

Unashamed (19): Take Me to Your Leader

(Romans 13:1-7)

I. Introduction

- A. David Lipscomb was most prominent preacher in South among our churches in Civil War
1. He stridently opposed the war, discouraged Christians from entering or supporting it
 - a. In fact, he opposed participation in civil government (*sole purpose is waging war*)
 - b. He taught Christians not to serve in military, police, run for public office, or vote.
 - 1) He saw human government as rebellion against God rule and dominion over us
 - 2) When Israel wanted a king, “*They have rejected me as their king*” (**1 Sam 8:7**)
 2. Lipscomb thought being part of God’s kingdom means that we’re not part of man’s
 - a. God does not grant us dual citizenship; she can only serve one king, one master.
 - b. We serve earthly king in 3 ways (our text today)— pay taxes, give respect and pray
- B. There was a preacher in North contemporary of Lipscomb named James A. Garfield
1. He held a slightly different view; he was colonel in Union army when the war began
 - a. He recruited students from Hiram College (preacher training school) for Union army
 - b. He led his men in victories in Kentucky, and he later fought in the Battle of Shiloh
 2. Garfield later went into politics, and he was elected to U.S. House of Representatives
 - a. In 1880, he was elected president, the only president elected while serving in House
 - b. Garfield saw politics as an extension of his faith; his proof text is our text today
 3. Garfield and Lipscomb differed in their views, and they had little use for one another
- C. We continue this morning in our study of the *Unashamed: The Message of Romans*
1. The first of Romans is about God’s grace; **Romans 12-16** is about gracing each other
 - a. **Rom 13:1-7** is about government, and no part of government or politics is grace!
 - b. At least not today. Our country has never been more divided politically than now!
 - 1) Politics used to be give-and-take, compromise, horse-trading, “*Art of the Deal*”
 - 2) Now it’s two entrenched sides who must win at all cost— the “*nuclear option*”
 2. It’s inevitable the divisiveness of political extremes will cause problems in the church
 - a. Lipscomb and Garfield would have a hard time worshiping together in same church
 - b. And the changing political realities had made things difficult in the church at Rome
 - 1) Paul tells the church to keep things simple politically—three basic things
 - 2) The devil is in the details. And it turns out, he was also on the throne at Rome

II. The Christian and the Government (Romans 13:1-7)

- A. **First**, we must submit to governing authorities because God established them (**13:1-2**)
1. No surprise Paul that mentions the government—he is writing to a church at Rome
 - a. It is surprising Paul begins by saying God was the one who put emperors on thrones
 - 1) Emperor Claudius forced all Jews out of Rome, causing a great deal of turmoil
 - 2) Young Emperor Nero allowed Jews to return to Rome, causing more turmoil
 - 3) Same Emperor Nero would begin a policy persecution of Christians in Rome
 - b. How did God involve Himself in raising up and taking down Claudius and Nero?
 - 1) Did He send Jews away (Claudius) or was it God who bring them back (Nero)?
 - 2) As we'll see, Christians at Rome had very different political views about that
 - c. The idea of God establishing the governing authorities was confusing— *it still us*
 2. Bible assures us God is the authority of authorities, Lord of lords and King of kings
 - a. God reigns as king over all the earth, exalted over the nations (**Psa 22:28, 47:7-8**)
 - b. It is God who puts kings on their thrones and He then deposes them (**Dan 2:20-21**)
 - 1) That is clearly seen in the Old Testament because we have a divine narrator
 - 2) So, do you think that God today has retired from the king-making business
 - c. Paul says that the authority of the governments comes from the authority of God
 - 1) For Christians to rebel against the authority of the state is to rebel against God
 - 2) **Small Groups:** *What would it mean if founding fathers took Paul seriously?*
 3. Does this mean Christians must obey the law regardless of how unfair or unjust it is?
 - a. Obviously, we can't randomly choose which laws to obey and disobey— chaos!
 - b. But Paul says “*be subject*” or “*submit*” (*hypotasso*) to early rulers—not to “*obey*” t
 - 1) Children and slaves are told to obey parents/masters; wives submit to husbands
 - 2) Those are entirely different commands, though we have combined the two
... in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and obey, till death us do part
 - c. Submitting may involve obedience— Paul expects that it will here (*paying taxes*)
 - d. But there were of course times when the law of God will supersede the law of man
 - 1) Many of these same Christians reading this letter would die under Nero's hand
 - 2) This was also the genius and engine that drove Dr. King and Civil Rights
 - a) He recognized law and he broke it... often. But never led a rebellion against it
 - b) Passive resistance and acceptance of consequence—that's exactly how Paul die!
 - e. Issues are often more complex than simply saying, “*The law is the law, and Paul...*”

B. **Second**, the government is God’s instrument of wrath to punish evil-doers (**13:3-5**)

1. Paul’s basic rule here— do what’s right, you don’t fear those who are in authority
 - a. **Question:** What do YOU do when you’re driving and suddenly pass a policeman?
 - 1) Immediately take your foot off accelerator? Hit brakes? Scream out loud?
 - 2) Why that reaction? Maybe at some point you weren’t doing “*what is right?*”
 - b. **Rule:** Do what’s right, you have nothing to fear. *There are exceptions, of course.*
2. **Note:** Rulers are authorized here to do exactly what individuals are forbidden to do!
 - a. Paul ends **Rom 12** absolutely forbidding us from seeking vengeance (**Rom 12:19**)
 - b. Ruler is “*God’s servant, agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer*”
 - 1) As an individual, I am not to take revenge on anyone or seek to punish anyone
 - 2) If I were a cop, then I would an instrument of God’s wrath... it becomes my job
 - c. Does that raise issues for a Christian? Sure, but who would we want doing that job?
3. Point for Garfield? I’d question Lipscomb that government’s only job is waging war
 - a. Paul says, “*God’s servant for good*” (**13:4**) We can that be read more broadly
 - b. Fighting crime and punishing the guilty is good. *But that isn’t our the only good?*
 - 1) Getting at root of crime would be good; war on pverty would be a war on crime
 - 2) Does government have role in caring for poor? Health care? Social security?
 - c. Good we never disagree on that! Good people always do disagree on doing good!

C. **Third**, we are to give to our government exactly what we owe it (**Rom 13:6-7**)

1. *Is this great timing or what?* This is the week that the tax man comes, right?
 - a. Pay your taxes! No one likes to pay taxes, buy if you do— *you can pay mine!*
 - b. Like we suggested last week, we really don’t need commentary here. *Pay the bill!*
2. More than just taxes, we are called to respect those who serve as part of government
 - a. That means the police, our warriors, our local public officials—all the government.
 - b. And we’re to respect the president— frankly we haven’t seen a lot of in awhile
 - 1) In last 16 years, left and right took turns ridiculing and lampooning president
 - 2) Hear people say, “*Well, I might not respect the man, but I do respect the office*”
 - c. The way to show respect to office is how you treat the man or woman occupying it
3. Our country gives us the right to criticize leaders; men & women died to preserve that
 - a. But God does not give Christians the right to disrespect those who are in authority!
 - b. Respecting people in government authority is one way to respect God’s authority!

III. Conclusion

- A. OK, let's go back and re-visit the political situation in Rome as Paul writes Romans
1. Claudius died in 54; poisoned by his wife Agrippina so son Nero could be Caesar
 - a. Nero was 17 when he began to rule; the first part of his rule was actually quite good
 - b. Nero reversed many of Claudius policies, including the edict banishing the Jews
 2. Think how differently the Christians in Roman church saw this new political reality
 - a. Jewish Christians saw Nero's rise to power as a fresh start and new lease on life
 - b. Roman Christians saw the new emperor and his administration as a huge step back
 - 1) While the Jews were banished, the church had stepped out of Jewish shadow
 - 2) But now they were being saddled with being seen as a Jewish sect again
 3. Roman church wasn't just divided theologically and ethnically— but also politically
- B. People who love God and love people can view politics and political issues differently
1. Sometime after the last presidential election, I had conversations with three members
 - a. One was almost in tears, so disappointed in outcome they could barely function
 - b. Another told me how excited and hopeful they were at the prospects for future
 - c. The third was in-between, "*I don't think we're in Kansas anymore, Toto*"
 2. So who is right? I still think there are still clowns to left of me and jokers to right!
- C. Let me offer three simplistic (*because that's all I got folks*) observations as we close—
1. **First**, we may know what God DID, but we don't know what He is DOING
 - a. God puts kings and presidents in power; he must have put Donald Trump there
 - b. Also put Millard Fillmore there— worst president! Whig party folded after his loss
 - c. Trust in God, but don't presume to understand or explain what God is doing today!
 2. **Second**, try to UNDERSTAND people before you try to CONVINCe them
 - a. Political issues are always multifaceted and complex; nothing is really "*simple*"
 - b. People who disagree with you on issues are not "*snowflakes*" but brother and sisters
 - c. Take this suggestion seriously, and you'll do what most missing in politics—*listen*
 3. **Third**, there is a difference between the kingdom of God and men (**Matt 20:25-28**)
 - a. Rulers of the nations always rule by power and force—point to Lipscomb here
 - b. Kingdom of God is about serving others, sacrificing for others— it's about others
 - 1) Whatever our political views, we must remember God cares about is people
 - 2) When we find a difference in our politics and our focus—what will we change?
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