

We the People . . .

Romans 13:3-7

Introduction

We celebrated the birth of our nation this weekend – 250 years ago – the Declaration of Independence was signed

When our Fathers – sat down for the task of creating a government for the new nation – they turned to the Bible and they turned to the God of the Bible

In May 1787 – when it became apparent that the articles of confederation were inadequate – and that a constitution was needed

We are told that delegates quarreled and haggled over a number of issues and no progress was being made until – the venerable statesman Ben Franklin stood up and suggested prayer to begin their proceedings

Ben Franklin: 'In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard - and they were graciously answered.'

Ben Franklin: 'I have lived a long time; and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men! And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings, that "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."

The motion originally failed to pass – but on July 4, 1787 – General Washington led the delegates down to the street to a prayer service at Philadelphia's Reformed Calvinist Lutheran Church – where Roger Williams prayed for the nation – and the delegates joined together in praying the Lord's Prayer

Soon they had a document that began: 'We the People . . .'

Scripture pronounces the blessing of God on nations who worship God

Psalms 33:12 - 'Blessed is the nation whose God is Yahweh.'

John Jay – our first Chief Justice on the Supreme Court

John Jay: 'No human society has ever been able to maintain both order and freedom . . . apart from the moral precepts of the Christian religion. Should our republic ever forget this fundamental precept of governance, we will then be surely doomed.'

We have come to a portion of Romans where the Apostle Paul has raised the issue of government - - - and the Christian's relationship to the state

He has told us that government is *for our good*

In a wicked world filled with sinners - - - human government is necessary for the restraint of evil - - - to promote law and order - - - and for the punishment of evildoers

James Madison: 'If men were angels, no government would be necessary.'

But angels we are not

Life in community requires a set of rules / laws to live by

I. For Your Good - vv. 3, 4

Paul is addressing the issue: How is a Christian supposed to live in relation to the government?

Here we see: One of the primary purposes of government is for the purpose of punishment of evildoers

Government is for our good

There can be no civil order unless offenders are punished and crime is dealt with

This is Criminal Justice 101

Christians understand the need for law and order – to establish a civilized society

Murder / theft / fraud – all undermine civil order

Liberals seem to always be pushing the envelope – 'why do we need police?' / Defund the police / Defund ICE / shorter jail times / open borders / soft on crime judges who repeatedly release criminals back onto the street

The murder of Irina Zarutskaya – a 23 year old Ukrainian woman who was riding the metro train in Charlotte NC [August 2025] – gained a lot of attention when video was released of the horrific and senseless crime committed by a 34 year old Decarlos Brown – who had spent time in prison from 2015-2020 – and had 14 prior arrests – including breaking and entering

Don't hold your breath waiting for justice

He has already been declared incompetent to stand trial on state and federal charges - - - basically – 'he's crazy' – it's too bad that was not declared before he was set free

In North Carolina, the killing prompted the passage of House Bill 307, dubbed "Iryna's Law", which set out various criminal law reforms, including restricting cashless bail and seeking to resume capital punishment in the state.

This passage in Romans often comes up in capital punishment discussions

We are told the government does not bear the **sword** for nothing – v. 4

Bearing the sword implies the legitimacy of the use of lethal force in carrying out law enforcement operations – as well as the death penalty where deserved in criminal cases

When the police are called to a disturbance – potential criminal activity - - they arrive with a gun at their side [at least in this country] - - - to break up fights / take into custody offenders

As a society – we expect that the police will have to shoot people on occasion – according to the nature of their job

Being a cop is a high stress job – we back the blue - - we support law enforcement

Arguments against the death penalty abound – on various grounds - - - it is inhumane and unworthy of civilized society

Most criminal justice text books are tilted towards doing away with the death penalty

In Europe – practically the entire continent has abandoned the death penalty in their criminal justice systems - - with one exception – Belarus

Sam Harris is an American neuroscientist / atheist – who has argued against the death penalty – because he does not believe in free-will / or free agency

We are simply the products of our brains / background / environment / etc.

Sam Harris: 'The men and women on death row have some combination of bad genes, bad parents, bad environments, and bad ideas . . . which of these quantities exactly were they responsible for?'

If he sounds like he is ultimately removing from man responsibility for his behavior - - - he is

Sam Harris: 'You are no more responsible for the next thing you think (and therefore do) than you are for the fact that you were born into this world.'

Scripture would say – 'you have an obligation to reject / resist wicked thoughts - - - and to exercise self-control in your behavior – to pursue what is just and right and pleasing to God

Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit

Our problem is what Scripture calls 'the flesh' – it is not merely a brain disorder / it is rebellion against the God who made us

The cure is repentance and faith in Christ Jesus

C.S. Lewis presents our condition before God as being like that of a rebel against a good and worthy King

C.S. Lewis: 'Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement; he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.'

Man must come to the end of himself and say – 'God – be merciful to me the sinner – and deliver me from my sins thru the blood of Jesus'

Sam Harris: 'Consider what would happen if we discovered a cure for human evil. Imagine every relevant change in the brain could now be made cheaply, painlessly, and safely. In fact, the cure could be put directly into the food supply, like Vitamin D. Evil would become nothing more than a nutritional deficiency.'

Not only does Harris remove man from guilt for his action – but he also removes any functional purpose of punishing the offender

If evil fits his paradigm – we need not punish evildoers – we simply need to rewire their brain / fix them

Sort of a neuroscientific Tower of Babel

Christianity insists the One hope for mankind and for a new nature is Christ

II Corinthians 5:17 - 'Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.'

We noted that God authorized the death penalty for Noah – following the flood

Genesis 9:6 - 'Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.'

I once took a course on Business Law at the University of Nebraska

And the professor just went rogue one week – ditched the subject matter and said - 'How many in here are in favor of the death penalty?'

About half the hands went up [including mine!]

He then told us of the case of Willie Otey [who raped and murdered a 26 year old woman in Omaha]

He was then in prison – with lawyers trying to prevent the death penalty being given him

The professor gave graphic accounts from Willie's own testimony of what he did - and then asked the class again – 'How many are for the death penalty?'

Nearly every hand shot up

I thought – that's how you convince people the death penalty is needful!

Otey ended up being put to death in September of 1994

The death penalty is a deterrent – otherwise – we would not see so many plea deals being made where the criminal confesses upon condition of not being put to death

Todd Starnes says on his radio show - that he is in favor of public executions - - - until some of these sickos and deviants who are being raised without morals see that committing crime is not glamorous and that you might be executed for it - - -

That is a biblical value judgment

In a Christian society – there will be a death penalty

Government – is intended by God - here to bring justice - - - and in a sense – to reflect the wrath of God against criminal behavior

Wait a minute – 'Aren't we supposed to leave room for the wrath of God?' - - - not return evil for evil?

Yes – that applies to the individual

That state is authorized to reflect the wrath of God in the justice system

In some ways – earthly justice points us to and reminds us that there is a greater bar of judgment before whom all will stand

The Great White Throne Judgment is spoken of in Revelation

Revelation 20:13 - 'And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every one of them according to their deeds.'

Moral responsibility – according to their deeds

What this person has done is abhorrent – and rightly merits the wrath of God

G.K. Chesterton: 'Hell is God's great compliment to the reality of human freedom and the dignity of human choice.'

The general principle Paul gives: “Do what is right and government will not bother you”

There are exceptions – where the person of faith comes into conflict with the government

Daniel living in Babylon – the government he lived under passed a law forbidding prayer to any god or gods other than King Darius for 30 days – or lion’s den!

If he keeps praying as he does - he could die - people don’t generally survive a night in the lion’s den

Daniel 6:10 - 'Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.'

He kept up his religious practices

Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den

We might note – that habits form the backbone of character

Daniel did not have to think about what was right or wrong – he knew his prayer practice was not something to be ashamed of or to repent of - - - so he continued as normal

The outcome:

Daniel 6:21-22 - 'Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O King, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lion's mouths, and they have not harmed me . . . '

Daniel comes out of the lion’s den without a scratch – and his accusers receive the lion’s den treatment

Not every faithful person is delivered from every danger

James the brother of John was put to death by Herod - Acts 12:1 / while Peter was delivered

Some people honor God thru deliverance - some people honor God by laying down their life - for His sake - William Tyndale did so - in translating the Bible into English

Our God is able to deliver us – but even if He does not - - - we're still not going to bow . . .

II. Servants of God - vv. 5-7

Warren Wiersbe: 'Any citizen can obey the law because of fear of punishment, but a Christian ought to obey because of conscience.'

One of the ways we keep a clean conscience before God and man – is by being a law-abiding citizen

I Timothy 1:5 - 'The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.'

This passage refers to the paying of taxes – v. 6

What services should a state legitimately provide?

Generally speaking – the larger government becomes the greater potential of fraud and misuse of tax dollars

Typically the liberal view of governments is trending towards socialism / the nanny state - - - where governments try to take care of everything from healthcare to housing – to groceries – to daycare / homelessness / the economy / etc.

According to some – these programs amount to a redistribution of wealth – which is the stated goal of many on the left

We have some who advocate that those who never owned slaves should pay reparations to those who never were slaves

We have wealth taxes – where you are taxed because you have more money than most / etc.

Many of these ideas simply do not reflect a very accurate assessment of human nature

'A government big enough to give you everything you need is also big enough to take everything you have.'

The bible endorses charity and generosity to the genuinely poor [generosity is a virtue] - - - but it also condemns the lazy and negligent

That is why we should support work programs that require able-bodied people to work if they are to receive Snap benefits / etc.

II Thessalonians 3:10 - 'if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.'

I Timothy 5:8 - 'But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.'

Able-bodied people taking charity / or seeking handouts even from churches are not the poor who should be pitied – but are actually wicked and deserving of rebuke

Michael Youssef: 'The world does not owe us a living for simply existing. While we have great compassion for the poor and needy, able-bodied people who refuse to work have no legitimate claim on the earnings of hard-working people. That's not my opinion. That's the clear declaration of the Word of God.'

'The act of taking away the hard-earned resources of American citizens by force of law and squandering it on subsidies for the lazy is contrary to the Scriptures. Socialism is unbiblical, unchristian, and unworkable. It destroys incentive, destroys the economy, and destroys human dignity.'

Conclusion

We give thanks to God for our nation and the freedoms we enjoy

We pray for our leaders / we support law enforcement / we vote for worthy candidates / we pay taxes

And - - - we hold forth the gospel as the only hope for lost sinners – to be set free from the chains of sin - - - and to escape the wrath of God which will come upon sinners at the judgment

Kings and kingdoms / nations will all pass away – and be replaced by the kingdom of our God

Matthew 25:31-32 - 'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him.'

We will declare that He is worthy of all honor and glory and power and praise

For He was slain and purchased for God with His blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And has made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.