

To Follow as Slaves or To Be Free in Christ

By Rev. Christine Meier

Last month we reviewed inalienable rights in light of Romans 1 & 2 and James 1. This month, a “walk-thru” religious and civil rights in light of self-government is where we will find ourselves. Our Scripture for this month is Romans 12 & 13. Many folks are surprised to know how consistently the idea of self-government is found within the Bible’s pages. A quote from James Madison might help us understand how the framing generation viewed civil and religious rights: “It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society. Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governour of the Universe: And if a member of Civil Society, who enters into any subordinate Association, . . . do it with a saving of his allegiance to the Universal Sovereign. We maintain therefore that in matters of Religion, no man's right is abridged by the institution of Civil Society and that Religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance.”¹

As we discovered last month, there are moments, especially in the Greek, where the translators didn’t translate a word. When making interpretive policy statements from a specific epistle or book of the Bible, it’s always important to know who wrote the epistle; who was it written to and for what purpose was it written. The Bible was not separated by chapters or verses, only by books or epistles. Romans was written to Christians living in Rome, functioning within what were probably house churches located throughout Rome and its suburbs. They comprised believing Jews who would follow the Law of Moses. This presented some challenges. For them, the “ways of the Spirit” went counter-intuitive to the Law of Moses. Civilly, they were also under the law of Rome. One of the main tenets of that law was Pax Romana or the Peace of Rome.

Starting as an empire of mixed peoples, it wasn’t until Augustus (Julius Caesar’s adopted son) that its reality became a “platform” for management. Having conquered many lands, Rome had growing pains which made managing the various peoples difficult. Keeping peace, ensuring a constant flow of revenue to

¹ “Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments.” In “The Writings of James Madison.” Edited by Gaillard Hunt. Volume 2, 1783-1787. 184, 185 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons. The Knickerbocker Press. 1901)

maintain that peace; (an army, competent rulers, infrastructure, and quelling sedition), became known as Pax Romana. Historians today define it as a period of time in which this “peace” reigned.² But it was more than just a time period. The gradual understanding of the concept arose with Augustus as a cult mentality, much like emperor worship arose with each succession of power. Laws, government and governing, collecting taxes and keeping ideas which worked well within Roman supremacy or Roman Peace (Pax Romana) were intertwined and connected to keep that peace. So any idea or conflict which could obfuscate Pax Romana was dealt with harshly. In fact, the crucifixion of Jesus was based on the Pax Romana. In other words, He caused a supposed disruption to that peace, so He had to be removed.

There is a caveat here. Because the Roman Empire encompassed so many lands and various peoples, there was also a willingness to allow people to believe many of their traditional and cultic practices, as long as Pax Romana was not diminished. Even the idea of this give-and-take fostered Pax Romana: You kept people happy with Rome because their traditions continued; they lived under “peace” and they decided fighting Rome was too costly. It was cheaper to pay your taxes (in most cases). If an idea, practice or religion didn’t do that, well, then, bye-bye people practicing that tradition or idea. Jews had made an uneasy deal with Rome early on. So had other cultures. Some cultures could not tolerate Rome. Initially Christians were considered a sect of Judaism. As time went on, Christians were less able to work within Emperor worship mandates, thus they were fed to the lions or placed in the “games” within the arenas. The destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD by Titus signaled Rome’s displeasure with Jewish attitudes which violated that “peace.”

It should be noted that some emperors were easier to deal with than others. But the thought you would talk to an emperor is misleading. Governors like Pontius Pilate (fifth prefect of Judea) would deal with various cultures within their districts. Depending upon emperor mandates and prefect attitude, would depend whether or not your life continued or ended quickly (or not, on the cross). Many today claim America as starting with a Roman-type government. The idea of a government being run by “We, the People” is alien in concept to the Rome we read in history books. America’s formation into united but independent states, under a non-sectarian covenant (Federal) agreement with a people who had a religious covenant (Christians and Jews) agreement with their God, was never seen before on the planet. So we need to highlight why Paul wrote the way he did to the Romans and

² http://www.ancient.eu/Pax_Romana/

understand “freedom” was not something people of Paul’s day understood when they related to their government. The only freedom to be found by Christians was within the pages of the Bible they read (Old Testament) and the pages of the epistles given to them by the apostles who were, at that time, writing the New Testament.

Their continued experiences with the Holy Spirit were so freeing and liberating that Paul had to write to the church in Corinth (1 & 2 Corinthians) to explain why modesty and propriety needed to accompany their spiritual experiences. While this was necessary for the Greeks, it went in a different direction for those Jews who were trying to follow the Mosaic Law, but believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. The make-up of the early church during its first 25 years was largely Jewish. From about 25 years after Christ’s resurrection to about 50 years or so, the believing population was changing with more and more Gentile converts being added. If we view the epistle to the Romans as being written in 56-57 AD, we then understand that Paul is still writing to believing Jews, but there is a large influx of Gentile converts within their ranks.³ The running theme of Paul to the Romans was how to live by the Holy Spirit as opposed to living under the Law of Moses. As Christians today, we take our worship experiences and communication with the Holy Spirit for granted. We treat our civil and religious rights almost as an after-thought. We forget at what price and cost those freedoms were purchased by centuries of believers, and 240 years of early Christian and American soldiers and statesman.

In Romans 1 & 2 last month we observed Paul talking about spiritual things being received for obedience, and unclean things received due to consistent disobedience. This month we’ll look at another concept or theme evident through Romans 12 & 13. We see a concept of Godly government— some have even described it as self-government (they are not wrong). In order to understand Romans 12 & 13, we need to glance at Chapter 11. This is where Paul talks about the nation of Israel and how God’s gifts are without recompense. In other words, God is not an Indian-giver. He does not take Israel’s gifts or calling away because she has walked away from Him. One of Israel’s gifts and callings to the world was to bring covenantal-compact governance through God’s written word; another was to bring forth Messiah. Paul then views how it is a Christian should live. Remember that he is talking to Jews who understood the Temple system. He explains they should live by presenting themselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-3). By living this way, Paul wants us to understand that we will be able to

³ <https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-romans>

know the perfect will of God for our lives. Quite often folks will ask me, “How do I know what God wants me to do?” I always refer them to this portion of Scripture and give them suggestions for fasting, worship and seeking His face in the word—and by making that a self-governing way of life.

It is after these concepts are delivered that Paul shares seven gifts God has given to the body of Christ to help in functioning, even to some extent to govern themselves with. Here in Romans we see several themes, and we have reviewed a few of them last month and now this month. When we get to Romans 12, it is clear we are talking about self-government religiously or how, in light of our following the “law of the Spirit and not the law of the flesh,” as Paul terms it, we are to live. It is then we see Paul describe these seven gifts. Many churches call them motivational gifts or gifts given to humans in general. I don’t think it is by accident that Paul, in talking about the nation of Israel in the previous chapter here in Romans, mentions God’s gifts as without recompense. Many churches counter against assigning these gifts as something people are born with because Paul writes about the body of Christ being members one of another. No doubt Paul is describing these specific gifts as “grace” gifts. That means they are enabling gifts or gifts of enablement to help the body of Christ.

Early on in America after the Puritans settled, there was a teaching which has conveyed our idea relating to the saying ‘For God & Country.’

“It is this understanding that ‘Christian Communion’ had two forms: the ecclesiastical and the civil state....The secondary purpose of the ecclesiastical government was for ‘conversion, edification, and salvation of souls;’ while contemporaneously ‘civil government is preservation, honor, justice and peace.’”⁴

We see this doctrine in the teaching of men like John Cotton when he wrote the treatise, “A Discourse About Civil government in a New Plantation Whose Design is Religion.” (1663).⁵ It’s not hard to understand the Puritan position when reading Romans 12 & 13. Modern-day Christian scholars attribute Romans 13 solely to secular, civil government, while some Jewish and Messianic Jewish scholars believe the key is to look at the beginning of the epistle. It is addressed to the saints

⁴ Meier, Christine, “70 Years of American Captivity: The Polity of God, The Birth of a Nation and The Betrayal of Government.” Victoria, BC, Canada: Tellwell Publishers (2016) 196.

⁵ John Cotton. 1663. “A Discourse About Civil Government In A Plantation Whose Design Is Religion.” Cambridge: MDCLXIII Printed by Samuel Greene and Marmaduke Johnson. 5-7. Public Domain. Maybe seen as a copy by John Davenport <<http://books.google.com>> You must sign in. Accessed 3/19/16

at Rome. They believe Romans 13 is for government based in ecclesiastical authority. Then there are those who opt for both. I happen to be in the “both” category. The reason I feel that way is because of one of those non-translated words I spoke about earlier. Chapter 12 recites a long list of “to-do’s” for the Christian while functioning in this world; whether that is spiritually or physically, inside and outside the church.

Chapter 12:21 says this: “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” On the drop-down tab on this site, there is a page titled “Living Jesus Today.” You can read the idea that good government must provide security to its citizens. The only true way to do that is for it to be transparent, honorable, ethical and efficient. This is what our government in the U.S. was before a foreign ideology like progressive socialism took it over. Now it is anything but those things. In fact, we see where the progressive socialists have placed as a candidate for president an individual who has been proven to be part of a crime syndicate this nation has not seen the likes of in its entire history.⁶ No one who is a Christian can, nor should vote for a party platform which denies children their lives by killing them, then denies Christians their free speech, money and religious worship, by arresting them or fining them into oblivion if they refuse to support abortion. But this is exactly what the promise of one party’s goals are for our country, within their new platform, if they can be elected.⁷ This runs contrary to Christianity and all who claim Christianity must resist this at all costs. Good government overcomes evil with good, simply put.

Progressive-socialists use Romans 13 to say that Christians must obey any government they find themselves in. But is that truly what it says? First we are told in James 4:7 to resist the devil. The devil is evil personified. We are told to resist wherever and whenever we find it. Secondly, in Hosea 8:4, God tells the prophet clearly that Israel chose kings, but it was not by God’s will that they did so. In 1 Samuel 8:5-22, we have recorded an incidence in which the prophet was getting old and his sons were not faithful in administering the covenant among the people

⁶ <http://www.breitbart.com/clinton-cash-movie/>

⁷ http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/papers_pdf/117717.pdf see 14-21; 34-39; 45-48, one must ask how all this “great” language in the Democrat platform will work when Christians refuse to “line up” and start preaching biblical truth. See also [https://prod-static-ngop-pbl.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/DRAFT_12_FINAL\[1\]-ben_1468872234.pdf](https://prod-static-ngop-pbl.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/DRAFT_12_FINAL[1]-ben_1468872234.pdf) for the Republican Party Platform. The difference is amazing: no “deep in your pockets” and “in every aspect of your life” language. Just outlines of how freedom and liberty should work for America and how they desire to restore it. The difference alone should inform why no Christian can vote democrat.

(governance). So the people asked for a king like other nations around them had. This displeases Samuel, because up until that point, Israel had been a free nation, with God as their King. But the Lord tells Samuel to listen to the voice of the people and give them a king, *only after God* tells Samuel to warn the people what the king will do in taking their money, children and other goods and freedoms. But God says, if they still want a king, give them one and warn them that I will not interfere when this king turns out to be a tyrant. After all, you were warned and you made the choice. We all know the sad story: few of Israel's kings were just. So it is clear that God does not always approve of the government we as humans choose for ourselves. Lastly, if Paul was describing unwavering support to the tyranny of Rome or its legal code when it conflicted with good government, then why did Rome want to imprison and kill Paul and other Christians of the time? Rome would not have done that if Paul and other New Testament writers were demanding total surrender to the Roman government.

In fact, it is clear from these and other Scriptures, that we are to resist bad and corrupt government. After all, we are the only ones who can change it. We did it to ourselves. So this idea that we are to be blind slaves and compliant sheep-to-the-slaughter of unjust government is ridiculous and non-biblical. The other reason I feel Romans 13 is describing both ecclesiastic and civil government is a missing word, or a word which has not been translated in our modern Bibles. Romans 13:1: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." The Greek says, "...subject to the higher (*huperecho*) powers (*exousia*), for there is no power (*exousia*) but of God (*Theos*)..." After the word "God" (*Theos*) is a word which is not translated. It is the Greek word *deuteronomy*. So it should read "...for there is no power but of God *deuteronomy*."

The Greek word *huperecho* is used five times in the New Testament. Here it is translated as "higher." It is only used one more time relating to government, and that's in 1 Peter 2:13: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme (*huperecho*)...." The other three instances in Philippians talk about self-governing as a Christian. The word translated as "power" (*exousia*) is used frequently (93 times). Its main idea is power relating to mankind's power of choice or liberty in having physical and mental power. In connection to these ideas we have its other understanding as the power of rule or government, influence and authority. There is a reason why translators do not translate the word *deuteronomy*. It is a conjunction word meaning *but* or *moreover*; in this case it could be translated as "secondly." The literal meaning of the Greek word "*deuteronomy*" is second law. It's a hybrid

derived from two Greek words, “deutero” (second) and “nomos” or law. It is used 2,555 times in the New Testament. Because the word “but” (*Ei me*) is translated already (*but* of God), and is also a conjunction word having almost exactly the same usage as the word *deuteronomy*, the translators do not translate it. “*Ei Me*” is used only 87 times in the New Testament.

Many Christians who read the Bible will recognize this word “Deuteronomy” as the title of book five of the Torah (first five books of the Bible). You might also now have a question: “If deuteronomy is Greek, why is it used as a title in the Hebrew Old Testament?” What we view in English as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy is not Hebrew. The Hebrew title for the fifth book is “Devarim.” It is classically translated as “These Are the Words.” Jewish law or Torah (the first five books of the Bible) is both written and oral. The Jews have always had an oral law first. By writing the book of Deuteronomy, it was a written teaching lesson. So it was labeled or titled as “These Are the Words.” It was incorrectly translated as “Second Law.” The Jews have no “second” law; they only have one law. Mishna (or Mishne) is the oral law, written down. The Talmud describes and expounds the oral law. Then there is something called the Gemara, which is the combination of the reciting of the Mishna (or Mishne) with the discussions of the rabbis about it (Talmud).

So if you’re still with me through this study, you might have another question. It might sound something like this: “Since Paul wrote to the Jews (Christians) at Rome, why would he write a connective Greek word twice, especially one, which at that time could be translated as the fifth book of the Old Testament? Wasn’t he also the ‘Apostles to the Gentiles’? Didn’t he know there could be a confusion or double meaning as to what he was writing?” When translators translate they follow a very good rule that goes something like this: Always use words which translate for the easiest understood meaning common at the time in which is the most likely explanation for the text. Unfortunately, in the case of some Bible writers, that is not always the best translation. This problem is easily seen in the Old Testament where God uses double meaning in words to get across a wider understanding. This same approach is used frequently by the Apostle John, and less frequently by Paul. I believe though, this is one of those places.

I believe that’s the case because of what I have shared and because of another bit of history. An ancient title for the book of Deuteronomy is “Mishne Torah” or “copy of the Torah.” This is also where many scholars believe the erroneous understanding of “second torah” or second law came to take place. Deuteronomy is far more than a copying of the Torah. This is the last time Moses will be addressing

all of Israel before they were to go into the “Promised Land.” Moses knows he will be prevented from entering in. Similarly, Paul is now getting ready to be sent into captivity. He has no idea which of the churches he has birthed he will be able to visit before his death. He’s heading to Jerusalem where it was prophesied he will be bound. It seems when he is told this prophecy, it is not news to him. So obviously, the Holy Spirit has already spoken to him. When Moses addresses Israel, as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, he is now instructing them as if he understands he is teaching hundreds of future generations. Historically within ancient examples, this is not so unusual for a leader to make a final address to a people on a special occasion. We see this idea similarly in Deuteronomy.⁸ We also see another idea which is similarly related in the book of Revelation. It is an idea that the canon of Scripture is closed. In Revelation we are told that nothing is to be added to the book, and we see a similar idea conveyed in Deuteronomy.⁹ Paul would not have had the benefit of John’s Revelation experience as penned (he was martyred before it was even received). Paul certainly would not be ignorant of his own demise while writing the churches beforehand. He certainly would not have been ignorant of Moses’ experience of not being able to go into the promised land and the instructions Moses left through the book of Deuteronomy.

For me, this makes the inspirational writing of our Bibles even more precious. Many try to claim lack of divine inspiration in the Old Testament because many of the books were written outside of the timeline of the history they describe. This is the case for Deuteronomy as well. Most scholars attribute the time of King Josiah as the time for its literal penmanship. Remember that Israel always had the oral tradition of the words of the book handed down to them, memorized by the priests and scribes. Paul desperately wants to leave his new charges with a similar history. Relating to the close of the canon, it is an “unseen” author who gives that distinction to the Apostle John, through his Revelation. With that last stroke of a quill, the canon of Scripture is closed. Yet we have this one, single word, most easily translated as “secondly or but” in our study text, and yet, not as easily viewed as the sole source of its meaning.

So what would or could we glean as an understanding if we assume a broader thought from the apostle? How are we to live in light of an additionally-gleaned meaning? We should understand that our first “governance” or self-governance as Christians would be what was laid down to us already. As we see from the use of the word “exousia,” we have power of choice and liberty. As we live with secular

⁸ Fox, Everett, “The Five Books of Moses.” New York: Schocken Books (1995) 841

⁹ Ibid., 842

rulers (even kings), we are to understand that the apostle is encouraging us to see this as a layer of governance which must work hand in hand with the governance laid down already. This is because we are witnesses to the world, primarily as a group. Living in the peaceful sharing of the Gospel story can further the reception of that story far more effectively than going to war. Remember the history here. The Jews will be losing their Temple because of a “war-like” mentality among many of them when it came to Rome. In fact, when they go to arrest Jesus, Peter strikes the High Priest’s servant with a sword, probably trying to lop off his head, but catching his ear. We are told Jesus heals the servant’s ear. Paul is not trying to have the body of Christ in a war with civil authority which does not believe in Jesus. Yet at the same time, we know Paul was a Roman citizen and as such had certain rights. We know he employed the use of those rights when they beat him unlawfully (Acts 16:22-40).

In 1 Peter 2, if you read down just a little further from the verses we have already reviewed, we see Peter tell a slave to obey his master. Is God okay with human slavery? Absolutely not! There is another ‘side’ which has been laid down to us as well. We are the responsible authority when it comes to government. It is up to the people what authority they will tolerate. If we tolerate evil, we will receive evil. It’s very clear when you pull all these various Scriptures together that humans are given a choice what their government should look like. If we are preaching the gospel and experience persecution, for the gospel’s sake we remain silent. On the other hand, whatever government we find ourselves in, we have a duty to make it the best and least corrupt government on the planet. This is what the church did here in America as they formed secular government. It was the church which created non-sectarian civil government in America, not the atheists.¹⁰

Here in the U.S. we have only one party which has supported a “rule” for decades which tries to tell your pastor that they are not allowed to preach “politics” from the pulpit. That “rule” is hogwash and is not, nor ever was in our Constitution. We have to understand our laws and their effect on our churches and people. In the U.S., it is “We, the People” who are to rule. This means Christians have a responsibility to engage in politics. From our earliest founding until Lyndon Johnson tried to lie to churches, telling them they cannot line politics up with biblical values, pastors and churches have always revealed the infiltration communism (progressive-socialism) has on one party in America (democrats). This is exactly why Johnson slipped in his “rule” as a senator. He was in trouble for his

¹⁰ Meier, Christine, “70 Years of American Captivity: The Polity of God, The Birth of a Nation and The Betrayal of Government.” Victoria, BC, Canada: Tellwell Publishers (2016) 102-103

progressive-socialist policies and would have lost his senatorial election if the truth was known. When a government or political party produces someone as its presidential candidate who should be in jail, but has, through obvious corruption and political maneuvering, gone free; yet that party encourages the jailing of its citizens for solid religious belief, even though they broke no laws, we are in real trouble as a nation.¹¹

America no longer understands her civil rights are a direct source from her God-given or religious rights. Those ideas produce what kind of self-government we live under. As with the Pax Romana, where over time tolerance for Christianity and Judaism ceased, there is no longer a tolerance among democrats for “certain” religious groups. Religious rights are the first obedience we have because we are connected to the God who shares with us the purity of life. The Bible’s ideology gave meaning to civil rights. The Bible’s teachings promote life by promoting religious rights, free speech in religious rights as well as secular free speech, rights of self-defense (in America through gun ownership), rights of property and privacy. It is through our connection to the God of the Bible that we learn the healthy way to self-govern, instead of government by oppression and oppressive taxation. No Christian can begin to think that we are commanded to obey corruption. Will you be shocked when you are prohibited from preaching certain portions of Scripture from the pulpit? Only one political party wants that to take place, and they have a history of doing this kind of thing. Their history of targeting people by race, religion and monetary structure is not new.¹² As Mordecai said to Esther of old when she dithered about “getting involved in politics,” (my paraphrase) “Who knows but that you have been called to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13, 14) Patrick Henry tried to convey a similar thought to his fellow Americans when they couldn’t believe England would attack them. He said: “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!”¹³ If you don’t want to be shocked by what comes next, you cannot remain silent. Our religious freedoms— no, our very lives are at stake.

¹¹ Meier, Christine, “70 Years of American Captivity: The Polity of God, The Birth of a Nation and The Betrayal of Government.” Victoria, BC, Canada: Tellwell Publishers (2016) 466, 470

¹² See the movie “Hillary’s America”

¹³ <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/patrick.asp> Public domain. All copies of this speech are not from the pen of Henry himself. They are garnered from the memory of those in attendance and reconstructed in a biography by William Wirt of Patrick Henry published in 1817. Site © 2008 Lillian Goldman Law Library, New Haven, CT. Accessed 3/2/16