

The Gospel of Government

(Ecclesiastes 8)

12/12/18; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

The quickest way to produce a conversation at Christmas dinner this year is to make a comment about our current president.

Whether it be a positive or negative comment, emotions run deep about Trump.

Multiple articles have even addressed this controversy..

Consider there is an USA Today article entitled..

“Trump's in the White House, turkey's on the table: What to do if you don't want to talk politics (at the holidays)”

Or this article from In Style magazine..

“How to Survive the Holidays When Your Relatives Are Trump Supporters”

Then there is this from medium.com..

"How to Make it Through Family Gatherings During the Holidays in the Age of Trump"

While this headline is written to grab your attention, the reality is that political disagreements have been around way before the age of Trump...

Elephants and Donkeys have always debated in the US but even beyond the US, people have deeply held convictions about government and politics..

IF we go to the OT, King Saul had his supporters and King David had his.

This is life in a fallen world.

This is government in a fallen world.

There will always be politicians that we agree with and those that we disagree with.

And while debate and disagreement can be healthy, it can also get way out of hand..

In fact, rebellion and revolution begin as simple disagreements over policy and governance.

Which shows how deeply emotional and intense these view of government can become.

In fact, there are many people who have replaced the worship of God with the worship of kings and politicians..

Many people today would miss church to go hear their favorite politician...

Many people will give generously to their favorite party while being stingy in their giving to the church..

Many people will loudly proclaim their allegiance to a party or politician but remain silent on their allegiance to Christ and His church..

I even saw an article last week that describes how politics has become a new religion many people in America.

Yet, that is not God's design for government at all..

God alone is to be worshipped and served, yet many now are replacing God with their favorite politician..

So what is the proper role of government and politics in the universe that God has created?

Well, Ecclesiastes 8 is going to give us some help.

Now granted, we have seen Solomon address the issues of politics already in this book.

We have seen the that governments are often unfair in the world.

We have seen that kings and politicians go in cycles.

They come in young with a lot of popularity but they serve and are often corrupted only to be replaced by the next fresh face.

And Solomon told us that both of those things are difficult to endure and even frustrating at times...

Well tonight, Solomon simply gives us a comprehensive view of government..

And this would apply to the believer living in the Untied or in Communist China or the Islamic Republic of Iran...

This would also apply in 2018, 1176, or 1000 BC..

And this biblical view of government simply has two parts...

The first is found in verses 1-9 of Ecclesiastes 8...

I. Wisdom Requires Submission to Government (1-9)

Let's read the first verse of Ecclesiastes 8..

1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines [a]him and causes his stern face to [b]beam.

Now this is an interesting way to being a chapter of a believer's relationship to government..

To help you understand this, I want to take you to the book of Daniel..

Most of you know the story of Daniel but in case you don't, look at how the book of Daniel begins..

Daniel 1:1

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

3 Then the king [c]ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his [d]officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the [e]royal family and of the nobles, 4 youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for [f]serving in the king's [g]court; and he ordered

him to teach them the [h]literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be [i]educated three years, at the end of which they were to [j]enter the king's personal service. 6 Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Long story short, the story of Daniel begins with the conquering of Israel by the Babylonians...

Nebuchadnezzar came into to Israel, defeated the Israelites and carried them off to captivity in Babylon..

Now this raises a number of questions in terms of government..

Does Israel submit to a hostile government?

Are Daniel and his friends required to serve the Babylonians?

Well, let's read on..

8 But Daniel [k]made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God granted

Daniel [l]favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, 10 and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would [m]make me forfeit my head to the king." 11 But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance be [n]observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see."

Couple things to note here..

First, Daniel does not engage in outright rebellion against the Babylonian government..

Even though the king's menu would defile Daniel and his friends, Daniel doesn't pick up a protest sign or a weapon.

Instead, he simply asks permission from a government official if he and his friends can eat an alternative menu.

Now the government official is hesitant because he fears the king seeing the effects of an alternative diet on the faces of these 3 young men..

But Daniel asks him to test the alternative menu on them and see if it affects their appearance.

Let's read how this turns out..

Daniel 1:14..

14 So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and [o]they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. 16 So the overseer continued to [p]withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.

You see, the outcome of Daniel's submission to government is that God allowed Daniel's appearance to exceed the appearance of those who ate his choice foods..

But that is not the only blessing that God gave to Daniel for the respect he showed the evil government over him...

Look at the next verse in Daniel 1.

Daniel 1:17..

17 As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of [q]literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.

Now this is an important verse because of what happens in Daniel 2..

In Daniel 2, the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and no one know what it is much less can explain it to him..

So Nebuchadnezzar orders all the wise men killed, and since this would include Daniel and his friends, Daniel asks God to give him the dream and the meaning of it...

God grants him his request and we read this in Daniel 2:24..

24 Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me [adj]into the king's presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king."

You see, not only was Daniel's appearance improved by his submission to government..

Daniel was also blessed by God with incredible wisdom so much so that he could know the king's dream and the interpretation of it..

Now that a long detour but let's return now and read Ecclesiastes 8:1 again...

1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines [a]him and causes his stern face to [b]beam.

You see, Daniel submitted to the evil government over him..

He didn't challenge the evil authority over him..

He didn't slander the king for his choice of diet.

He simply submitted and asked permission to eat something different, and God honored that submission by giving Daniel a face that beamed with health and a mind that beamed with wisdom.

I see many Christians on the verge of rebellion in regards to government, yet God's wisdom says to submit and respect authority and God will bless you and keep you safe...

He certainly did that in the life of Daniel..

Now verse 2 furthers this truth..

Solomon writes..

2 I say, “Keep the [c]command of the king because of the oath [d]before God. 3 Do not be in a hurry [e]to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases.” 4 Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, “What are you doing?” 5 He who keeps a royal command experiences no [f]trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure. 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man’s trouble is heavy upon him. 7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen? 8 No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver [g]those who practice it. 9 All this I have seen and applied my [h]mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.

In case you aren’t convinced to submit to government, Solomon offers a few motivations to do so..

First in verse 2, obey the king and his government because of your loyalty to God..

Second in verse 3, obey the king because he has incredible power over your life.

Third in verse 4, obey the king because he doesn't answer to you..

Fourth in verse 5 and following, obey the king so that you avoid trouble in the world..

Look, I don't understand people who won't comply with people in authority over them.

I understand that authority figures can be wrong.

I understand that they can be corrupt..

Solomon even says in verse 9 that he has seen men abuse their authority over another..

But this is no reason to resist all authority in your life.

Look, I have seen TV shows on corrupt cops.

I have heard of policemen who steal and lie and commit all sorts of immorality..

But I can tell you this..

If one pulls me over and wants to talk to me, I am going to comply and submit because he has a gun and has been authorized by the government to use it.

The same can for a soldier I encounter or a judge or even a political figure.

Wise people don't challenge authority, they respect it and submit to it.

Now again, it needs to be said..

This submission to authority stops when those in authority are causing us to sin against God..

The Bible is crystal clear.

WE are to obey God over government.

Though instances of having to decide between government and God are rare, submission to government is always overridden by obedience to the Lord.

Generally speaking, verses 1-9 and many verses in the NT command believers to obey the governmental authorities that God has placed over us in the world..

With that said, we turn to balance our view of government in this world in verses 10-17.

We will call this..

II. Wisdom Recognizes Limitations of Government (10-17)

Let me read you a passage in the NT where God describes the purpose of government..

1 Peter 2:13-14..

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent [p]by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

The primary purpose of government is to maintain order in society.

Governments are ordained by God to reward and protect people who do good while warning and punishing those who do bad..

Now I understand that governments act beyond that purpose, but that is not their primary role and purpose in the world.

Their role is to retrain evil in the world..

When there is no government, there is chaos and you can't leave your house without the threat of someone hurting you..

When there is no government, good people are at the mercy of evil people, and that never ends well for the good people..

Now, let's be clear.

Government will never perfectly fulfill their purpose in the world..

And why won't they?

Because human government is in the hands of fallen people.

And fallen people do sinful things at time..

And this is exactly what Solomon talks about in the second part of this chapter...

Let's read verses 10-13..

10 So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility. 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear [i]Him openly. 13 But it will not be

well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

Though Solomon saw the wicked perish...

Though he saw the evil deeds of evil people come to an end at their funeral..

He also realized that evil and wicked people aren't always punished by government in a punctual manner..

In fact, evil men escape the punishment of government authorities their entire lives....

Some evil people even enjoy a long life simply because they outwit and outsmart government their entire life...

Now the problem with this inadequacy of government is that some people are actually encouraged to do evil..

Look back at verse 11..

11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.

Now, Solomon doesn't point this out to discourage us.

He points this out to keep us balanced.

In other words, don't get bent out of shape when government fails to do its job perfectly.

Yes, we all want immediate and perfect justice from government, but we need to remember that won't always happen..

However, that is no reason to throw the baby out with the bath water..

Governments may fail, but even then, it is better than the alternative..

Solomons continues to explore the imperfections of government in verse 14...

14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it [j]happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it [k]happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.

Just as government can't punish all evil doers, government also fail to always reward those who do good..

In fact, Solomon says that the righteous are sometimes treated lies they were evil doers..

And we all understand that innocent sometimes go to prison..

People who weren't speeding sometimes get a fine.

People who follow the law sometimes are sometimes accused and even convicted of breaking the law...

Again, this is the outcome in a world that is fallen..

Sometimes the wicked don't even get a slap on the hand, and sometime the righteous get a slap on the face..

And again the point is not to frustrate us but to keep us balanced..

In other words, don't pick up a gun and exact revenge on city hall when you get a parking ticket that you don't deserve.

Instead, plead your case in the proper way, and even if you lose and experience injustice, don't be tempted to view the city government as evil..

Instead, chalk it up to a fallen world and continue to submit and respect the government authority that God has put over you..

But there is more...

Verse 15..

15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his [l]toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should [m]never sleep day or night), 17 and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.

AS this chapter on government ends, Solomon wants to help us cope with government..

So first of all, submit to government unless it causes you to sin.

Second, recognize and realize that no government is perfect due to the sinfulness of those who run it.

But then third, God's wisdom tells us not to fret over the imperfections of government...

You know some people spend their entire life trying to ensure that government is perfectly just at all times..

Solomon tells those people to relax and keep themselves balanced by simply enjoying the world around them and appreciating the government over them..

First of all, you aren't going to understand and right all the wrong of government..

But second of all, don't waste your life and time trying to fix something that will always be broken.

Look government is a like a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle that has about 25 pieces missing...

You can put it together to see the big picture and enjoy the artwork but if you drive yourself crazy trying to find those 25 missing pieces, you can't enjoy anything about the process of getting it together..

Solomon was the head of government as the king of Israel..

But he realized that even he couldnt get it right every time..

So instead of working day and night to make it perfect, he simply did the best he could and trusted God's sovereignty for the rest..

Conclusion

So where does this leave us in 2018?

First, I would say this.

#1 - Be biblical in your view of government.

This means that we should pray for those over us.

That we should submit to those governing us.

That we should obey the laws of the land and be good citizens..

#2 - Be thankful for government.

This means we should be grateful to the Lord every day for those who rule over us.

Yes we realize that some of those people are not believers..

Yes we acknowledge that we don't share a world-view or even a morality with those over us.

But in the end, this means that we thank God for the peace and protection that government provides in our lives.

#3 - Be influential in government.

Just because we submit to government doesn't mean that we withdraw from it.

If the Lord allows you to influence government through running for office or writing to officials or voting for candidates and policies, take part in that process..

God has never called his people to be silent.

God has never called his people to withdraw.

But God has never called his people to ensure perfect justice in government.

It is not my role as a pastor to make sure the government is perfectly just.

But it is also not your purpose in life as a believer to fix all the wrongs..

Be influential but realize that perfection doesn't come until Jesus' government is established.

#4 - Be centered in your response to government.

Some people become so obsessed with government that it becomes an idol in their life.

When election results come in, they grieve or celebrate like it is a life or death matter.

Look, government and politicians are not the center of a believer's life.

Our lives are centered on Christ, his church, the spread of the gospel and our families..