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**Politically Incorrect: #3**  
*“The Church & the State”*  
Oct. 26, 2008 **Romans 13:1-7**

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**Reading: Romans 13:1-7**

*1 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. 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. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.*

*6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. NIV*

*I have always been interested in government! When I was a kid history & civics was one of my favorite subjects. I learned about the Presidents... one of the most memorable vacations my family went on was to Washington and I still remember walking thru the White House. And I'll make a confession that I don't tell just everybody... when I was either 10 or 11, for Halloween I went as Ronald Reagan. (I kid you not!) This morning I want us to continue our “Politically Incorrect” look at politics... and the relationship that our Faith should play in our Politics... by zeroing in on the role of Government (the State) and the Christian's relationship to it. We have already observed that Jesus called his followers to go out into the world as “salt” & “light”... to be positive influences for good... speaking a word for God into all of the political rhetoric going on. And we've observed how difficult that can be as “dual citizens”... how do we live as “citizens of Heaven” AND at the same time balance our duties as American citizens? The problem comes when those kingdoms collide and we've got to figure out which one we're going to be more beholden to? I hope all of us would agree... that we are Christians FIRST... Americans second. But what is this relationship between Christians (i.e. the church) and the State?*

*Today I want us to look at **Romans 13:1-7**. This is probably the most extensive treatment in the NT pertaining to this relationship between the Christian and the State. It has been used and abused through the centuries... folks have used it to argue for the legitimacy of war... for the death penalty... for patriotism, etc. Let me say: this text was written for NONE of those reasons! It wasn't written to the government... it was written to Christians in Rome who were struggling to live under the oppressive Empire that was making it increasingly difficult to live out their faith in an open and influential way. And it was meant to counter the inclination that maybe what Christians ought to do was overthrow the government! Paul says, “No.” If Jesus had wanted to overthrow the government, he certainly could have done it.*

**SOME OBSERVATIONS:**

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**#1 God “ordered” ALL authorities**

*It's so easy to gloss over this because of where we grew up... and how we were taught to be “God-fearing Americans.” Most of us grew up thinking that part of what it means to be an American is that we believe in God... and that America is a “Christian” nation... and that we are “one nation under God.” God has blessed America... I know it because that's what the song says! But what if you were a German Christian growing up in the 1930's under Hitler? What would you think about this text then? Were you supposed to obey Hitler? God certainly didn't establish the Nazis, did he? What about all the other dictatorships and horrible regimes that have existed in the last 2,000 years? What is this text saying if its not saying that God is responsible for these governments?*

*That God establishes all authority does not mean that God approves of all authorities!* A better translation might be that God “orders” all the authorities. Much like a librarian “orders” the books, but does not necessarily approve of their content. He arranges them and maintains authority OVER them. Paul’s point is not so much that God endorses any particular government... but that God is sovereign over ALL governments! He isn’t arguing the **legitimacy** of government... but the **supremacy** of God! Now THAT would have been an encouraging message to Christians living under Roman rule. As oppressive as Rome might have been... to know that God is over EVEN the powerful Roman Empire would have been an encouraging thought! Its not that there is “ONE nation under God”... ALL nations are under God (whether they want to acknowledge that or not!) You’ll remember that Jesus reminds Pilate of this when he faced the Roman Governor at his own trial. He acknowledged Pilate’s authority but said, **“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. John 19:11 NIV** It’s a recognition that ANY power or authority that ANY government of the world may have is subject to the ultimate rule & reign of God! God is over all!

*Civil Government was NEVER God’s intention for us to begin with. By “civil government” I mean government of man... “of the people, by the people.”* When you think back to the Garden... when God created Eden and placed mankind in it... there were no kings or presidents. God was their king. And there was only one law. Don’t eat from the tree of knowledge of good & evil. But the slick little serpent came and convinced them that what they needed was this knowledge... to be like God... knowing good & evil. They would be their own judges between good and evil. They would rule themselves and control their own destinies. Don’t we all want that? And so they ate... and their eyes were opened and they got just what they wanted. Control. And you see what has become of it today. Even with the LAW... when God gave the people an expanded set of laws through which to govern... remember the #1 law? **“I am the Lord thy God. You shall have no other gods before me.”** In other words... set no one above me! And you remember what the people eventually cried out for? *“Give us a king like all the nations around us.”* (They didn’t call him ‘god’ but wasn’t it ultimately a rejection of God’s kingship to ask for their own king?) And so the Bible says that in his anger God gave them a king. And they got just what they asked for... a king like everybody else had... proud, arrogant, independent, dishonest, unfair, weak and fallen. So the very existence of civil government is because of our rebellion against the governance of God! It was never his intention to begin with. If everybody had just held to God’s government... there would be no need to hold an election next week... we could put all those Congressmen out of work (and probably quite a few of ourselves, come to think of it.)

*Well, relax... that’s never going to happen. Let’s get real. Paul was real. He knew that wasn’t going to happen. We live in a fallen world... THAT’S the reality!* We live in a world where civil government (rebellious or not) is necessary. So, the question becomes WHAT are we going to do about it? What is the Christian’s response to this imperfect system of civil government?

## **#2 “Submit to the authorities”**

*Insofar as it doesn’t violate our faith & Christian duty... we ‘submit’ to the authorities.* Scholars are writing now that “obey” is not exactly the best translation... the idea is not so much that we must always blindly obey our leaders... but that as citizens of heaven first, we willingly place ourselves under the governance of the kingdoms of man. (may be a subtle distinction, but I hope you see it.) Peter says that we ought to.... **“12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” 1 Peter 2:12 NIV** (I think THAT’S the idea!)

## **#3 Notice that Government can do a lot of good... cf. vs. 4**

In a fallen world God uses government to reign in evil... to protect people... by punishing the wrongdoer! In this way, governments are "God's servants". Paul doesn't have a completely pessimistic view of government. There's a reason for it... and it can be a good thing!

#### **#4 But there's a LIMIT to what it can do... it can't change people's hearts!**

*Government might be able to affect behavior... but it can't change hearts.* Look... that's the reason it "bears the sword"! Think about it. It has been said that our nation is a nation of laws... but how does it enforce those laws? What gives the government the ability... the right... the "teeth" to enforce law? To govern? It's "the sword" right? The threat of punishment... force... Government uses the sword or the threat of force as a way to coerce behavior. It does this with the military (why do you think America is a lone super-power? It's the strength & size of our armed forces!) the sword. It does this through law enforcement... you break the law, you go to jail... or pay a fine. The sword. It does this through taxes & tariffs. (Many of our taxes are designed not just to raise revenue but to coerce behavior. The so-called "sin taxes" on alcohol & cigarettes. Taxes are cut to encourage certain things. Taxes are increased to discourage certain things.) The sword. This isn't a criticism... this is just the way of government! That's how it works. But this kind of "top-down" authoritarian way... may have the ability to bring about certain behavior... but it just doesn't have the ability to change people's hearts!

**Here's the thing: Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can change people's hearts... and isn't that what we really need in America?**

*Aren't so many of our problems really problems of the heart? Spiritual in nature?* Take for example the problem of Abortion in this country. Regardless of where you are "politically" I hope that as Christians we can all agree that it's a problem... and that our goal (as Kingdom people) ought to be to reduce or even eliminate the number of abortions. According to a recent statistic I saw we've lost something like 4,200 soldiers in Iraq since the war began... and that's about the number of babies that are aborted every single day in this country. God who is the creator of life CANNOT be pleased! I am of the opinion that it ought to be illegal in America just like murder is illegal. It is the removal by force of a person's right to live, and that person- the weakest & most innocent among us! BUT before you think you've got me pegged politically here this... just changing the law isn't going to change people's hearts. If Roe v. Wade were overturned today, there would still be abortions tomorrow. Just like there will still be murder, just making something illegal does very little to change people's hearts. Only the gospel can change hearts! So, if Christians are serious about reducing abortion in America we had better get serious about spreading the gospel... about telling people about Jesus Christ and giving them a reason for their baby to live! You see, abortion, like so many other problems we face... is a heart issue... it's a spiritual issue.

*Some people expect the government to solve all of our problems... but that's ridiculous! It won't because it can't!* It may WANT to... but Government doesn't have the power within it to solve the real problems that plague us! It might be able to treat the symptoms... but it can't touch the problem! Why? Because our problems go much deeper. Just think about how many "political" problems are really spiritual in nature.

- Economic crisis—you think it has to do with the sin of greed & power?
- Worldwide poverty/ hunger-- I'm not talking about not being able to pay the cable bill... but real poverty. Why is there poverty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Is it because God didn't make enough stuff to go around? Is it because he just made too many people? Or could it be the sin of mankind hoarding & seeking power & control over others and using food supply to do it? Does family dysfunction play a part? Drug abuse? What about those who simply refuse to work? Could any of those things be a factor?

- What about the issues of life like abortion? Isn't it ultimately the taking of life for the sake of one's personal convenience?
- What about war? Doesn't it exist because mankind seeks power & control over others?
- Issue after issue... there are spiritual roots to so many of our political problems!

**And you will never solve a Spiritual problem with a Government Solution!**

*The best you might hope to do is regulate it... curb it... disguise it (and these may be noble efforts of government)... but they'll never bring about lasting & permanent solutions to these problems! If Christians are serious about SOLVING the political & social problems of our time... then we had better get serious about showing people Jesus... because that's the only solution there is! Yet, every 4 years we go through the same old "dog & pony show". The politicians politic and campaign... and promise us all that they will fix all of our problems! This year they will give healthcare to every American... we'll no longer have to worry about sickness & disease! This year they will fix the economy... and make it affordable for us to all drive our SUVs again! This year they'll fix the situation in Iraq... and war will be but a distant memory! We can beat our tanks and swords into plowshares! And then we'll get together on election day as we do every 4 years and vote for a new Messiah to come and to deliver us from all of this evil! Then 4 or 8 years he will leave office in disappointment (who has ever left with high opinion poll ratings?) Why? Because nobody can deliver us from this! The real problems we face can only be fixed by Jesus Christ! Maybe HE should run for President? Can you imagine how the press would crucify him?*

*If Christians would only get as passionate about sharing the gospel as we do about our politics or about our careers or about our football... imagine what we could all do! Just imagine the kind of change we could bring to the world! Imagine the hope that we could offer to the world! Imagine the peace & security that we could all rest in! Is that too utopian... to naïve or idealistic a vision? Maybe... but isn't it a dream worth believing in? Isn't it a goal we ought to strive towards? We can bring about this change... by changing one person's heart at a time. That's what Jesus did.*

*Have you been campaigning this year? Got a sign in your yard? Have you told anybody who you're voting for? Tried to persuade them to go your way? (I have)*

*Who have you told about Jesus this week? Isn't THAT the place to start?*