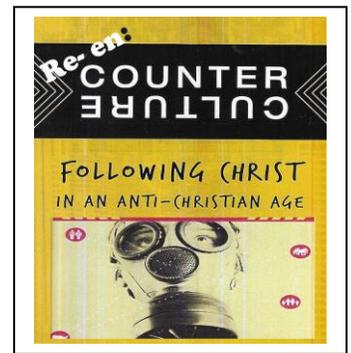


Romans 13 Re-Encountering-Culture 'The Prayer 20/20 Impact' March 8, 2020



Dear Praying Friends, and Partners In Prayer Team,

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money)"

Matthew 6:24 (KJV)

"And Jesus said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'" Matthew 22:21 (NKJV)

"For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" Romans 13:6-8 (NKJV)

Have you ever had someone respond to you when you asked about praying for him- "Hey, don't pray for me, I don't need it?" I had an unusual week, among all the other crazy stuff, and the sermon topic which has left quite the amount of questions and requests for me to clarify some statements; when someone told me to stop praying for him... I wasn't prepared for this. I honestly wasn't quite sure how to react. My first thought is, "If anyone says, 'Don't pray for me,' or 'I don't have anything I need you to pray for me concerning anything', then I automatically think, 'Just saying don't pray, or there is no reason to pray,' indicates something is wrong and amiss in your life." We know prayer is the most crucial lifeline we have; our sustaining flow of resources runs through this pipeline of prayer, by the Spirit, and right from the throne of God. I believe prayer wins the day, and without it, we will become dry and weak, emptied of all divine resources. For sure, we still have our own personal strengths and wills, but honestly... how far will those limited resources take us? And worse, where will it leave us in the end? If anyone were to ask me if I need prayer, I would probably overwhelm them with a long list of flaws, desires, and requests. So, of course as we start our message today, please pray for me and for us who need God's Word!

When thinking of this young man, I also couldn't help but think of the words of Samuel who said to the people of Israel when they asked for a king, *"Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way" (1 Samuel 12:23).* When others don't want prayer, how can I even think to not pray for them, right? I desired to pray more for this young man, and will still pray that he will return to God and take Christ's hand, accepting His salvation work as his own. Maybe one day, he will come over the horizon, and I will know the joy the Father had for his son, *"who was dead and has begun to live, who was lost and has been found"* as in the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). We know these are difficult times, yet as followers of Christ we were born for times like these! When darkness covers the earth, that's our cue to rise and shine (Isa. 60:1)! There is hope, so don't stop praying, prayer team, for our messages through Romans 13. God is at work, and prayer wins the day!

I had to do something this week which many have a hard time doing: it was sending my taxes to my preparer out in Iowa. The last few years our taxes have not caused us



to dance as shown on some of these recent crazy tax commercials on television. As people file their Turbo taxes or other, they are seen wiggling their legs and dancing with crazy delight because of the return they will get. It has been a long time since I've had that kind of tax return. I find myself praying for Christ's return instead. So what is the Christian's response to paying taxes? Have you ever asked yourself, "How is God honored by my

paying the government all that money?"

How does that old saying go? "Nothing is certain but death and taxes." We've all heard the quote, (or misquote?) and it's cemented a place in our history and popular culture. The quote basically means that death and taxes are loathed but unavoidable; no matter whom you are. I recently found out most people attribute the origin of the quote to Ben Franklin or even wrongly so to Mark Twain. As I was digging around for the origins of that saying, I found a wonderful joke that goes like this: "What's the difference between death and taxes?" The answer: "Congress doesn't meet every year to make death worse." (Smile!) I love the story of a little boy who wanted \$100 badly and prayed for two weeks but nothing happened. Then he decided to write a letter to the Lord requesting the \$100. When the postal authorities received the letter addressed to the "Lord, USA", they decided to send it to the President. The President was so impressed, touched, and amused that he instructed his secretary to send the little boy a \$5.00 bill, as this would appear to be a lot of money to a little boy. The little boy was delighted with the \$5.00, and sat down to write a thank-you note to the Lord. It said: "Dear Lord, Thank you very much for sending me the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you had to send it through Washington, DC and as usual, those jerks deducted \$95." Speaking tongue in check, have you heard that "Children may be deductible, but they are still taxing?" (Source Unknown).

All joking aside, Jesus said in Scripture when He was tested: "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that belong to God*" (Matt. 22:21). This was said when Tiberius was the Caesar of Rome. He was a good administrator, but of course, he was not a Christian. He knew no Christian influence at all, since Christianity was born during his reign. So apparently Jesus was calling the Jews to render to a pagan Caesar some kind of honor. So here is a question that nobody ever asks, "What is God owed?" **The answer: "Everything is God's so we owe God our everything!"** So the point seems to be: "When we realize that all of life, including all of Caesar's rights and power and possessions, belong to God, then we will be in a proper frame of mind to render to Caesar what is Caesar's." When as believers, we know that all is God's, then anything we render to Caesar we will render for God's sake. Any authority we ascribe to Caesar we will ascribe to Him for the sake of God's greater authority. Any obedience we render to Caesar we will render for the sake of the obedience we owe first to God. Any claim Caesar makes on us, we test by the infinitely higher claim God has on us.

This morning we will look at Paul's teaching on our relationship to secular government in the 13th chapter of Romans to answer the question, "How is paying my taxes bringing honor and recognition to God?" The first thing we need to understand is that at the time Romans was written, Nero was the Emperor. He killed his own mother to solidify his rule. He, along with Caligula, were two of the most evil men of the first

century. Nero was in every way a moral deviant. He also thought himself to be a god and desired divine worship. He had his tutor Seneca commit suicide in lieu of being executed. If any person deserved to be despised, it was Nero. Nero would later falsely accuse the Christians in Rome of setting the city on fire. Christians were crucified, burnt, thrown to the animals and suffered torture. There was a pragmatic aspect for the Christians not to rise up against Nero and Rome. Many of the early Christians were slaves. They could look back to the way Rome dealt with Spartacus and the slave revolt. The Jews could remember what happened to a Judas who led a tax revolt against Rome. Rome could be most brutal when it needed to be. Active resistance against such power would have resulted in disaster to the movement. The Christians were under enough suspicion by Jews and Romans alike. So, walking circumspectly was certainly good policy.

But Paul chooses a different argument why the Christians should be subject to the authorities over them. His argument is based upon the sovereignty of God. Despite all appearances, Paul says that there is no authority except by the will of God. God is ruler over all potentates, good and evil. He is not responsible for the evils of government, but God rules. He will hold those in power accountable for their administration of the states they rule over. Paul in Romans 13 is saying that every soul is to be subject to the authorities over him or her. *“Every soul”* is placed first in his sentence which emphasizes that every single person without exception is to be subject to this authority. This is a decree of God. These authorities rule by the will of God. Anyone who resists them is resisting God. In principle, the rulers are appointed by God to punish evildoers and not those who are good. It is obvious that on many occasions the wicked are rewarded and the good punished. But the Christian is not to actively withstand government, even when it does evil. A Christian has to set his or her sights upon the return of Jesus and the establishment of His Kingdom. There will be an accounting for those who have ruled poorly. Vengeance belongs to God alone. If we suffer wrongfully for doing good, God takes account of this also. The wrongs we suffer for Jesus’ sake will be made right. Without this eternal perspective, remaining physically passive in the face of evil would make no sense at all.

As we think about respect and taxes and what is due to our government, I have three dangers that we as law abiding believers need to be careful about in our counter-cultural ebb and flow mindset. As our nation moves further and further away from its Christian foundation, believers in America are increasingly experiencing the sense that we are aliens in a foreign country. Living in a culture that mocks Biblical values and rewards greedy and selfish behavior inspires us to be a culture that wants their “American Dream” to be that of wealth, prosperity, and material happiness.

Danger #1- Be careful of the danger of “American greed!” Greed is a strong and selfish desire to have more of something- most often money or power. There are many warnings in the Bible about giving in to greed and longing for riches. Jesus warned, *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal... You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:19, 24b).* Did Jesus pursue the acquisition of money? No. On the contrary, *“He became poor for our sake” (2 Corinthians 8:9)* and had *“no place to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20).* Neither did Jesus pursue power. Rather, He instructed, *“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 10:43–45). People don't believe they have enough. Greed refuses to be satisfied. More often than not, the more we get, the more we want. Material possessions will not protect us—in this life or eternally. When we are living from a place of greed, which is by definition believing that one doesn't have enough, then what God provides is never enough. We live out of a mindset of scarcity. When we are living generously, the word "enough" takes on a whole new meaning.



Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth century Christian writer, put it in prayer so eloquently, *"God, of Your goodness, give me Yourself, for You are enough for me. I may ask nothing less that is fully to Your worship, and if I do ask anything less, ever shall I be in want. Only in You I have all"* (Claiborne 277).

A story is told of a rich industrialist from the northern state that was horrified to find a southern fisherman lying leisurely beside his boat. "Why aren't you fishing?" asked the industrialist. "Because I have caught enough fish for the day," said the fisherman. "Why don't you catch some more?" The southern fisherman replied, "What would I do with them?" "You could earn more money," was the reply. "With that, you could fix a motor to your boat, go into deeper waters and catch more fish. Then you would make enough money to buy nylon nets. These would bring you more fish and more money. Soon you would have enough money to own two boats . . . maybe even a fleet of boats. Then you would be a rich man like me." "What would I do then?" asked the seemingly lazy fisherman. "Then you could really enjoy life." "What do you think I am doing now?" said the fisherman (Knight, *Biblical Illustrations* pg. 293).

The initial response of the fisherman clues us in to the fact that he knows something with which so many of us have difficulty. He says he isn't fishing "Because I have caught enough fish for the day." Enough. But how much is enough?

When Jesus told us to *"render to Caesar"* it occurred to me that it is limited and defined by rendering to God. What is Caesar's is determined by the fact that everything is God's first, and only becomes Caesar's by God's permission and design. Only God decides what a rightful, limited rendering to Caesar is. The only reason God ordains the rights of a Caesar is for the sake of God. When Matthew records that, *"Jesus, aware of their malice asked the hypocrites why they put him to the test"* (Matthew 22:18), Jesus then blew them away with an answer that encompasses all of life. He held up a coin and Caesar's image was plain, stamped as a sign of ownership, validating Jesus' response to *"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."* That answered the deceitful question, but Jesus went one phrase further saying, *"...and to God the things that are God's."* These men knew the Old Testament well. And given the context, would have understood the implication of Jesus' words. It was an unstated question, *"Whose image and likeness is stamped on you?"* It was a Gospel answer to a sinful question. Do we realize that we have an image stamped on our lives as Christians? We bear the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27) and are to give to God what is His—our lives. Marvel at the brilliance of Jesus today, knowing that we bear His image and likeness, and are made alive through the Holy Spirit who lives within us (I Peter 3:18). Are we living the

stamped image of Christ on our lives before others or are we falling for the greed of the American dream?

Danger #2- Be careful of the danger of American discontentment! Maybe you remember Steve Jobs, who was the CEO of Apple? He spoke at the end of his life, this statement: “If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you will most certainly be right.” After Steve Jobs was struggling to make a comeback after being ousted by Apple with a new tech startup called Next (a company Apple eventually bought, bringing Jobs home to the company he founded), Jobs was interviewed by the Wall Street Journal. The article ends with this quote of Jobs: “Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn’t matter to me anymore.” When we face the possibility of death, we learn what really matters in life don’t we? Paul reminds us to watch what we love most in life. *“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief’s” (1 Timothy 6:6-10).* Have we learned the secret of contentment as a witness to others?

We see people struggle now with lottery tickets, gambling, and misuse of the things they own. In trying to attain more in life, are we showing we trust and honor God? Paul reminds Timothy to make this a priority: *“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession” (1 Timothy 6:11-13).* When the inevitable “death” comes to us just as taxes do, are we caring more about the pursuit of happiness which is costing us our souls? Or are we giving God the due honor He deserves in a world that thinks it can have “money” instead of “God.” Remember Jesus said: *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (which is riches)” (Matthew 6:24).* Do people see our lives competing for more, or do they see God in first place in our lives?

Danger #3- Be careful of the danger of American self- entitlement! We live in a world where everyone sues because “I deserve to get what is due me and what I’m owed.” How is it that we always think something is owed us? Is this a “guy thing” or can the ladies also relate? Advertisers teach us our self-worth, our values; our identities come from what we buy. From the car we drive to the clothes we wear; from restaurants to chewing gum; from exotic vacations to an extension cord. We assess value to who we are, what we do, whether we matter based on our abilities to acquire. We constantly sue people for what we feel we are due. The famous Biblical Methodist preacher John Wesley encourages us to see our money similarly in a great sermon titled *“The Use of Money.”* In it he gives what he called “three plain rules” for the use of money.

The first rule is “Gain all you can.” He explained how one must use his/her time and talents wisely to make as much as possible, morally and without doing harm to anyone else.

The second rule is "Save all you can." The explanation of this rule included cutting down on our spending, by only what is necessary. Wesley was known for living off of 20% of his food allowance, and walking places to save money.

These first two rules sound more like a rationale for greed rather than a way to combat it. Wesley understood this and addressed it in the sermon. He said, *"But let not any man imagine that he has done anything, barely by going thus far, by 'gaining and saving all he can,' if he were to stop here. All this is nothing, if a man go not forward, if he does not point all this at a farther end. Nor, indeed, can a man properly be said to save anything, if he only lays it up. You may as well throw your money into the sea, as bury it in the earth. And you may as well bury it in the earth, as in your chest, or in the Bank of England. Not to use, is effectually to throw it away. If, therefore, you would indeed 'make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,' add the Third rule to the two preceding. Having, First, gained all you can, and, Secondly saved all you can, Then 'give all you can'"* (Wesley Sermon: "The Use of Money", II.1).

In describing what this third rule means, Wesley wrote, *"Give all you can, or, in other words, give all you have to God. Do not stint yourself...to this or that proportion. 'Render unto God,' not a tenth, not a third, not half, but all that is God's"* (Wesley III.6). In other words, all of our money is to be used to God's glory. He was not advocating, as we often hear, that we give 10% to God and do whatever we want with the other 90%. Rather, Wesley reminded us that 100% of our money is a gift from God to be used to the glory of God, the building up of the Kingdom of God by serving our neighbors in all that we do. We owe an unspeakable debt of love to our Savior.

So, all this to say, that the Scriptures are calling for Christians to have the mindset of an alien and an owner at the same time. *"Live as free people, not using your freedom as a cloak of evil, but being servants of God"* (1 Peter 2:16). We are God's servants, not the servants of any government. We are free from all governments and human institutions, because we belong to the owner of the universe and share in that inheritance and "fellow heirs with Christ". We are aliens in the U.S.; we serve the owner of the world. God has made us and bought us for Himself (1 Corinthians 6:20). We are slaves of no man and no government (1 Corinthians 7:22-23). Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We are aliens and exiles on the earth (1 Peter 2:11). We are not "at home" here, but await the Lord from heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8). In this freedom from the world and from Caesar, God sends us for a season back into the "foreign" structures and institutions of society to bear witness that they are not ultimate, but God is. We are to live out the alien ideas of another kingdom in the midst of our earthly homeland. There will always be tension as we live in these two kingdoms. But God sends us "in" not "out". He wants us to take the most precious and only thing to heaven. When we die we can't take riches or money with us. But we can take others who have accepted Jesus.

Finally, what does this mean for Christians in the US where we live? Do we not live in a democracy? Do we not have our rights enshrined in the Constitution? Do not the citizens rule? We are under severe stress these days as the administrative state rises in power. What might have once been said about America is less true today. We have not had a Nero rise yet in this country, regardless of what we hear bandied about. As it is our civic duty to vote, then vote, as this is our duty as citizens. The choices might not be such as we might wish, but in your conscience, do your best. We must

remember that ultimately, it is God who raises nations and rulers as well as sets them down. We must not forget the sovereignty of God, even here in America. Also, our freedoms as Christians are not enshrined in a Constitution but the Word of God. Regardless of what might happen to our country, we must realize that we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom not made with hands. As much as it lies within us all, let us live at peace with everyone in a way that bears the image of Jesus struck upon our lives. Ask God to reveal if our hearts are envious, discontent, or even greedy. May you and I be people who are not striving to be rich by this world's standards. Contemporary worship leaders Chris Tomlin & Louie Giglio wrote a song called "Enough." The chorus goes,

*"All of You is more than enough for all of me
For every thirst and every need
You satisfy me with Your love
And all I have in You is more than enough"*

We may not struggle with paying our taxes or issues of greed or money, yet, God has called us to a different economy defined not by greed but by generosity. Let's open our hearts to at least help those who do struggle. Let's show our citizenship of heaven by the way we give. Give honor to God! Give forgiveness and the message of salvation to those struggling with discontentment! Give love always as our debt and obligation- which is never an issue we should sue over. Pray as God shows our rebel hearts any area we need to know where we already have enough in Christ Jesus, and may we go to further His kingdom in our world.

Pray with me,

Our King of heaven, we confess before You the pride, fear, greed, and selfishness that we struggle with daily. Forgive us for closing our eyes to be compassionate upon people hurting around us. Instead of looking at people and seeing their great riches, we should look at people and see their great need for their souls, to know Christ our Savior. Only Jesus is enough! Enough for our great need of forgiveness; enough to take on our weakness and sinfulness; enough to be our substitute on the cross for our sins. Thank You for Your perfect obedience, Jesus, that was credited to us, even though we continue to struggle every day with selfish and greedy hearts. Holy Spirit, melt our hard hearts, for cannot soften them. Cause us to see how we have been rescued by our great Savior, and give us the desire and ability to give our due debt of love to others. Help us love them deeply from our hearts of gratitude and concern. Help us to enter the worlds of others, bringing the true light of grace and hope. May we grow into people who love as we have been loved and who serve as we have been served and give freely as Jesus gave Himself for us. We ask in the Name of the One who is our Indescribable Gift Himself, amen.

***Laughing all the way to the IRS and tax office,
Pastor Corvin <><***

Quotes on greed:

"Greed is a fat demon with a small mouth and whatever you feed it is never enough."
... Janwillem Van De Wetering

"Greed is not a financial issue. It's a heart issue." ...Andy Stanley