

### **RENDERING UNTO CAESAR-Part 2**

May 29, 2016

Last week's article focused on the Christians in Rome, and some of the problems with which they needed help from Paul. It is very helpful to understand any passage of Scripture through the eyes of those to whom it was originally written, but we must also be able to cross the bridge from the first century to the twenty-first century, if we are going to be able to make proper application of the passage at hand.

There are many differences between the first century culture, and the modern lifestyle. Perhaps the greatest difference between the two, is that those who received the letter from Paul, lived under very different circumstances, politically speaking. At the time of the writing, Nero was the emperor of Rome, and following A.D. 60, he became a murderous and highly ambitious ruler, those who claimed Christianity, or anyone who opposed his rule, were visited with great misfortune by those in power. Even though great persecution existed at that time, the Christians in Rome were still bound to obey the laws of the land, and Paul made that very clear in his letter to them (Rom. 13:1-5).

There may have been misconceptions in the minds of Christians during the first century concerning their "freedom," and it could have been the case that some thought their freedom meant complete freedom from obeying the Roman government. However, that was not the case, and Paul wrote to inform them of their duties to the civil authorities, and that they were to be subject to the emperor, when his laws did not contradict God's laws. Paul is very clear though, that God is the ultimate authority, even when it comes to civil law. We learn from Paul's letter that the governments of the world exist only because God allows them to do so, no human being has any authority which was not given by God, and Paul described the civil government as a divine institution approved by God Himself.

Even though government institutions have approval from God to exist, that does not mean He approves of every action taken by the governments of the world. If one decided to rid its territory of all male children, God would not approve of that action, and He does not approve of any action that usurps his authority (Mt. 28:18).

All who refuse to be in subjection to the higher powers resist the ordinance of God, because He granted that authority. Robertson L. Whiteside stated, "To violate civil law is more than violating civil law. It is violating an authority that God has appointed to exist in governing man on earth" (*A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome*). The faithful Christian will be a law abiding citizen because he understands that God has commanded adherence to the laws of the land, and when one disobeys a law of the civil government, he is transgressing the command of God (1 John 3:4).

Civil disobedience means to "stand against, defy, and oppose civil government" (Marvin Weir, "Duties to Civil Rulers, the Debt of Love"). Whiteside said, "To resist the government does not simply mean to fail sometimes to obey a law; it is to take a stand against the government – to defy the authority of the government. To do this is to array oneself against both God and the government, and is so doing brings upon himself the judgment of both."

Those who stand against, and are opposed to the government will be punished, but the punishment will come from both man and God. However, those who will "be subject unto the higher powers" do not

have to live in fear of the government, as long as the government is not abusing the authority it has been given by God; but, those who practice evil and live contrary to the laws of the land should be fearful, and Paul sets forth the proper function of civil governments, which is to administer justice to those who have transgressed, or disobeyed, the law. Peter also stated the function of the government was “for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Pet. 2:14).

Next week we will continue our study of rendering unto Caesar in the proper way, and will notice modern application of the text. Also, we will focus on the consistency of the principles, taught in Romans, which are found in other places in the Scripture.