

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (14-5-1978 Strandtown Baptist Church)

Romans 13 v 1-10

Introduction

In considering the implications of a consecrated life, we have touched areas where we expect the practice of consecration to take place – how to behave in church, service, with fellow men, and with enemies. But consecration has not finished yet, because it extends to our life as citizens. We do not cease to be citizens when we become converted. Christians are citizens of two worlds, hence have duties to both worlds.

Paul was not contracted out of his responsibilities or privileges, as a Christian missionary. He was glad of the protection of the Roman authorities. They saved him from being lynched. He had, as a Roman citizen, the right of appeal to the Roman Emperor. He used these rights in the furtherance of his Christian missionary work. At the same time he showed respect to civil power, and did his duty as a citizen. So here Paul underlines our duties as citizens, and they are counted as part of consecration to the Lord. Not an optional extra, nor a bonus we give, but part and parcel of Christian life.

We are citizens as well as church members. So we are to do duties in both directions equally conscientiously. V.1- 7 speaks of duty to the state, and v. 8-10 speaks of duty to fellow citizens.

Duty to the State

The state is a divine institution, ordained by God. It is God's will that society be organized under various human governments. The source and sanction of civil government is God Himself.

Though governments vary, the principle behind them is to promote the good and suppress the evil. No government is perfect, and it is easy to find fault. But however bad or weak, no government aims to favour wrong as wrong, and punish right as right.

The existence of human government is God's will, and rulers are described as "God's ministers" (twice used in this passage). They are God's servants for our good. The ruler has the right to bear the sword (v.4), i.e. right to inflict the death penalty. He executes God's wrath on men that do evil. To resist him is to resist God.

Therefore authorities exist to enforce law and order. They have the right to do what we, as individuals, are not permitted to do. We are forbidden to execute private vengeance, and forbidden to take law into own hands as individuals. But what we are unable to do ourselves, the state can do for us. It is there to restrain evil, promote the good, to prevent society from falling under anarchy. Imagine what life would be like if no police, no laws except the law of the jungle, no government. How grateful early missionaries were for peace of Roman Empire and for its protection of them.

To extend this principle – just as the state has right to restrain evil-doers and protect the innocent in society, so it has the same duties in face of enemies and destroyers

from outside. Protection from internal and external enemies. Therefore right to have army as well as police force. Surely here is one answer to the pacifist's case.

Not only does the state preserve order and prevent anarchy, but it also confers on us other benefits. Wide range of services, which individually we could not enjoy. Supposing we had to supply our own water, light, sewerage, education for children, social security, public transport and roads. These are only obtainable when men agree to live together in one state and under one government, which organizes life. In the light of all of this, we have a duty to the state.

Cannot enjoy all the state provides and still refuse all responsibility to the state. No man – least of all a Christian – can take everything and give nothing. Therefore the Christian, above all men, is bound in honour to be a good citizen and to take his part in all duties of citizenship.

Hence Paul says be subject, be obedient, be loyal. Do not try to disassociate selves from society. Do not opt out. Do not claim privileges and refuse duties. We are bound up with everyone else in bundle of life and society. In practice, pay everyone their dues. Taxes to those to whom taxes are due. Revenue to those to whom revenue is due. Respect to those to whom respect is due. Honour to those to whom honour is due. To be done regardless of type of government. To be done regardless of the personal character of rulers.

In year 58AD, when the letter to the Romans was written, the Emperor was a dissolute young man named Nero, certainly no model of virtue or purity or kindness. Indeed six years later he began a vicious and unjustified persecution of Christians – they were burnt, crucified and torn to pieces by wild animals. That was how he thanked Christians for their loyalty!

Therefore ought we not to be obedient and dutiful when we live in a democracy and have a say in the spending of money, regardless of whether we agree or approve of all decisions of government or like the private life of the ruler? That does not mean we sit down and do nothing when things are going wrong. We have a right to protest and change the government and influence public opinion, and do all we can to alter what is wrong. Gospel has given us moral backbone to make solitary protest for truth and against falsehood.

This attitude of obedience and loyalty to the state is inculcated throughout the New Testament. In the Gospels – **Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's** (Mark 12:17) – when asked if it is lawful to give tribute to Caesar. Also see Jesus paying local taxes and Temple dues. In Acts, Paul shows respect for rulers, which in turn he urges on others. In the Epistles, Paul encourages prayers **for kings and for all that are in authority** (1 Timothy 2:1ff). **Be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work** (Titus 3:1). **Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man ... to the king.. or governors... Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.** (1 Peter 2:13-17).

It is God's will for us to show duty, respect, obedience and loyalty. These are Christian obligations as much as our most spiritual functions. Paying taxes and praying at meeting are equally Christian responsibilities. If our duties as Christians

were fully realized, what a splendid witness for God – in a day when people live for self, when the emphasis is on rights, to get not give, and where respect for authority, patriotism, law and order are dirty words. The Christian is a faithful subject, law-abiding inhabitant, punctual tax-payer, giver of genuine deference to government officers.

Reason behind all this is for conscience sake (v.5). Not because it is wise or because it pays, for this is teaching of conscience informed by God's Word. But "for conscience sake" is spirit and also limit of our obedience. What if the state requires us to act contrary to Law of God? Higher authority – even than the state – God Himself. **We ought to obey God rather than men** (Acts 5:29). We render to Caesar what is Caesar's, but to God what is God's – this is our supreme allegiance. C.F. Three Hebrews resisting Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship his image; Daniel refusing to pray only to Darius; Christians refusing to worship Caesar and being thrown to the lions; Luther's defying words, though spoken with courtesy and respect, "I cannot do otherwise; so let me God."

When state exceeds its authority in acting contrary to God's law, disobedience may not only be a right, but a duty. To what extent? Taking up arms? Matter on which Christians differ – and on which no clear guidance is given. Clearly last resort, when all else has failed. Griffith Thomas said "The Christian will be slow to head a rebellion, but where circumstances absolutely compel, there does not seem anything in this passage to prohibit it." And Bishop Henry Moule commented "This passage does not pronounce it inconceivable that a Christian under circumstances which leave his action unselfish, truthful, the issue not of impatience but of conviction, might be justified in positive resistance".

Duty to fellow citizens

Owe no man anything (13:8) – whether Christian or not. Do not incur anything which you are unable to pay, do not live above your means, be able to meet all liabilities, fulfil obligations, pay bills promptly. Debt is a form of stealing. To pay as well as pray. A Christian debtor was once heard praying "Lord give us faith, give us devil driving faith". His creditor was in the same meeting, and soon followed with "Amen, Lord, and give us debt paying faith" to himself quietly.

Not only money, we also owe men the Gospel. **I am a debtor** (Romans 1:14). Also **debtors not to flesh, to live after the flesh** (Romans 8:12). Therefore obligation to live after the Spirit. **Owe no man anything but to love one another... love is fulfilling of the Law** (Romans 13:8).

Always pay debt of love and remember we cannot discharge this in full. When we love, we fulfil commandments. As we love ourselves is to be the measure and standard and extent of our love to neighbour. It trips off tongue so easily. Do we love neighbour as Jesus said and as Good Samaritan exemplified? When we love neighbour as ourselves, we are considerate of neighbour's feelings and welfare. We harm men when we fail to help them. It is not just a case of avoiding doing harm, but of doing much active good. Love is not an emotion we may indulge as we please or not. We are not free to select the objects of our love e.g. the lovable. We must love all

round, without distinction. Every man is our creditor for that debt. Not get his due from us unless he gets our love. Undying debt.

Is all this too difficult? It may be so, but it is not impracticable because God's gift of Holy Spirit. He is Spirit of love. If only He controls our life it is not impossible to fulfil obligations. Love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us. Therefore love as Christ loved, and live as Christ lived.