

Chapter 2

The Apostle Paul is Not Addressing God-Established Powers but God-Ordained Authorities

Yahweh's Sovereign Choices

As Creator, Yahweh is sovereign over His entire creation. Therefore, the righteous and unrighteous alike rule by His design:

For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another. (Psalm 75:6-7)

[B]lessed be the name of God for ever and ever ... he removeth kings, and setteth up kings... (Daniels 2:20-21)

[T]he most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it [even] the basest of men. (Daniel 4:17)

Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.... (John 19:10-11)

Question: To what end does God establish rulers who are not only base but often wicked?

Answer: To whatever end God intends.

Although Yahweh's reasons are not always self-apparent, such men (and women) are often put in positions of power for the purpose of judging an ungodly people:

The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. ...he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee ... because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of Yahweh thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee. (Deuteronomy 28:43-45)

Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy [Yahweh's] law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them. For they have not served thee in their kingdom.... Behold, [as a consequence] we are servants [slaves, NASB] this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers ... we are servants in it: And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us *because of our sins*: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress. (Nehemiah 9:34-37)

As such, they are not God-ordained authorities to whom Christians are obliged to submit but merely God-established powers. The difference between powers and authorities is evidenced in both Old and New Testaments. For example, when the Judahites returned from their Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, the Persian kings were still a power over them.

However, these Judahites were nonetheless determined to serve Yahweh under God-ordained authorities who were committed to rebuilding a godly government of the very nature depicted by Paul in Romans 13:

And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.... And the rest of the people, ... all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God.... They ... entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law [including biblically qualified civil leaders] ... and to observe and do all the commandments of Yahweh our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes. (Nehemiah 9:38, 10:28-29)

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.... Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. (Acts 4:19, 5:29)

When powers rule, Christians *are* constrained to submit to such powers but *only so far as* they are themselves submitted to God, as evidenced in the laws they enforce. Romans 12:18 requires that we be at peace with all men so much as it depends upon us. Thus, when living in a nation ruled by such powers, it behooves Christians to comply with any regulation not opposed to Yahweh's sovereignty and law, even when it's not overtly promoting the same. Traffic laws are one example. Biblical precedent is found in the following verse, in which Christians were charged with submitting to the unjust demand of carrying a Roman soldier's pack:

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. (Matthew 5:41)¹

This, however, is all superfluous. Romans 13 is *not* depicting powers established by Yahweh for judgment but instead authorities ordained by God as a blessing to people who look to Him as sovereign and thus His law as supreme.

The glaring difference between authorities and powers can be seen in the following: A child's father is his God-established authority. If a stranger usurps that authority by taking control of the child, the stranger does not become the child's authority. He is, instead, a mere power over the child, until the child's God-established authority is reinstated.

Exousia vs. Dunamis

Part of the confusion regarding Romans 13 is because the King James translators chose the word "power" instead of "authority" to describe those the Apostle Paul had in mind. Had Paul intended any Tom, Dick, or Harry claiming power over others, he might have employed the Greek word *dunamis* or some other Greek word meaning powers. Instead, he used the word *exousia*, meaning authority:

Behold, I have given you [Christ's disciples] authority [*exousia*] to tread upon serpents and scorpions [Christ's enemies], and over all the power [*dunamis*] of the enemy.... (Luke 10:19, NASB)

The disciples had authority, the enemy had only power.

This is not to say *exousia* is never used for those who are otherwise only God-established powers. For example, Pilate was not one of the authorities Paul depicted in Romans 13 as a blessing to the righteous. He was instead a God-established power doing the bidding of the Roman Empire. Pilate, nonetheless, had authority to accomplish God's purpose for good:

[T]hen saith Pilate unto him, ... Knowest thou not that I have power [*exousia*, authority] to crucify thee, and have power [authority] to release thee? Jesus answered, thou couldest have no power [authority] at all against me, except it were given thee from above. (John 19:10-11)

Pilate, of course, viewed himself as an authority (much the same as the Chaldeans in Habakkuk 1:7 whose "authority originate[d] with themselves") and would have naturally used *exousia* to depict himself. However, Christ did not acknowledge Pilate's authority, only that any authority he might have was given him from God.

Pilate's authority to crucify Christ was given him by God for accomplishing what had to be done to secure our salvation. Therefore in *that act* Pilate was ordained for a blessing. However, that one act alone did not make him a God-ordained authority for the *overall* blessing of those whom he ruled over. This can only be accomplished by a civil leader who restores, upholds, and maintains Yahweh's righteous foundations by implementing and executing His triune moral law.

The difference between these two types of leaders is best delineated by Paul himself in Verses 3 and 4 of Romans 13. The Prophet Hosea also sheds light on the difference between God-ordained authorities and God-established powers:

[H]e shall come as an eagle against the house of Yahweh, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law.... Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him. They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not. (Hosea 8:1-4)

Disobedient Israelites rebelled against Yahweh's law and, in so doing, set up kings God did not know. Are we to believe the omniscient God actually did not know what these rebellious Israelites were up to? Of course He did. Did Hosea not recognize Yahweh's sovereignty over even the worst of rulers? Of course he did. Hosea was merely indicating these rulers were set in positions of *power*, and, as such, God did not "know" them in the same intimate and favorable fashion He does those who are authorities on His behalf.

Two Different Governments

No government exists without Yahweh allowing it to exist. However, there are two different types of government for two different types of people. Nations that look to Yahweh as sovereign and His law as supreme are blessed with just and righteous authorities, per Exodus 18:21, Romans 13:1-4, etc.

Nations that reject Yahweh as sovereign and look to their own laws as supreme are visited with oppressive powers to either bring them into submission or to judge them. The Prophets Isaiah and Daniel provide examples of the latter type of government power:

Woe to... the drunkards of Ephraim [principal tribe of the house of Israel], whose glorious beauty is a fading flower.... Behold, the Lord hath *a mighty and strong one* [probably referring to Sennacherib, king of Assyria, responsible for taking the house of Israel into captivity], which ... shall cast down to the earth.... The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, *shall be trodden under feet*. (Isaiah 28:1-3)

Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom [the Roman Empire] upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall *tread it down*, and break it in pieces. (Daniel 7:23)

As prophesied in Daniel 2 and 7, the Roman Empire was one of the *trampers* of the house of Judah—that is, on top of *their* upside-down world. But Jesus came to turn what was upside down right side up. This was definitively accomplished via His death, burial, and resurrection and was to be progressively accomplished via His saints—unless, of course, they be salt that's lost its savor, good for nothing but to trampled under the foot of man:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and *to be trodden under foot* of men. (Matthew 5:13)

All governments not based upon Yahweh's perfect, right, pure, true, and altogether righteous law² are trampers to one degree or another. Trampling is inherent in the very nature of such government powers:

No man's life, liberty, or property is safe while the legislature is in session.³

The thief [including any secular Messianic State] cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.... (John 10:10)

This, as contrasted with Yahweh's authorities:

Behold, a king [a God-established authority] will reign righteously, and princes will rule justly.... And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever. (Isaiah 32:1, 17)

Powers who trample their subjects are a judgment upon those who reject Yahweh, His law, and His ordained authorities. It should be self-evident that such governments are *not* a blessing to those they govern, as must be maintained by those who teach Romans 13 is about secular government. This trampling is what occurs, not when good has overcome evil,⁴ but when evil has overcome good.

Christians *are* required to submit to God-ordained authorities who overcome evil with Yahweh's moral law, per Romans 13:1-4. They are *not* required to submit to God-established powers who are generally known for overcoming good with evil. Ezra provides biblical precedent at a time when the Persian Kings Artaxerxes and Darius were still *powers* over the two-tribed house of Judah:

Then sent the king an answer.... Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city [Jerusalem] be not built.... Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto

the Jews [Judahites], and made them to cease by *force and power*. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ... unto the second year of ... Darius king of Persia.

Then the prophets, Haggai ... and Zechariah ... prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel.... Then rose up Zerubbabel ... and Jeshua ... and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.... [T]he eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they [their adversaries, including Kings Artaxerxes and Darius] could not cause them to cease....

Then [Tatnai, Shetharboznai, and the Apharsachites] asked ... those [Judahite] elders, and said ... Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? We asked their names also, to certify thee [King Darius], that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house [of God].... (Ezra 4:17-24, 5:1-5, 9-11)

These Judahite elders and prophets were operating as representatives of the King of kings. They understood that Yahweh's *authority* trumped King Darius' *power*, just like the Apostles understood Christ's *authority* trumped Caesar's *power*.

Yahweh's Kingdom Purposes are *Never* Thwarted

Hosea provides a graphic example of the kingdom under the judgment of ungodly powers:

Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment [of men]. (Hosea 5:11)

“[T]he Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return [to Yahweh]. (Hosea 11:5)

Yahweh's sovereign purpose is accomplished *even* when a government opposed to Christ's kingship is in power:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. *Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it *with judgment and with justice* from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Christ's kingdom⁵ increases during *both* times of justice and judgment. In Romans 13, Paul depicts Christ's reign in times of justice with God-ordained authorities as the civil leaders. In Psalm 110:2, King David informs us Christ reigns even in the midst of His enemies.

Two different types of government for two different types of people, much the same as in the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28. These two polar opposite governments are witnessed time and again in the Bible. However, they are *never* grouped together under the same terms—especially terms such as those used by Paul in Romans 13.

In Romans 13, Paul is depicting a righteous government, resulting from Christians who have overcome evil with good by means of Yahweh's moral law,⁶ per Romans 12:21. In their quest to restore godly foundations under God-ordained authorities, they are taking every thought captive

to the obedience of Christ for the subduing of strongholds established upon unrighteous foundations:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and *every* lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking *every* thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish *all* disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6, NASB)

1. The Greek word *aggareuo*, translated “compel” in Matthew 5:41, is used two other times in the New Testament (Matthew 27:32 and Mark 15:21). In both Gospels, it’s used when Simon was *compelled* by the Roman government to carry the cross of Jesus.

2. “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)

3. 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.

4. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:21)

5. [*Law and Kingdom: Their Relevance Under the New Covenant*](#)

6. [*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*](#).