

RENDERING UNTO CAESAR-Part 3

June 5, 2016

As we continue our study from last week, of man's duty to the civil government, Paul declared that the government is a "minister of God," and it is so for good, because it "maintains order and discipline, regulating the lives of those who would otherwise slip into utter anarchy" (Tom Wacaster). Much like today, the civil government during the Roman rule did much to help the spread of the gospel, though that was not its purpose. The Roman powers helped to promote a peaceful environment wherein the gospel had a better environment in which to be preached. Paul understood that as long as men obey the laws of the land, they have nothing to fear, but if they choose to be disobedient, fearfulness should come upon them because the government does not bear the sword in vain. It should be understood that if the governments of the world are ministers for good, to those who submit to the law, they would be by necessity, punishers to those who do wrong (Deaver).

Paul's use of "the sword," as an illustration, demonstrates a symbol of power, and that power includes the use of the sword as a means to carry out capital punishment. The government has been given the authority to institute the death penalty for crimes it deems worthy, and in the long ago, God gave a command concerning capital punishment, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:6). Paul understood that there were certain crimes that demanded death as the penalty, and the civil government was expected to carry out that punishment. If the government does not punish those who commit evil, then proper fear is not produced, and wrong doing will continue to occur. In fact, Paul acknowledged if he had done anything worthy of death he would not refuse to die, for he knew that it was within the will of God for the government to enact the punishment of death where necessary (Acts 25:11).

It is a matter of obligation for all people, especially Christians, to be subject to the laws of the land, to live a godly life, and please heaven. Lard was correct when he said:

"Our conscience is our sense of right, formed by the word of God. Ruling authorities are appointed by God, and civil officers are his servants. God having now told us this, we know it within ourselves. This knowledge forms our sense of right, and this sense is our conscience. If now we do not obey the civil authorities, this sense or conscience is violated. This will not only cause us pain, but it is wrong in itself." (Lard, Moses E. *Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans*).

A clear conscience is a byproduct of Christianity (2 Pet. 3:21), and if a Christian violates his own conscience he is sinning (Rom. 14:23). That is not a new fact that God presented, but has always been a part of His plan (Acts 24:16; 2 Cor. 4:2; 1 Tim. 1:5; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3).

There are many differences between the ancient Christian's culture and the modern believer's, but the expectation of obedience to the laws of God remain the same today, just as they were in the days of Paul. Within the laws of God, He has always had in mind the peaceful life that He desires for His creation, and obeying the laws of the land is one way of delivering that peace to the families of man.

We will complete the discussion of man's duty to the government next week.