

## **GOD AND GOVERNMENT**

Romans 13: 1-7

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October 3, 2024

This coming Tuesday, Americans all across the nation will be going to the polls and voting for our nation's leaders. In fact, many have already cast their ballots. In the meantime we have been bombarded during these past months with a never-ending parade of advertisements supporting this or that candidate, along with a continuous barrage of newscasters attempting to predict who will win the presidential election. If you're like me, you're more than ready for it to be over.

Nevertheless, all of this frantic election activity has raised an important question. Who created the idea of government in the first place? Is it a human invention or did God have something to do with its origin? And if He did create it, what purpose or purposes does it fulfill? The Bible addresses these questions on numerous occasions, especially in the New Testament. Here is a listing of other scriptural references that address this topic: 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Titus 3:1 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. During the coming week take a few minutes to look them over. This morning, however, I would like for us to focus our attention on the passage of Scripture that was read this morning. Let me share it with you again reading from a contemporary translation of the Bible known as The Book.

What does this passage of Scripture tell us about the origin of government? According to Paul, God is the author of government. The idea of an institution known as government is, therefore, more than a human invention. It was ordained by God. It's one of the three institutions which He created for the benefit of humanity. The other two are the church and the family. To appreciate God's direct and personal involvement in the creation of government, we do not have to look any further than the second book in the Old Testament, Exodus. When the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai and Moses conferred with God high up on the mountain, what was taking place? Simply stated, a nation was being created with laws for its governance as illustrated not only in the Ten Commandments, but also in all of the other statutes and rules that are prescribed in the next three books of the Old Testament. God was, so to speak, in the nation building business and that required creating a government.

Throughout history many nations, including our own, have looked to God as the inspiration and the unseen author of the form of government which was created. In 1787 the Constitutional Convention meeting in Philadelphia was at a pivotal crossroad. There was so much discord and disagreement that

some of the delegates packed up their bags and headed home. At this crucial moment when the idea of putting together a new constitution for the governance of the nation seemed to be slipping away, Benjamin Franklin, the oldest and now nearly infirm member, addressed the gathering. During his address he said, "We have been assured, Sir," probably referring to Washington who was president of the convention, "in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it. I firmly believe this. I also believe that, without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel...." Had he not intervened in such a way as to remind the delegates that they needed to work together under the guidance of a divine presence, we might not possess that which has been deemed one of, if not the finest expression of a system of governance that has ever been devised.

With that in mind, let us turn our attention to what Paul reveals to us about the institution of government and why God created it. The answer is found in those first seven verses of chapter thirteen in the book of Romans. Basically he is telling us that God created government to achieve three purposes. First, it prevents chaos. Second, it establishes righteousness. Third, it promotes participation. Let's briefly take a look at each of these distinctives. In verses one and two he states that all governments have been placed in power by God and that refusing to obey them invites punishment. In other words, government has been given the task of maintaining law and order and those who reject this purpose and seek to create discord and strife have every reason to expect that they will be punished. Now here's something you might find hard to believe. During the first three centuries following the birth of Christ, the Church faced persecution by the Roman Empire, sometimes fierce persecution involving the loss of thousands of lives. Nevertheless, did any of the Christian leaders and writers of that era tell their fellow believers to rise up in rebellion against the government. Instead with one voice, they said just the opposite. They told the members of their churches to obey and pray for those who governed them.

The second purpose of government is to establish righteousness. In verse four Paul states that those in authority are given the responsibility of punishing those who do wrong. This means that government must promote and pursue righteousness. It must establish a set of standards for human conduct that make the world a better and safer place in which to live. Paul was personally aware of that fact as a Roman citizen. On more than one occasion the rights which he possessed as a citizen of the Roman Empire protected him from imprisonment and even death at the hands of his fellow Jews who wanted to kill him. The same is true today for us as citizens of the United States. Properly written and administered, the laws of our land are

to promote a right way of living for its citizens and to protect them from those who would harm or take advantage of them.

The third purpose of government is to promote participation. In Paul's day and time that could be summed up by three words—taxes, respect and honor. He sums up this purpose in verse seven. "Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and import duties and give respect and honor to all to whom it is due." That is certainly true for us as well. We need to support our government financially and show respect to those who are in places of authority. Fortunately, however, this third purpose of government offers an even fuller expression of participation for us. We are not only required to do things like paying taxes, but are also permitted and encouraged to be a part of our government. We can select those who govern us when we go to the polls and vote and we can even run for public office or support those who are running for office. This is a level of voluntary participation in government that has rarely been offered in the history of human affairs.

After the successful conclusion of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, a prominent lady met Benjamin Franklin as he exited Independence Hall in Philadelphia and asked him, "Well Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" Franklin's direct and a poignant reply was, "A republic, if you can keep it." May that continue to be a reflection of who we are as a nation as well as the fact that we are part of a government which has been instituted by God.