek word kti,sei- which means “creation”

Translation: “Submit yourself, because of the Lord, to every human creation - kti,sei- whether to the king etc.” Placing the origin of government on human beings, not on God.

C. Re-interpreting Romans 13

The emphasis on submission to a God-ordained authority, established by him, also lends itself to seeing the government rightfully (in a God-ordained way) using the sword, that can lead to submission for the sake of submission and a defeated sense of accepting the status quo without questioning the decisions of the authorities, since God placed them there.The

emphasis on submission to a God-sovereignly directed-authority, established by men, but used by God, even with their injustice, to fulfill his purposes, without a blanket affirmation of the use of the sword, can lead to hope for change as we faithfully and humbly enact God's agenda of sacrificial love.

Now the rest of the passage takes on a different meaning:

13:2-4 is one unit addressing the issue of "resistance." To "resist" the authorities is a reference to taking up arms against it; it is not a simple question of "disobeying"-- Peter and John clearly disobey. As do all the martyrs who are called upon to renounce Christ. What they do not do, however, is to take up arms in rebellion.

13:2 ο` avntitasso,menoj "the one **ranging in battle against**" - is resisting and opposing what God is directing (diatagh/|), and the one opposing will receive judgement on himself.

THIS IS A REFERENCE TO GUERRILLA TYPE WARFARE AND IS ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF HOW ONE RESISTS AN UNJUST GOVERNMENT, NOT WHETHER ONE DOES

Versus NIV **Romans 13:2** "Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves"- which flattens out the different Greek words for a consistency of theological thought.

13:4 Not an agent of God to deal out the death penalty when its laws are broken (Shariah), or when a Christian refuses to do evil or takes a stand against the injustice or the oppression of an evil government by humbly and lovingly seeking righteousness; but an agent of God to use the sword against those who would use the sword as a means of overthrowing the government.

Instead of doing justice and righteousness and humble love, taking up arms in opposition is not how the kingdom comes.

THE WAY WE DO RESISTING IS CONTINUALLY SEEKING JUSTICE TO IMPELEMENT JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS ON ALL LEVELS- THROUGH HUMILITY AND LOVE, AND LOVING OUR ENEMIES AND DOING GOOD TO THOSE WHO OPPOSE US.

The same message of Jesus: Matt 26:47-55; cf John 18:33-37.... It doesn't come the way the kingdoms of the world come. But make no mistake, Jesus' claim was a direct confrontation to the claims of Caesar-- John 18:37

13:5 It is necessary to submit (i.e. not become one who ranges in battle against the government) both because of the real possibility of death by the sword and also because of conscience before God- obeying the way he has called us to interact in sacrificial love.

13:6 This is why you pay taxes- because they demand this of you and are in a position of authority to require it of you- because they are the instruments- better than "servants" - God is using (without saying they are good or evil)- so give them what you "owe" them, but give God what you owe him- a debt of love.

- A. Acts 4:23-31 The climactic statement of the triumph of Jesus and the early church in submitting to the physical authority of the governments and boldly resisting their moral injustice

Conclusions??