

**The Heart of God//Justice from Genesis to Revelation
Part Eight – Jesus is King! (But You Still Have to Pay Your Taxes)**

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I. Government is God’s Good Idea

The Bible opens with this claim that God is the creator of all that exists. And, **Because God is the Author of Life, he is the Ultimate Authority.**

And **God Made Humans to Participate in His Wise and Just Rule** (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8)

“You [God], have made them [humans] rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild...” – *Psalm 8:6*

Romans 13:1-7

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves.

³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.” – *Romans 13:1-7*

1. We Engage in Public Life.

Over the centuries, different Christians have answered the question of *how* to engage in significantly different ways, for sure. But to be disengaged entirely, as some of the Anabaptist groups have done – this would be the Amish and some other Mennonites – does not seem to square very well with the fact of being present in the real world so we can bear public witness to the watching world.

The Baptist tradition, of which we are a part, would say that we engage, but we recognize the important idea of a separation of Church and State. That the state should not run the church, and the church should not run the state. But there *is* engagement.

2. We Show Respect for Those Who Function as Public Servants.

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always be gentle toward everyone.” – *Titus 3:1-2*

3. Some are called to *be* in those places of public service.

“Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.” – *Romans 16:23*.

4. We Pray for Those in Authority.

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” – *1 Timothy 2:1-2*

II. God Is the Higher Authority.

5. We are humble and realistic about the scope of the political.

The Christian faith is realistic about the scope of change possible through the political. **But, for many, the political sphere can easily be seen as ultimate.**

Even Christian people can fall prey to the way our late-modern west can treat political ideologies – and this happens on the right, on the left, and even in the centre – as though they are the source of our ultimate hope or security.

“The messianising of leaders to prop up an imagined ‘Christian empire’ can have dire consequences for social freedoms as well as proving injurious to the integrity of the Church’s own witness when it allies itself too closely with an earthly power. Remember that the Scriptures have a special title for someone who claims to possess kingly and religious authority, who is both presidential and priestly: the word is ‘Antichrist.’ Such a person is against Christ by assuming Christ’s own role, because Christ alone is both messianic King and Great High Priest.” – N.T. Wright and Michael Bird, *Jesus and the Powers: Christian Political Witness in an Age of Totalitarian Terror and Dysfunctional Democracies*

6. We Don’t Fear.

“And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.” – *Philippians 1:14*

He's able to “read his situation” in light of the bigger reality of the ultimate reign of King Jesus.

Throughout the scriptures there are a number of “throne room” scenes – in Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and especially Revelation. In those moment when the people are about to go into exile or are living under an oppressive regime – where the world might just come apart at the seams – these throne room scenes give us a glimpse that God is still on the throne; and he is not in a panic.

No matter who is voted in as the next government for BC, Jesus is still on the throne. Whoever wins the election south of the boarder, that person will not be “on the throne of the world,” Jesus will be. That’s why we don’t fear.

The Gospel in Focus

The self-centeredness of the human heart leads to injustice and oppression of all sorts.

But Jesus, the True King, God the Son, comes to put things right, and that is enacted in his ministry of healing and restoring people – a signpost of the world put right. And, to the shock of all, he personally steps in front of all our injustices, and sin, and the ugliness that it entails – and deals with it once for all time through his death on the cross.

The way Jesus is the True King is by laying down his life in self-giving love, to finally deal with the problem of evil at the level of every human heart. And then he sends out his people with hearts that are being transformed and renewed, to tell this news of Jesus as the world’s true King, and to enact the kind of justice and mercy he himself has aimed at.

So now, what about when governments are doing things opposed to what is just and good?

Paul’s main concern in his letter to the Roman church is that they be good citizens. But that does not mean that *everything any government does* is simply to be “yes boss.”

Look what God says through the prophet Isaiah:

“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.” – *Isaiah 10:1-2*

We can address injustices through non-political means. Consider many mission organizations that work for justice in the places governments are not addressing.

There are some who will address injustice through political means. Example: William Wilberforce.

“God has raised you up for the good of the church and the good of the nation, maintain your friendship with Pitt [William Pitt, the British Prime Minister], continue in Parliament, who knows that but for such a time as this God has brought you into public life and has a purpose for you.”
– John Newton to William Wilberforce

Even if I don't write "Jesus is Lord" on the ballot, I aim to write it with my life. In the way I interact with others, where I use whatever 'authority' God has delegated to serve the good of my neighbour, and seek to see justice done in the spheres God has called me to work in.

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." – *Mark 10:42-45*

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

We could think of political reflection on a spectrum with one end that tends toward cynicism, apathy or non-engagement and on the one hand, and a sense that politics is *everything, is ultimate*. Where would you land on this spectrum, and why?

Dig In

1. Read **Mark 12:13-17**. The Pharisees and the Herodians were on opposite ends of the political spectrum from each other, with the Pharisees opposed to the Roman rule, and the Herodians giving up the distinctiveness of their Jewish faith to find power alongside the Romans. They were trying to force Jesus into one political camp against the other – trying to make him “pick a party” to join, or at least affirm.
 - a. How does Jesus answer them? How does he resist their overly simplistic approach to the political realm? How might it speak to our approach?
 - b. What does Jesus’ answer say about the significance and limits of human authority?
 - c. How does his answer encourage you?

2. Paul encourages the church to submit to governing authorities. There are times, however, when it is just and right to address laws or policies (See **Isaiah 10:1-2**). Sometimes Christians have done that through political means, yet much of the work in areas of justice is accomplished by churches or mission organizations.
 - a. Based on Isaiah, and the other forms of justice we have examined throughout this series, what criteria would Christians use as a measure of which issues to address at the political level?
 - b. What are the dangers of seeking change through political means? What might be a key to mitigate against these issues?

3. How do the words of Jesus in **Mark 10:42-45** set the tone for Christian engagement in our use of ‘authority’? In what areas of life is God calling you to use your God-given authority to seek justice on behalf of the needy?

Prayer:

Take time to thank Jesus that he is ultimately on the throne, so we do not fear. Ask for the grace and courage to use what God has placed in your hands for his glory and in his way. Pray for the needs and concerns of your group.