

Chapter 5

The Ministers of God Are Those Who Do Good to the Righteous

The Apostle Paul identifies the rulers he's writing about in Romans 13 as [authorities rather than powers](#) and as [ministers of God](#) who are a [terror to the wicked](#). Paul is even more explicit in that he also characterizes these same civil leaders as those who do good to the righteous.

For he *is* the minister of God to thee for good ... a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. (Romans 13:4)

Pastor Samuel Cooke, preaching at Cambridge, Massachusetts, on May 30, 1770, before Lieutenant Governor and Commander-in-Chief Thomas Hutchinson, testified to Paul's intent in Verse 4:

Rulers are appointed for this very end—to be ministers of God for good. The people have a right to expect this from them, and to require it, not as an act of grace, but as their unquestionable due. It is the express or implicit condition ... that they attend continually upon this very thing. Their time, their abilities, their authority—by their acceptance of the public trust—are consecrated to the community, and cannot, in justice, be withheld; they are obliged to seek the welfare of the people, and exert all their powers to promote the common interest. This continual solicitude for the common good ... is what rulers of every degree have taken upon themselves; and, in justice to the people, in faithfulness to God, they must either sustain it with fidelity, or resign their office.¹

Consistent vs. Sporadic Fulfillment

Paul is not describing what such authorities are *supposed* to be, but instead what they *are*:

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. (Proverb 29:2)

With secular government, rejoicing is the exception not the rule:

...[Yahweh's] law is slacked, and judgment [justice, NASB] doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth. ...their judgment and their dignity [authority, NASB] shall proceed of themselves. (Habakkuk 1:4, 7)

The best we can hope for from a secular government is that it would do good to the righteous sporadically whenever it happens to enforce a biblical law. Thus, at whatever point a government ceases to do good to the righteous, it ceases to be the government described by Paul.

On May 28, 1777, Pastor Samuel Webster wasted no words when he declared:

But depend on it, no government is God's ordinance but that which is for the good of mankind.²

Doing Good by Punishing the Wicked

One of the ways government does good to the righteous is by executing [Yahweh's prescribed civil sanctions](#) on the wicked, which, in turn, results in a safe, peaceful, and robust society:

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. (Proverbs 1:33)

How much more so when government does the same?

Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment [justice, NASB].... He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. (Psalm 72:1-2, 6-7)

Pastor Samuel West preached a sermon from Titus 3:1 in which he identified the ministers of God for our good:

Can we conceive of a more perfect, equitable, and generous plan of government than this which the apostle [Paul in Romans 13:3-4] has laid down ... to have rulers appointed over us to encourage us to every good and virtuous action, to defend and protect us in our just rights and privileges, and to grant us everything that can tend to promote our true interest and happiness; to restrain every licentious action, and to punish every one that would injure or harm us; to become a terror of evil-doers; to make it their constant care and study, day and night, to promote the good and welfare of the community, and to oppose all evil practices? Deservedly may such rulers be called the ministers of God for good. They carry on the same benevolent design towards the community which the great Governor of the universe does toward his whole creation.³

Converting Sinners

The government advanced by Paul—which results in God's manifold blessings on the society it governs⁴—also aids in the conversion of sinners to Christ:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as Yahweh my God commanded me.... Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as Yahweh our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

The law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul.... (Psalm 19:7)

[F]or when thy [civil] judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. (Isaiah 26:9)

This will never be said of secular government.

Praying for Government

The government depicted in Psalm 72 is the same as what Paul charged Timothy to pray for:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

Those who maintain that Paul advocates secular government must, in turn, teach that we're obligated to thank God for government that is often the opposite of Paul's description in Romans 13—government that by its rejection of Yahweh's perfect law of liberty⁵ alone jeopardizes the peace and security of those it governs.

In Psalm 19, King David depicts Yahweh's moral law as perfect, sure, right, pure, and altogether righteous.⁶ It provides mankind with the most rewarding, prosperous, and peaceful of societies, governed by the least abusive and intrusive of civil leaders.

On the other hand, secular governments often bear out that "No man's life, liberty, or property is safe while the legislature is in session."⁷

Our prayers for a quiet, peaceful, and honest society are largely for naught unless they culminate in a biblical government established upon [God's triune moral law](#),⁸ administered by biblically qualified judges:

Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers.... And let them judge the people at all seasons.... (Exodus 18:21-22)

In addition to the qualifications above, such men are to represent Yahweh rather than other men. They are to write out their own copy of God's law, study it daily, and scrupulously observe it. They are also to seek righteousness, declare only the truth, render impartial judgment, shun bribes, and abhor dishonest gain.⁹ In short, they are to be ministers of God for our good:

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment [justly, NASB].... And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. (Isaiah 32:1, 17-18)

Do the qualifications for God's ministers no longer concern Him? Did Paul forget about these qualifications? *Of course not!* Instead, Paul is merely reinstating those same instructions for godly government under the New Covenant. He depicts a government instituted, executed, and maintained by God-ordained, biblically qualified authorities—particularly judges—for the deterrent and punishment of the wicked and for the good of the god-fearing man.

The Apostle Peter's Validation

As one would expect, the Apostle Peter depicts the same Romans 13 government:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. (1 Peter 2:13-14)

Peter proclaims the submission due to this government is "for the Lord's sake." Submission to governments that repudiate Yahweh and reject His law cannot, *by any stretch of the imagination*,

be described as “for the Lord’s sake.” Instead, this phrase is reminiscent of King Jehoshaphat’s declaration to the biblically qualified judges he restored:

And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for *ye judge not for man, but for Yahweh* [i.e., for the Lord’s sake], who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of Yahweh be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with Yahweh our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts. (2 Chronicles 19:5-7)

Jehoshaphat understood the judges he appointed would judge for Yahweh’s sake. Thus, he warned them of their responsibility to adjudicate God’s law, which would result in the punishment of the wicked and the praise of those who do good.

Neither Paul nor Peter advocated secular powers that randomly do good to the righteous (if at all). Instead, they depicted the same authorities as did Jethro in Exodus 18 and King Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 19. They did *not* advocate secular government but instead a biblical government, presided over by biblically qualified judges who serve on behalf of Yahweh to the good and praise of those who likewise serve God.

1. Samuel Cooke, “A Sermon Preached at Cambridge, in the Audience of His Honor Thomas Hutchinson, Esq, Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief, The Honorable His Majesty’s Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England, May 30th, 1770,” quoted by John Wingate Thornton, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution – Political Sermons of the Period of 1776* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1970) p. 162.
2. Samuel Webster, “A sermon preached before the Honorable Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the State of Massachusetts Bay, in New-England at Boston, May 28, 1777,” quoted by Franklin P. Cole, *They Preached Liberty* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press) p. 53.
3. Samuel West, “A Sermon Preached before the Honorable Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New-England, May 29th, 1776,” quoted by John Wingate Thornton, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution: Political Sermons of the Period of 1776* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1970) p. 291.
4. See Deuteronomy 28:1-14.
5. See Psalm 19:7-11, 119:44-45, and James 2:12.
6. “The law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of Yahweh is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of Yahweh are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.” (Psalm 19:7-11)
7. Gideon J. Tucker, *New York Surrogate Reports* (New York, NY: New York Surrogate, 1866), p. 249, quoted in Suzy Platt, ed., *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations* (New York: NY: Barnes & Noble, 1992) p. 198.
8. For more on how Yahweh’s moral law applies and should be implemented today, see [Law and Kingdom: Their Relevance Under the New Covenant](#).

See also [A Biblical Constitution: A Scriptural Replacement for Secular Government](#).

See also series of ten online books on each of the Ten Commandments and their respective statutes, and judgments, beginning with [*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*](#)

9. See Exodus 18:19-21; Deuteronomy 1:16-17, 17:18-19; Ezra 7:10; and Ecclesiastes 19:5-7.