

RENDERING UNTO CAESAR-Part 4

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The question that all Christians should be asking is, “How do I connect first century teaching with modern day obedience?” The good news is the principles found in the Holy Scripture, written to ancient Christians, are the same principles that can, and must still be applied today. Many of those principles and commandments have to do with the ways in which we interact with the established governments of the world. Notice one of the more commonly disliked laws of the land. Paul commanded, “For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.” (Rom. 13:6-7). Very few people today enjoy rendering to Caesar his due taxes, but the collection of taxes is not in opposition to the laws of God. All citizens have the responsibility to pay taxes to the civil government, and Christ taught that men should pay the taxes they owe (Mt. 17:24-27; 22:15-22). Christian citizens have the responsibility to pay taxes for the same two reasons that they must be in subjection to the government. First, taxes are paid so the wrath of the government can be avoided; second, taxes are paid for conscience sake, and the “tribute” that the Romans would have had to pay was “the annual tax which was levied upon houses, lands, and persons” (Deaver). Since God ordained government, it is necessary that it be funded in order to operate in an effective manner, and the collection of taxes is the means by which that happens.

Christians must keep in mind, that if they fail to abide by such laws, they will be held accountable by God. God. However, the civil governments will also be held accountable for not serving the people as God has set forth in His Word. If Christians are not happy about how tax money is being spent, they should not rebel against the government, instead they should seek to change the government through legal means, i.e. voting in elections. It is absolutely possible for one to cross the barrier of time and culture, and remain obedient to both God and man.

The very principles found in Romans 13:1-7, are based upon the same underlying principle found throughout the Bible. They are founded upon one’s love for God and his fellow man. Paul re-enforced that sentiment when he said, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8).

Lard said, “Christians must pay to all whatever is due them, whether tax, customs, or honor...Owe no tax, no custom, no fear, no honor; pay to all their dues.” Some have taken this phrase to mean that it would be wrong to borrow anything from anyone. However, Weir makes the point, “Does this verse teach that it is wrong to purchase items on credit? Absolutely not! If one honors the schedule of payments for which he has contracted, he does not break the law nor offend the creditor. When one purchases on credit, the entire amount agreed upon must be paid, but only the current payment is that which is “owed” on a given day” (“Duties to Civil Rulers, the Debt of Love”). Paul is not saying that a Christian cannot make purchases on credit or acquire debt, but he is prohibited from “owing a thing after it is due.” In other words, pay your debts in a timely fashion and all that is owed.

It seems that Paul is addressing a debt that will always be owed, the debt of loving one another, and there should be a special love between those who are the children of God. “There is a sense in which one may be able to ‘render’ custom, taxes, and/or money borrowed, and eventually ‘get out from under’ a certain obligation. But, the obligation to love one another is always due, never fully paid; and

it is a perpetual debt” (Wacaster). The one who loves as he should, has fulfilled the law, and that love must be shown to others.

God has ordained civil government and the authority which it possesses, and both Christians and non-Christians alike have an obligation from God to obey the “higher powers.” When properly operated, the function of civil government is to protect, preserve, and praise those who live in subjection to them. It also has the responsibility to punish those who rebel against the government and violate its laws. Citizen responsibility to the civil government requires that all the laws of the land be kept, as long as those laws do not violate God’s laws (Acts 5:29). In situations where civil laws violate God’s laws, God must be obeyed. When men are able to live in peace and love with each other, and the governing powers, the principle in this passage is grasped by the modern Christian.

When it comes to human governments, a few things must be understood. It is the case that Satan will often use the governments of the world to carry out his plans for the destruction of humankind. However, God does not allow the governments of today, any more than He did in the first century, to thwart His plans, but He has used the decisions of men to carry out His desire, whether they were good or evil. It is possible, for the Christian, to live in accordance with God’s will, as well as the civil government’s.