Notes for Relationships with Rulers (Romans 13, Daniel 3, Acts 4-5)

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* Reality of times in history that have tested the patience and resolve of God’s people.
* There have been times that have escalated to the place where believers had to determine to defy earthly authorities to remain faithful to their heavenly one.
* German Confessing Church in the 1930’s was such a time.
* Men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer resisted the infiltration of the Nazi regime and ideology into the church- namely in the racial discrimination in ministerial roles and membership through baptism.
* His resistance included writings, teachings, securing formal resolutions against the Nazi regime, training resistant clergy in Germany, rescuing Jews, and even a coup against Hitler.
* A believer’s relationship with earthly authorities can be complicated through the curse.

1. It is the aim of Christians to cooperate with all authorities.

* Romans 13 makes it clear that authorities that exist are done for the good of mankind as part of God’s design.
* It is our aim to attempt to cooperate with governmental authorities.
* Paul’s inclusion of this instruction in the book of Romans should be telling.
  + Called “Purest gospel”- Martin Luther
  + Called “the most important theological, Christian work ever written” -John Piper
  + First two-thirds is deep theological explanation of salvation. Last third is explanation of how we live in view of that salvation.
  + Nero is believed to be in power at the time of this letter- prior to official persecution
* Our participation and cooperation are not dependent on promotion or adoption of Christian agenda.

1. Authorities may be instituted by God, but they do not always imitate God.

* God instituted authorities for our good and His glory.
* However, governmental authorities do not always imitate the God that instituted them.
* Earthly authorities are fallible because they are run by fallen people.
* Blurring the line between institution and imitation can lead to unhealthy allegiances.
  + Governments can be used by God, but they will never be God.
* Governments can imitate and be a blessing. They can ignore and be a burden.

1. Resisting earthly authority is necessary when it contradicts God’s authority.

* There comes a point where it is the divine duty of believers to reject ungodly dictates.
* Daniel 3 and the story of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael is an example of necessarily resisting governmental authority
  + They are commanded to bow down to an idol
  + It is a clear violation of the second of the Ten Commandments
* Acts 4-5 and the story of Peter and John is an example of properly resisting spiritual and cultural authority.
  + Peter and John are commanded to stop preaching the resurrection of Jesus.
  + They believe that the instruction of Christ in Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28 supersede any dictates from the Sadducee authorities
* Sometimes the issues are not so obvious
  + Battling over US tax policy- should we pay taxes to a government that wastes money or spends it on things that are evil?
  + My personal conviction and resolution- I pay because I am told to pay. But then I pray for God to hold those in positions of authority accountable for what they do with it.

1. Resistance must be done with reliance on God and respect toward persons.

* Paul tells believers that we don’t have to live in fear of authorities when we do good. However, there are times when their motives and metrics are messed up.
* Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael are confident in God’s ability to deliver them from the fiery furnace, “but even if He does not, we will not bow down…”
* They resisted, but there seemed to still be a certain level of respect shown
* That is consistent with their story and the favor that they enjoyed throughout Daniel
* Even when we cannot comply, we must model the character of Christ
* It does absolutely no good to make a stand for Jesus and not act like Him and demonstrate Him in the process
* There is even restraint in Peter’s address. He is pointed and direct. He makes certain that they understand their place in the story of Christ’s crucifixion. But they are not unnecessarily militant.
* We can and should be honest. We don’t have to be unnecessarily nice. There should simply be restraint and a lack of violent militantism in our response.

1. Resistance may cost your life…and it may save others.

* The unfortunate reality is that resistance carries consequences
* We want to take the spiritually appropriate high road and be guaranteed physical safety
  + That is not the historical reality
* We must willingly accept the consequences that are demanded
* In Daniel 3, Jesus (or an angel) literally walks through the fire with them. In Acts 4-5, God uses Gamaliel as the voice of reason and restraint.
* In these stories, they are delivered, but not forever.
  + Each of the disciples die a martyr’s death according to tradition (with the exception of one)
* This willingness to pay the ultimate price can be the catalyst for change for others
  + Nebuchadnezzar threatened to cut up the family of anyone that dared to speak evil against the God of the three Hebrew young men
  + Later, his story of resistance and ridicule became one of recognition. The next chapter records Nebuchadnezzar praising God.
  + The willingness of Peter and John to stand their ground resulted in thousands being saved immediately and millions in the centuries to come
* Resistance must be done in full recognition of potential prices to be paid