

The Powers That Be

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In support of the doctrine that civil government has the right to act in things pertaining to God, this text of Scripture is quoted:

Romans 13

¹ The powers that be are ordained of God.

The first nine verses of the chapter are devoted to this subject, showing that the powers that be are ordained of God, and enjoining upon Christians, upon every soul, in fact, the duty of respectful subjection to civil government. The whole passage reads as follows:

Romans 13

¹ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.

² Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Will you then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and you shall have praise of the same;

⁴ For he is the minister of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid; for he bears not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that does evil.

⁵ Wherefore you must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

⁶ For for this cause pay tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

⁷ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

⁸ Owe no man anything, but to love one another; for he that loves another has fulfilled the law.

⁹ For this, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Render to Caesar

It is easy to see that his scripture is but an exposition of the words of Christ:

Matthew 22

²¹ ...Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's...

In the Saviour's command to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, there is plainly a recognition of the rightfulness of civil government, and that civil government has claims upon us which we are in duty bound to recognize; and that there are things which duty requires us to render to the civil government.

This scripture in *Romans 13* simply states the same things in other words:

Romans 13

¹ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.

Again, the Saviour's words were called out by a question concerning tribute. They said to him,

Matthew 22

¹⁷ ...Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

Romans 13:6 refers, to the same thing, saying:

Romans 13

⁶ For for this cause pay tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

In answer to the question of the Pharisee about the tribute, Christ said:

Matthew 22

²¹ Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's.

Romans 13:7, taking up the same thought, says:

Romans 13

⁷ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

These references make positive that which we have stated,—that this portion of Scripture (*Romans* 13:1-9) is a divine commentary upon the words of Christ in *Matthew* 22:17-21.

Limit of Civil Government

Civil government has nothing to do with anything that pertains to God. *Romans* 13:1-9, being the Lord's commentary upon the words which are the basis of that argument, ought to confirm the position. And this it does.

The passage in *Romans* refers first to civil government, the higher power,—not the highest power, but the powers that be. Next it speaks of rulers, as bearing the swords and attending upon matters of tribute. Then it commands to render tribute to whom tribute is due, and says,

Romans 13

⁸ Owe no man anything, but to love one another; for he that loves another has fulfilled the law.

Then he refers to the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments, and says:

⁹ If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

There are other commandments of this same law to which Paul refers. Why, then, did he say, “If there be any other, commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, You shall love your neighbor as yourself”?

There are the four commandments of the first table of this same law,—the commandments which say,

Exodus 20

³ You shall have no other gods before me;

⁴ You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of anything...

⁷ You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain...

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Then there is the other commandment in which are briefly comprehended all these:

Mark 12

³⁰ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Paul knew full well of these commandments. Why, then, did he say:

Romans 13

⁹ If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Answer: Because he was writing concerning the words of the Saviour which relate to our duties to civil government.

Our duties under civil government pertain solely to the government and to our fellowmen, because the powers of civil government pertain solely to men in their relations one to another, and to the government.

But the Saviour's words in the same connection entirely separated that which pertains to God from that which pertains to civil government. The things which pertain to God are not to be rendered to civil government—to the powers that be; therefore Paul, although knowing full well that there were other commandments, said,

Romans 13

⁹ If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

That is, if there be any other commandment which comes into the relation between man and civil government, it is comprehended in this saying, that he shall love his neighbor as himself, thus showing conclusively that the powers that be, though ordained of God, are so ordained simply in the things pertaining to the relation of man with his fellowmen, and in those things alone.

As, therefore, the instruction in *Romans* 13:1-10 is given to Christians concerning their duty and respect to the powers that be; and as this instruction is confined absolutely to man's relationship to his fellowmen; it is evident that when Christians have paid their taxes, and have shown proper respect to their fellowmen, then their obligation, their duty, and their respect to the powers that be, have been fully discharged, and those powers never can rightly have any further jurisdiction over their conduct.

This is not to say that the State has jurisdiction of the last six commandments as such. It is only to say that the jurisdiction of the State is confined solely to man's conduct toward man, and never can touch his relationships to God, even un-

der the second table of the law.

Man's Duty to God

Further, as in this divine record of the duties that men owe to the powers that be, there is no reference whatever to the first table of the law, it therefore follows that the powers that be, although ordained of God, have nothing whatever to do with the relations which men bear toward God.

As the ten commandments contain the whole duty of man, and as in the scriptural enumeration of the duties that men owe to the powers that be, there is no mention of any of the things contained in the first table of the law, it follows that none of the duties enjoined in the first table of the law of God, do men owe to the powers that be.

That is to say again that the powers that be, although ordained of God, are not ordained of God in anything pertaining to a single duty enjoined in any one of the first four of the ten commandments. These are duties that men owe to God, and with these the powers that be can of right have nothing to do, because Christ has commanded to render unto God—not to Caesar, nor by Caesar—that which is God's.

Example: Nebuchadnezzar

This is confirmed by other scriptures:

Jeremiah 27

¹ In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,

² Thus says the Lord to me: Make you bonds and yokes, and put them upon your neck,

³ And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah;

⁴ And command them to say unto their masters. Thus says

the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Thus shall you say unto your masters:

⁵ I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me.

⁶ And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts, of the field have I given him also to serve him.

⁷ And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come, and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him.

⁸ And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, says the Lord, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand.

In this scripture it is clearly shown that the power of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was ordained of God; nor to Nebuchadnezzar alone, but to his son and his son's son, which is to say that the power of the Babylonian Empire, as an imperial power, was ordained of God. Nebuchadnezzar was plainly called by the Lord, "My servant," and the Lord said:

Jeremiah 27

⁶ And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon.

He further says that whatever...

⁸ ...nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish.

Now let us see whether this power was ordained of God in things pertaining to God. In the third chapter of *Daniel* we have the record that Nebuchadnezzar made a great image of gold, set it up in the plain of Dura, and gathered together the

princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to the dedication of the image; and they stood before the image that had been set up. Then a herald from the king cried aloud:

Daniel 3

⁴ ...To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,

⁵ That at what time you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up;

⁶ And whoso falls not down and worships shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

In obedience to this command, all the people bowed down and worshiped before the image, except three Jews: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. This disobedience was reported to Nebuchadnezzar, who commanded, them to be brought before him, when he asked them if they had disobeyed his order intentionally. He himself then repeated his command to them.

These men knew that they had been made subject to the king of Babylon by the Lord himself. It had not only been prophesied by Isaiah (chapter 39), but by Jeremiah. At the final siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord through Jeremiah told the people to submit to the king of Babylon, and that whosoever would do it, it should be well with them; whosoever would not do it, it should be ill with them. Yet these men, knowing all this, made answer to Nebuchadnezzar thus:

Daniel 3

¹⁶ O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter.

¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

¹⁸ But if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up.

Then these men were cast into the fiery furnace, heated seven times hotter than it was wont to be heated; but suddenly Nebuchadnezzar rose up in haste and astonishment, and said to his counselors,

²⁴ Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

But he exclaimed,

²⁵ ...Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

The men were called forth:

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who has sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

Here there is demonstrated the following facts:

1. God gave power to the kingdom of Babylon;
2. He suffered his people to be subjected to that power;
3. He defended his people by a wonderful miracle from a certain exercise of that power.

Does God contradict or oppose himself? Far from it. What, then, does this show? It shows conclusively that this was an undue exercise of the power which God had given. By this it is demonstrated that the power of the kingdom of Babylon, although ordained of God, was not ordained unto any such purpose as that for which it was exercised; and that, though ordained of God, it was not ordained to be authority in things pertaining to God, or in things pertaining to men's consciences. And it was written for the instruction of future ages,

and for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Example: Darius and Medo-Persia

Another instance: We read above that the power of Babylon was given to Nebuchadnezzar, and his son, and his son's son, and that all nations should serve Babylon until that time, and that then nations and kings should serve themselves of him. Other prophecies show that Babylon was then to be destroyed:

- *Jeremiah* 51:28 says that the kings of the Medes, and all his land, with the captains and rulers, should be prepared against Babylon to destroy it.
- *Isaiah* 21:2 shows that Persia (Elam) should accompany Media in the destruction of Babylon.
- *Isaiah* 45:1-4 names Cyrus as the leader of the forces, more than a hundred years before he was born, and one hundred and seventy-four years before the time.
- And of Cyrus, the prophet said from the Lord:

Isaiah 45

¹³ I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, says the Lord of hosts.

But in the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus was only the leader of the forces. The kingdom and rule were given to Darius the Mede; for, said Daniel to Belshazzar, on the night when Babylon fell.

Daniel 5

²⁸ Your kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Then the record proceeds:

Daniel 5

³⁰ In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans

slain.

³¹ And Darius the Median took the kingdom.

Of him we read in *Daniel* 11:1, the words of the angel Gabriel to the prophet:

Daniel 11

¹ I in the first year of Darius the Mede, even I, stood to confirm and to strengthen him.

There can be no shadow of doubt, therefore, that the power of Media and Persia was ordained of God. Darius made Daniel prime minister of the empire. But a number of the presidents and princes, envious of the position given to Daniel, attempted to undermine him.

After earnest efforts to find occasion against him in matters pertaining to the kingdom, they were forced to confess that there was neither error nor fault anywhere in his conduct. Then said these men,

Daniel 6

⁵ We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

They therefore assembled together to the king, and told him that all the presidents of the kingdom, and the governors, and the princes, and the captains, had consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a decree that whoever should ask a petition of any god or man except the king, for thirty days, should be cast into the den of lions.

Darius, not suspecting their object, signed the decree. Daniel knew the decree had been made, and signed by the king. It was hardly possible for him not to know it being prime minister.

Yet, notwithstanding his knowledge of the affair, he went into his chamber, and, his windows being opened toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before God, as he did aforetime. He

did not even close the windows. He paid no attention to the decree that had been made, although it forbade his doing as he did, under the penalty of being thrown to the lions.

He well understood that, although the power of Media and Persia was ordained of God, it was not ordained to interfere in matters of duty which he owed only to God.

As was to be expected, the men who had schemed the passage of the decree found him praying and making supplications before his God. They went at once to the king and asked him if he had not signed a decree that every man who should ask a petition of any god or man within thirty days, except of the king, should be cast into the den of lions. The king replied that this was true, and that, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, it could not be altered.

Then they told him that Daniel did not regard the king, nor the decree that he had signed, but made his petition three times a day. The king realized in a moment that he had been entrapped, but there was no remedy. Those who were pushing the matter held before him the law, and said,

Daniel 6

¹⁵ Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed.

Nothing could be done; the decree, being law, must be enforced. Daniel was cast to the lions. In the morning the king came to the den and called to Daniel, and Daniel replied,

²¹ O king, live forever;

²² My God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before you, O king, have I done no hurt.

Thus again God has shown that, although the powers that be are ordained of God, they are not ordained to act in things that pertain to men's relation toward God. Christ's words are

a positive declaration to that effect, and *Romans* 13:1-9 is a further exposition of the principle.

How Governments are Formed

Let us look a moment at this question from a commonsense point of view. Of course all we are saying is commonsense, but let us have this in addition: When societies are formed, each individual surrenders the personal exercise of certain rights, and, as an equivalent for that surrender, has secured to him the fuller enjoyment of these, and all other rights pertaining to person and property, without the protection of which society cannot exist.

Each person has the natural right to protect his person and property against all invasions, but if this right is to be personally exercised in all cases by each person, then in the present condition of human nature every man's hand will be against his neighbor. That is simple anarchy, and in such a condition of affairs society cannot exist.

Now suppose a hundred of us are thrown together in a certain place where there is no established order; each one has all the rights of any other one. But if each one is individually to exercise these rights of self-protection, he has the assurance of only that degree of protection which he alone can furnish to himself, which we have seen is exceedingly slight.

Therefore all come together, and each surrenders to the whole body that individual right, and in return for this surrender he receives the power of all for his protection. He therefore receives the help of the other ninety-nine to protect himself from the invasion of his rights, and he is thus made many hundred times more secure in his rights of person and property than he is without this surrender.

Right to Believe Must Not Be Surrendered

But what condition of things can ever be conceived of

among men that would justify any man in surrendering the personal exercise of his right to believe—which in itself would be the surrender of his right to believe at all? What could he receive as an equivalent?

When he has surrendered his right to believe, he has virtually surrendered his right to think. When he surrenders his right to believe, he surrenders everything, and it is impossible for him ever to receive an equivalent: he has surrendered his very soul.

Eternal life depends upon believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the man who surrenders his right to believe, surrenders eternal life. Says the Scripture,

Romans 7

²⁵ ...with the mind I myself serve the law of God...

A man who surrenders his right to believe surrenders God. Consequently, no man, no association or organization of men, can ever rightly ask of any man a surrender of his right to believe. Every man has the right, so far as organizations of men are concerned, to believe as he pleases; and that right, so long as he is a Protestant, so long as he is a Christian, yes, so long as he is a man, he never can surrender, and he never will.

How Are the Powers Ordained?

Another important question to consider in this connection is,

“How are the powers that be, ordained of God? Are they directly and miraculously ordained, or are they providentially so?”

We have seen by the Scripture that the power of Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon was ordained of God. Did God send a prophet or a priest to anoint him king, or did he send a heavenly messenger, as he did to Moses and Gideon? Neither.

Nebuchadnezzar was king because he was the son of his fa-

ther, who had been king. How did his lather become king?

In 625 BC, Babylonia was but a province of the empire of Assyria; Media was another. Both revolted, and at the same time, the king of Assyria gave Nabopolassar command of a large force, and sent him to Babylonia to quell the revolt, while he himself led other forces into Media, to put down the insurrection there. Nabopolassar did his work so well in Babylonia that the king of Assyria rewarded him with the command of that province, with the title of king of Babylon.

Thus we see that:

- Nabopolassar received his power from the king of Assyria;
- The king of Assyria received his from his father, Asshur-bani-pal;
- Asshur-bani-pal received his from his father, Esar-haddon;
- Esar-haddon received his from his father Sennacherib;
- Sennacherib received his from his father, Sargon; and
- Sargon received his from the troops in the field, that is, from the people.

Thus we see that the power of the kingdom of Babylon, and of Nebuchadnezzar the king or of his son, or of his son's son, was simply providential, and came merely from the people.

Take, for example, Victoria, queen of Great Britain. How did she receive her power? Simply by the act that she was the first in the line of succession when William the Fourth died. Through one line she traces her royal lineage to William the Conqueror.

But who was William the Conqueror? He was a Norman chief who led his forces into England in 1066, and established his power there.

How did he become a chief of the Normans? The Normans

made him so, and in that line it is clear that the power of Queen Victoria sprang only from the people.

Following the other line:

The house that now rules Britain, represented in Victoria, is the house of Hanover. Hanover is a province of Germany. How came the house of Hanover to reign in England?

When Queen Anne died, the next in the line of succession was George of Hanover, who became king of England, under the title of George the First. How did he receive his princely dignity?

Through his lineage, from Henry the Lion, son of Henry the Proud, who received the duchy of Saxony from Frederick Barrossa, in 1156.

Henry the Lion, son of Henry the Proud, was a prince of the house of Guelph, of Swabia. The father of the house of Guelph was a prince of the Alemanni, who invaded the Roman Empire and established their power in what is now Southern Germany, and were the origin of what is now the German nation and empire.

But who made this man a prince? The savage tribes of Germany. So in this line also the royal dignity of Queen Victoria sprang from the people.

And besides all this, the imperial power of Queen Victoria as she now reigns is circumscribed—limited—by the people. It has been related, and has appeared in print, that on one occasion, Gladstone, while prime minister and head of the House of Commons, took a certain paper to the queen to be signed. She did not exactly approve of it, and said she would not sign it. Gladstone spoke of the merit of the act, but the queen still declared she would not sign it.

Gladstone replied, "Your Majesty must sign it."

"Must sign!" exclaimed the queen, "Must sign! Do you know who I am? I am the queen of England."

Gladstone calmly replied, "Yes. Your Majesty, but I am the people of England," and she had to sign it. The people of England can command the queen of England: the power of the people of England is above that of the queen of England. She, as queen, is simply the representative of their power.

And if the people of England should choose to dispense with their expensive luxury of royalty, and turn their form of government into that of a republic, it would be but the legitimate exercise of their right; and the government thus formed, the power thus established, would be ordained of God as much as that which now is, or as any could be.

The Power, Not the Person

Personal sovereigns in themselves are not those referred to in the words, "The powers that be are ordained of God." It is the governmental power, of which the sovereign is the representative, and that sovereign receives his power from the people.

Outside of the theocracy of Israel, there never has been a ruler on earth whose authority was not, primarily or ultimately, expressly or permissively, derived from the people.

It is not particular sovereigns whose power is ordained of God nor any particular form of government. It is the genius of government itself. The absence of government is anarchy. Anarchy is only governmental confusion.

But says the Scripture,

1 Corinthians 14

³³ God is not the author of confusion.

God is the God of order. He has ordained order, and he has put within man himself that idea of government, of self-protection, which is the first law of nature, and which organizes itself into forms of one kind or another, wherever men dwell on the face of the earth.

And it is for men themselves to say what shall be the form of government under which they shall dwell. One people has one form; another has another.

This genius of civil order springs from God, its exercise within its legitimate sphere is ordained of God; and the Declaration of Independence simply asserted the eternal truth of God when it said:

“Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

It matters not whether they be exercised in one form of government or in another, the governmental power and order thus exercised are ordained of God.

If the people choose to change their form of government, it is still the same power; it is to be respected still, because it is still ordained of God in its legitimate exercise,—in things pertaining to men and their relation to their fellowmen.

But no power, whether exercised through one form or another, is ordained of God to act in things pertaining to God; nor has it anything whatever to do with man’s relations toward God.

Except in the nation of Israel, it is not, and never has been, personal sovereigns in themselves that have been referred to in the statement that “the powers that be are ordained of God.” It is not the persons that be in power, but the powers that be in the person, that are ordained of God.

The inquiry of *Romans* 13:3 is not:

Will you then not be afraid of *the person*?

But it is:

Will you then not be afraid of *the power*?

It is not the person, therefore, but the power that is represented in the person, that is under consideration here. And

that person derives his power from the people, as is clearly proved by the scriptural examples and references given.

To the people we come sooner or later; it is upon their wisdom and self-restraint that the most cunningly devised scheme of government will in the last resort depend.¹

¹ Bryce, *American Commonwealth*, chapter 24, last sentence.