



## BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# How should the church and Christians relate to government

**Matt 22:15-22**

**Romans 13:1-7**

**~ Brent Russell ~**

- We as South Africans have a great **national past time**
- And it is not **rugby!**
- And it's not **cricket!**
  
- **We spend an inordinate amount of time bad mouthing our government**
- We moan about how the government is **failing to spend money on AIDS**
- We **bemoan the corruption** here and there
- We complain about Thabo's **R300 million private jet** and then about him never being in the country
- We mutter about the never-ending **cycle of crime**
- We go on and on don't we!
- **We love to complain about our government**
- And we are not particularly unique
- When I spent 6 months in the UK some years back the brits complained as well
- So it with this in mind that I want us to look at our relation as Christians to our government
- This is the lectionary reading for this Sunday and so we see what the scriptures have to say

*Matt 22:15-22*

*Romans 13:1-7*

- Many people in the church get **distinctly uncomfortable** when we start to talk about politics from the pulpit
- But these are the readings for today so I cannot avoid them
  
- One of the main issues with us relating to the government as Christians is that our **worldview is often wrongly dualistic**
- What do I mean by this?
- One can look at it in two ways
- **Firstly** for some people - there is a **clear split** between religious things and secular things
- So there are things like **Jobs, money, politics** and then there is **prayer, Bible and church**
  
- And so many people wrongly have the idea that politics should not be part of the church and the church should not be part of politics
- **This idea that there is a clear divide between the church and state**
- **between religion and politics**
  
- **Secondly** there is the concept that we should worry about heavenly things only
- **The belief that all earthly things are evil or transient**
- And that we must ignore them and only look to our heavenly future
- And many use this as a blinker to **ignore issues** of the world because they are so focused on heaven
- **You've heard the saying one can be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly value**
- **I believe that both these dualistic worldviews are overly simplistic**
- **But more importantly they are not scriptural**

- **Yes we are to be focused on heaven - but we should not - MUST not ignore earthly issues**
- **We need to be focused on or eternal life but not so much that we ignore social issues of the day**
- Paul writes to the **Roman church** about how they should relate to the government
- It would be around **three centuries** before this church in Rome would find themselves under a Christian state
- And so Paul writes to them about how to relate to **government that is pagan**
- There are **three things** I briefly want to pull out of the scriptures as a basis for the rest of the sermon

### ***Firstly - Government is God ordained***

- The first thing Paul says in Romans 13 is that the institution of *Government* is **God Ordained**
- God did not wake up one morning and look at our government and scratch his head wondering - "**Wow where did they come from?**"
- The institution of government has been ordained by God
- **They have been given authority, power and governance over us by Him**
- **So our government is there, simply put - because God wants them there**

## ***Secondly - Government is given by God to do good and prevent evil***

- The governments of the world have been put in place to bring **order and justice** to the world
- **Paul writes that those who do no wrong have nothing to fear**
- It is only those who are evil and bent on crime who have to fear
- Governments have a defined purpose by God
- They have been ordained for very specific reasons by God
- **To help us function as a society**
- To help keep **legal justice** in terms of rights, property etc
- To keep our lands **free of crime and corruption**
- They have been there to serve society and to help us function as countries
- **The government is here as a servant of God**
- Set in place to serve us

## ***Thirdly - Submit as a matter of Christian conscience***

- Paul in numerous places writes about us doing things as a matter of Christian conscience
- In some sense do things so that people will look up to you
- **Submit not only because of a fear of punishment**
- **But submit because God is asking you to submit**
- Do it so that we can be **seen to be law abiding citizens**
- Do it so that we may set a **moral example** for others
- Do it to bring **Glory to God**

- **So are we all happy?**
- YES? or NO?
  
- Well it is quite clear that in a perfect world these things may be easy to practice
- In South Africa they are reasonably easy to practice
- **But what of Zimbabwe?**
- **Or of dictators like Saddam Hussein?**
  
- Well it's talk time
- It seems from this passage and that there are some questions that beg to be answered
- So I have two questions I want you to discuss with one another for a couple of moments

**1. Are immoral governments also God ordained?**

**2. How should we as Christians to relate to governments like this?**

- Lets try to answer these questions and to do so we'll use some other sections of the Bible

### **Are immoral or corrupt governments ordained by God?**

- Paul is writing this letter to the Roman church under the rule of **emperor Nero**
- This emperor was as bad as they come
- He had his own **mother murdered**
- And he also some time after Paul's letter to Rome had many Christians killed for supposedly **starting a fire** that it is believed he himself had started
- **Clearly a man who by no counts was moral**
- When Paul writes about government been ordained by God he is talking about the **institution** rather than individual governments
- **The institution of Government is God - ordained**
- But one could not claim that a tyrant such as **Hitler** was God ordained
  
- **Even though governments may be corrupt God can still use them for his purpose**
- We too know that **Jesus trial and execution** on a cross could not have taken place without the government
- It was particularly the **corrupt Pilate** who was more interested in peace keeping than truth
- And so as part of the ordained process of Jesus crucifixion that had been prophesied hundreds of years before a corrupt government had a particular and important role to play
- And so one may argue that even in times of evil being perpetrated by governments there may still be a purpose of God being served in such a situation

### **How should we relate to such a government**

- This is perhaps the most important question that we as Christians need to answer
- So let me share a story with you from the scriptures
- **I am going to paraphrase this story out of 1 Kings 21**
- There is a story that was used frequently by many black ministers during **apartheid**

- **It is a bout Naboth and his vineyard**
- The basic story runs as follows
- Naboth owned a vineyard near King Ahab's palace
- The King wanted his vineyard but Naboth would not give up his inheritance
- So the kings wife set up Naboth and had him killed so that the king could have his land
- Elijah the prophet is sent by God to speak prophetically to King Ahab
- In this story Ahab repents and wears sackcloth and fasts before God to seek repentance
  
- **And I believe that Elijah's actions in the face of a corrupt government set the example for how we are to act towards governments that are wrong**
- Elijah does not bad mouth the government
- He rather steps in and takes the bull by the horns
- He approaches the King directly and brings God's word to him
- And so the role of the church and of us as individual Christians needs to be a prophetic one
- **We need to follow Elijah's example**
- We need to step in where government is not fulfilling their duty and inform them and petitions them without malice
- **We need to bring God's word to the government of our day**
- So here are some practical examples where we need to become more vocal
- Areas where we as the church and as individuals can petition, appeal and request government to act
  
- 1. Our government is not moving with regards to antiretroviral drugs for those who have **AIDS** - we must be more vocal about this - we need to stand up for the rights of those who have no voice - like Elijah we need to step in and warn the government that to void caring for the afflicted is do dismiss them and will God's wrath
- 2. Our country legalized abortion - Many people where upset at this terrifying decision, We should have ns still should stand up for life in the battle - we should be speaking out against this

3. We need to speak out against **corruption** in our government that costs the country billions each year in money that could be better spent elsewhere such housing for the poor and food for the hungry
  4. We need to convince our government to speak out against the **Mugabe** regime, not to sit and protect the reputation of an evil dictator - but to act and stand for the rights of the oppressed
- It is our duty as Christians to help our government be the government it is supposed to be
  - It is our duty to speak out against the evil done by our government
  - It is our duty to take the bull by the horns and to confront Government with the issues
  - Please note I did not say moan about
  - I said speak out against
  - I did not say backstab
  - It is not about being an insurgent
  - This is about calling the government to task
  - It is about trying to get the government to restore itself to the purposes for which God ordained it
  - For standing up and for good and for preventing evil
  - It is our duty as Christians to be good moral and upstanding citizens
  - For us to remain obedient as far as we can
  - But for us to remain quiet in the face of injustice is for us to take some of that responsibility
  - It has been said that evil things happen when good people do nothing

- If we keep quiet we are condoning the evil actions of corrupt people
- We are in some sense saying it is OK to abort babies
- It is OK to ignore the outcast and the marginalized
- Jesus spoke out against the injustice of the powers of His time
- It is our duty as his disciples to follow Him and to stand up for God's truth