Rejoicing in Restraints, part 11: Government
Assorted
(preached Pine Grove 10/25/20 Sun PM)

Introduction

As I sat down to begin writing this message, the news broke…

The headline read, "Pope Francis endorses same sex civil unions."

It seems that a documentary about the Pope was released on Wednesday at the Rome Film Festival.

The documentary was entitled "Francesco" in honor of Pope Francis, and in the documentary, the pope said this,..

"Homosexuals have a right to be part of the family. They're children of God and have a right to a family."

Now, I and no Bible believing Christian is surprised by this.

The Roman Catholic church long ago departed the faith.

They are not to be considered a Christian church by any biblical standard.

In fact, the only shocking thing is that the Pope hasn't said this sooner.

Now the reason for that is simple.

The Catholic has tried to maintain themselves as champions of the family.

They have stood against abortion for many years, but now they join in the worldly chorus that seeks to destroy the family.

Consider the irony of what he said in that homosexuals have a right to a family.

But a homosexual couple is not a family by any biblical definition.

The world can call them a family all they want.

The pope can call them a family.

But God never will call them a family.

Now interestingly, no former pope has called homosexual couples a family either.

Pope John Paul II said that homosexuality was quote "an attack on marriage and the family."

Pope Benedict who followed him had even stronger words..

"A century ago, anyone would have thought it absurd to talk about homosexual marriage. (But) Modern society is in the middle of formulating an anti-Christian creed, and if one opposes it, one is being punished by society with excommunication. (Equal marriage rights are creations of the spirit of antichrist.)"

Thought Pope Benedict was wrong about salvation, he was most certainly right about marriage.

But this all changed Wednesday with the Pope's words on homosexual marriage.

And this won't be the end of the Catholic church's attack on the family.

They will eventually allow and endorse abortions.

It is only a matter of time.

Again, nothing surprising here, but it is another entity adde to the list that seek to destroy the restraints in society.

Not only is the pope attacking the family, he is also attacking the church in the sense that many view him as the leader of Christianity.

And therefore, many will assume that the church is now endorsing homosexual marriage.

So the restraints in society continue to fall with each passing day.

However, our desire is to honor the restraints that God has placed in our lives to keep us from sin.

So we have been informing our conscience, which is God's most personal restraint, with biblical truth.

We have been examining our families, which is another creation of God to restrain sin.

Tonight, we finish up looking at government, which is a 3rd restraint on sin in society, and next week, we will begin to look at the church which seeks to restrain sin through the gospel, discipleship, and influence.

Now last week, we began to develop a biblical look at government from Romans 13..

If you want to turn to that passage again, it may be helpful to review what it teaches.

Romans 13:1.

Every [a]person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except [b]from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore [c]whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for [d]good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

And though we are going to do a thorough exposition of that passage on Sunday mornings in the near future, we used it to establish how God has given the government authority to restrain sin.

The first truth we wanted to pull from these verses is that all governments by God.

Verse 1 is very clear.

Governing authorities are established by God.

And we noted last week that this is true of both evil dictators and good kings.

It is true of evil empires and benevolent republics.

It is true of the government at the national level and local level.

The mayor and the president are put in place by God.

Now that leads to an interesting note.

When you think about kings and monarchies, it is easy to understand that God appoints them and removes them.

But when you think about democracies like or own, it means that God causes a certain number of people to vote for the winner and a smaller number to vote for the loser in any election.

Now that may make some people feel uncomfortable but that has to be the case or else God would be unable to establish governments where the power resides the people at the ballot box.

So I can assure you, people may walk into a voting booth alone, but no one pushes a button apart from the sovereignty of God.

If that is hard to understand, go back and read Romans 8:28.

Church you know that God knows the next president of the United States even before one vote is cast.

And you also know that whoever that president is, God will use that man does and work it for good for God's people.

You know that because that is what Scripture teaches.

Therefore, you can cast your vote and go to bed that night and wake up and know that whoever wins was put there by God Himself.

Even though we cast the vote, God controls the outcome.

Because all government is ordained by God and established by God.

The second thing we noted last week is directly related to God's restraining sin through government.

Look again at verse 3.

3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for [d]good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

For all the complexities of government.

For all the programs and debates and levels of red tape and bureaucracy, all governments have one express purpose.

They are ministers of God.

And the word for minister comes from the Greek for servant.

Governments are literally servants of God, and they serve in two ways.

They praise those who practice good, and they punish those who practice evil.

That is government's God given role.

Now, that duty spills over into economics and foreign relations and the making and passing of laws.

It spills over into the court system and the military and the police force.

However, the mission statement of all those areas of government wherever they may exist is very simple in biblical terms.

They exist to praise good and punish evil.

Now, let me add this important note.

If any government doesn't recognize the God of Scripture and doesn't see His word as the definer of good and evil, they will never perfectly fulfill their mission.

And this is why no government has ever perfectly carried out its mission, but it is also the reason that some governments are better than others.

However, even governments that do not acknowledge God and His word are still able to restrain sin.

If they will simply reward good and punish evil according to the law of God written on the human heart.

If they will govern from their conscience, they can function somewhat as God intended.

But when the conscience is violated and the law of God written on the human heart is erased, governments fail to do as God intended.

Look, you are seeing that in this country.

Let me give you a little insight in how governments and the nations they govern begin to crumble.

How about legalizing abortion in 1973.

When the government of the Untied States in the form of the Untied States supreme court made it legal to murder a baby, the nation's view of life was forever changed.

When a government refuses to acknowledge God as the giver and taker of life, that government and that nation is in trouble.

We may think that rising murder rates and crime and assisted suicide are simply signs of the times, but they are not.

They are the logical outcomes of a nation that has lost its God given conscience.

If you can murder a baby, you can murder anyone and that can be seen all over our nation now.

The same is true in our nation in terms of divorce and sexual immorality.

The large increase in divorce rates in American history occurred in the 1960s and 70s.

That coincided with what experts call the sexual revolution in America.

And the family in our nation has never been the same.

Government endorsement of all sorts of sexual sins and the destruction of the family is the result of nation and government that have lost their God-given conscience.

So the current explosion of sin around us is nothing new.

It has been brewing for years, and now the government is simply catching up with the culture.

With that said, let me read Romans 13:5 again.

5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

And with the same clarity of verse 1 that said all governments were established by God, Paul uses the same clarity to say that all believers are to be in subjection to government.

Now for years, that was easy for most American believers.

However, it is becoming increasingly harder.

Case in point, the recent government shut down of churches over COVID 19.

How is the believer to respond when government addresses issues of the church?

Well, that is our topic for tonight.

So the 3rd thing we need to understand about government is that government is limited by God.

Take your Bibles and turn to Acts 5.

For those of you who come on Wednesday nights, we are familiar with the book of Acts.

It is the history book of the early church.

It starts with the ascension of Jesus and the founding of His church in chapter 1 and 2, and it details the spread of the church throughout its 28 chapters.

In chapter 5, the church is very young and still in Jerusalem where it was founded.

But though the church is small, it is not quiet.

Peter and John have been preaching all over Jerusalem about Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the Jews.

Many are believing their message and being added to the church but many are rejecting and harassing these men.

In Acts 5, Peter and John and all the apostles are thrown in jail at the hands of the local government in Jerusalem.

Now understand, the Jews were under Roman authorities but the local government of Jerusalem consisted of the Jewish religious leadership.

So the apostles are thrown in jail for preaching about Jesus.

But an angel of the Lord frees them from prison and they go right back to the temple to preach Christ.

We will pick up the action in verse 25..

25 But someone came and reported to them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned). 27 When they had brought them, they stood them [m]before the Council.

Now the Council is another name for the Sanhedrin which was the governing authority in Jerusalem.

They had the power to jail.

The power to pass laws.

The power to judge.

They were the legislative and executive and judicial branch all rolled into one.

And now Peter and the apostles are standing before them.

Verse 27..

The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and [n]yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

Essentially, the apostles had defied the orders of the local and essentially national government of Israel.

So Peter speaks up.

Verse 29..

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

And that statement right there sums up the limitation that God has placed upon government.

Believers live in submission to government up until the point that government causes them to sin against or prevents them from obeying God.

Now this is not the only example of this in the Bible.

Look at Exodus 1:15.

15 Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom [l]was named Shiphrah and the other [m]was named Puah; 16 and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." 17 But the midwives [n]feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had [o]commanded them, but let the boys live.

Also ***Daniel 6:6-10..***

6 Then these commissioners and satraps came [e]by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: "King Darius, live forever! 7 All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' [f]den. 8 Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which [g]may not be revoked."
9 Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.

10 Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, [h]as he had been doing previously.

When the government of Egypt forced the Hebrew women to kill, they obeyed God not man.

When the government of Darius the Mede passed a law that prevented Daniel from praying to God, he obeyed God and not man.

When the government of the Jews ordered the apostles to stop preaching the gospel, they obeyed God and not man.

This is the limitation on government.

It cannot prevent obedience to God or force believers to sin against God.

Now, a couple thoughts.

 # 1 - Some have stretched this principle too far.

There are some people who simply refuse to submit to government, and they often use God and Acts 5:29 as their excuse.

Don’t be that person.

Law that tell you to murder someone or prevent you from praying or forbid you from preaching are rare in the history of the world.

Now, that doesn’t mean they don’t exist.

It simply means that they have not been the norm.

Most believers in the Bible lived in submission to the governments that were over them.

In fact, Romans 13 was written as Nero ruled the Roman empire.

And he was clearly opposed to all things Christians.

Remember, he is the one who captured Christians and tied them to poles and lit them afire to provide light for his parties.

He is the emperor who burned his own city and blamed it on Christians.

Yet, the instruction to the church in Rome from the Lord was to live in subjection to Him.

On top of that, Jesus lived in subjection to Caesar Augustus in his life on earth.

And Caesar was no friend of God either.

In fact, he demanded to be worshipped as God.

He endorsed slavery.

He passed laws hat allowed fathers to murder unwanted children.

His reign made the craziness of our day seem tame, but Jesus submitted to him and even told his follower to render to Caesar what belonged to Caesar.

The pattern of life for the believer is submission to government.

But this leads to thought #2 for tonight, which is this..

#2 - The trend in our day is toward Acts 5:29.

Getting back to our current world and government, where does government cross the lien in causing us to sin or preventing us from obeying.

Interestingly enough, I would argue that governments preventing churches from meeting inside over COVID 19 concerns is crossing the line of Acts 5:29.

To pass a law, and by the way, that has not happened in one instance that I know of in any state over COVID 19.

But to issue a statute or pass a resolution that prevents the church from fellowshipping fall into the area of government preventing Christians from obeying God.

Look, argue what you will, and I have heard many arguments made, but the church is commanded to meet.

Hebrews 10:23-25..

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The command to the believer from the Lord is to assemble with other believers on a regular basis.

The early church assembled together every day to listen to the apostles teaching, observe the Lord's Supper, pray, and to simply enjoy the fellowship of one another.

That has been the practice of the church ever since, and it finds it's foundation in Hebrews 10:25.

In fact, the word church is ecclesia, which means to assemble.

Now I am not talking about this because we face this threat here.

I am thankful for a governor who has not followed the lead of so many other governors and mayors.

I pray that never occurs here, but it is occurring in other areas.

Some churches are not meeting while others are taking the view of Acts 5:29 and continuing to meet.

I salute those churches and I would agree that they are doing as they should in light of Acts 5:29.

But I would also add that ever situation is a little different, so I would show grace to those churches who are not meeting.

Long story short, we are living in interesting times, and our view of government needs to be biblical and we need to be able to exercise wisdom.

I would add this.

What you see now in terms of government intrusion into the church is only a test run for what is to come unless the Lord intervenes.

I envision a day where churches pay taxes, are sued for hate speech, and are threatened with jail for non-compliance.

I pray that day is far away, but only the Lord knows.

Now let me add one more important note to this before we wrap it up.

When the day comes to obey God over man, we still submit to the punishment of government.

I remind you that Daniel still went into the lion's den and the apostles were still beaten in Acts 5.

So when they come to arrest me for preaching truth, I am to go peacefully and quietly and trust the Lord to care for me.

Again, no rebellion.

No protest.

No taking up arms.

Instead, I and we will follow the example of Christ.

Look at 1 Peter 2:13..

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. 15 For [q]such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and [r]do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the [s]king.

And then this is how Peter ends that chapter on submission to government.

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 [w]and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

So even when government oversteps the limitations that God has placed upon and believers submit to God over government, that is not permission to rebel.

We disobey but we endure the punishment of government while entrusting ourselves to the Lord.

All this talk of armed rebellion and government overthrow has no place in the vocabulary of the believer.

Because there is no justification for it in Scripture.

You may disobey government.

In fact, you should disobey government when it forces you to sin or prevents you from obeying, but even then you should receive the punishment from government and trust the Lord in that.

Now even though that is little more insight into government than how it restrains sin, it is definitely relevant and important instruction for today.

Next week, we begin to examine the restraint on sin that comes from the church.

Let me end with a couple big thoughts about the restraint of government in the world.

Conclusion

#1 - Be thankful for government.

Look, I have struggled greatly with the overreaction of government in terms of COVID 19.

The facts about the virus do not match up with what governments have done.

Understand, if governments truly cared about the safety of people like they now say they do, we would have been wearing masks every winter since the flu is always deadly.

But is not a health issue, and it hasn't been for some time now.

It is truly a political issue and has been since April.

However, that being said, I would prefer an overreaching government to no government at all.

Along those same lines, even an ungodly government is better than no government at all.

You see, government in general promotes peace and provides protection because it was created by God for that purpose.

So be thankful for it.

Even when it doesn't fill its role in the world as it should, it is better than the alternative.

#2 - Be prayerful for government.

Not only are we to submit to the government and honor the government, we are commanded to pray for the government as well.

1 Timothy 2:1-4

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in [a]authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and [b]dignity. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the [c]knowledge of the truth.

You should be praying for your leaders more often than you complain about them.

God can save and HE does save the worst of sinners.

#3 - Be hopeful for a one world government.

A frequent question about government is which form of government does God prefer.

That's easy, - God prefers a monarchy with Christ as King.

In fact, that is what is coming.

Isaiah 9:6-7

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will [i]rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

Church, a perfect government is coming.

And those who are in Christ will live under his prefect rule.

All I can say is "Come Quickly, King Jesus."
Let us pray.