

“Avengers: Earth’s Mightiest Heroes”

Romans 13:3-7

November 22nd, 2020

As a child, I enjoyed reading comic books. Some of my favorites were *Beetle Bailey*, *Sad Sack*, *the Archies*, and *Peanuts*. In my high school years, I collected Superhero comic books. Some of my favorites were *Detective Comics* featuring Batman, Spiderman, Superman, and Iron Man.

In recent years, Hollywood released a significant number of blockbuster movies starring Superheroes. Jan and I have enjoyed the Avengers series, culminating in two really good movies, *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: End Game*.

The Avengers were the birth child of the late Stan Lee founder of Marvel Comics. They were initially known as “Avengers: Earth’s Mightiest Heroes.” Original superhero members were Iron Man, Captain America, Black Widow, Hawkeye, the Hulk, and Thor. They were quite powerful each on their own, but together, they were an incredible force with which to be reckoned.

Why the talk about comic books and superheroes this morning? Have I finally lost it? Well, the Apostle Paul makes mention of avengers, that’s why! OK, maybe Paul and Stan Lee are not thinking similarly, but the term “avenger” is the same!

When Paul writes of avengers in the sermon text before us today, **Romans 13:3-7**, he refers to the governing authorities God has established. These governing authorities are avengers God established to confront those who do evil.

Last Sunday morning, we began our study of **Romans Chapter 13** by looking at the first two verses. There, we saw that God established government as a means to protect people and to ensure law and order in fallen human society. Among the implications of God establishing government is that we, as believers in Jesus Christ, are to willingly submit to and support the governing authorities that exist. I’m sure that’s not a popular thing for some given all the strife, angst, and conflict of the last several months and even years. But, God has great purposes for rulers and governing authorities, and among those purposes is the church’s good.

Romans 13:3-7:

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are Gods’ 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.”

In explaining government’s role, Paul teaches that those who do evil are to fear the governing authorities. Verse 3 begins, “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.” The authorities God elevates to office are to strike fear in the hearts of those who do evil in society. This should cause enemies outside the state and evildoers within to realize that if they resort to

evil, they will pay the consequences of their wickedness. In verse 4, Paul calls the head of the State His “minister” (perhaps your version has the word “servant.”) “The (minister/servant/ruler) is nothing more than a lowly servant before God.” (Morris, 463) Paul goes on to speak of government “bearing the sword.” This is important, so let’s camp a few moments on it.

“The image of the sword is used throughout Scripture to indicate the authority given to those responsible for enforcing the law of God.” (Sproul, 448) *Now, what comes to mind when you think of laws being enforced?* Yes, the police – our public servants – every city’s finest! Police departments are an extension of the government’s responsibility to protect its citizens. The overwhelming majority of those servants in blue are among society’s best people, and they don’t make a habit of abusing the law or those protected by it.

For us to unite with others in calls to “defund police” is to help seal our doom as a culture and society. We shouldn’t let bad examples cause a wholesale doing away with the police and somehow hope to maintain and enforce order. We have police departments because people generally are not basically good. Instead, the Bible pictures us as conceived in and born with sin natures that oppose God. We should pray for offenders and the hope of fewer and fewer violent instances of brutality.

This bearing of the sword by the government authorities extends to maintaining correctional facilities - prisons - and death, if necessary. Bearing the sword includes administering capital punishment. And, let there be no mistake that the Bible does teach capital punishment as a biblical concept! We studied that when we worked our way through the Book of Genesis for a couple of years on Sunday mornings awhile back.

Listen to what the Bible says in **Genesis 9:6** – “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.” The execution of dangerous criminals who have committed horrible crimes is a responsibility the state must take seriously if society is to function properly. In recent months, we have seen the destruction, violence, and madness of a society of some even law-abiding citizens reacting to injustices.

Another aspect of bearing the sword regards the state’s power to raise and foster a military. The state has the God-given responsibility to wage war in order to protect its citizenry. This is important because, among other reasons, of what we read in verse 5, “Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.”

What does it mean that we Christians (Paul’s audience in this letter is the Church) are to be subject to the governing authorities? Well, it means that our default position is to obey those over us because God has placed them there, and He commands, like He does here in verse 5, that we submit to these leaders. “Since God authorizes our rulers and places them over us, we are to render obedience as a matter of principle unless they require us to do something God forbids or forbid us from doing something God commands.” (Sproul, 455-56) It’s an indictment on us when we feel we must take a stand against things that are ultimately insignificant or upon those things that should be common sense in order to preserve life. But, it would appear that

we feel we know better than God does. Such is the case when we foster separate, individual little kingdoms of one.

The bearing of the sword means the government also has the power to conscript its people into those armed forces. And the government has the power to tax its people to pay for the war effort. Such incredible powers – in the hands of evil people – can easily be corrupted. This is another point where the Church comes in – if there is no just cause for the military action being considered, then the Church must call the State to account for its actions. Such government as we find God establishing here in **Romans Chapter 13** is only effective in the hands of God-fearing, Christian people.

Certainly, we must understand that without government, our society would be total anarchy, a completely lawless society. But, for government to work effectively, **we must pay for it**. That brings us to verses 6 & 7 - “For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are Gods’ 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.”

So, the Bible teaches Christians must support their government and pay taxes? Yes, it does. Government is very expensive. Even so, significant parts of government make our society better. We’ve already addressed the need for police departments and military forces; they exist because tax money supports them. The same is true of national and state parks, federal drug enforcement agencies, food inspectors, centers for disease control, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, state police, various types of health care and more.

The immediate recipients of this letter to the Roman Church were subjects of the Roman government. It was an oppressive government. The Roman Christians had been crushed by the burden of Roman taxation. Even so, Paul told the Christians in Rome that they were to pay taxes. Taxes might be unfair and oppressive, but God has given to the civil magistrate the right to levy taxes.

Think about it – governments usually do not produce anything, so most of their revenue, if not all of it, is dependent upon the imposition of taxes rather than on voluntary contributions, and the government is allowed by God’s decree to collect such taxes by the sword, if necessary. This is why Paul can say in verse 7, that we are to pay taxes “to whom taxes are due.”

The real problem isn’t so much the taxes we are required to pay, though we do pay a lot of those. No, the more significant problem is *how much* government spends, and upon what it spends its money! Without budgets, *how can governments control spending?* Even with budgets and oversight controls on spending, it is most difficult to keep spending within limits. And, for governments to spend money on sinful things and evil practices is to bring the Church into the bull’s eye of those looking to take the Christian church down. It is a dishonorable government that requires Christians to spend a portion of their tax money for abortions of any type, or, for instance, elective surgeries for gender reassignment.

True story. A remarkable politician came on the scene some time ago. He inherited a nation that had 50 to 75% unemployment; but he brought employment to almost 100%. His government was bankrupt when he came to power; in just 4 years he had balanced the budget and paid off the national debt. Moral perversion was rampant when he came to office; he drove pornography and other forms of vice out of the nation. Mobs ruled the streets before he came to power, and the nation teetered toward anarchy or Soviet communism; he restored order and national pride. His economy and military became the most powerful in the world.

Wow! *Would such a leader get your vote? Do you know to whom I refer?* This man's name was Adolph Hitler. The German people put their hope in him, and he led them to one of the worst tragedies in world history. We should never put our hope in government or politicians to change the world; only God and His Gospel can do that.

The late Chuck Colson once said, "The Kingdom of God will not arrive on Air Force One." I agree; so should each of us who claims the name Christian. This is a reminder for those participating in the recent general election. For us to exert so much energy on what we get from our government or not, whether we will be able to retain all of the freedoms we cherish so much, all of it is gut-wrenching, causing much angst. We love the country we have helped build; we want to keep her prospering in every way possible. We should be good citizens of the City of Man. But, even more importantly, we must be good citizens of the City of God. He will prevail even if all of humanity combined forces and attempted to bring in another conclusion.

I think of the Psalmist in **Psalm 2** who wrote, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.'"

How does God respond? This is **Psalm 2:4**, "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold all of them in derision." Then, God says, "Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him."

So, if you're a Christian, you have already placed your trust in Him. Ask God to rekindle a deeper faith in Jesus; remember, that He has already called you blessed. God will not let you get away. Your heart may have experienced some hardening, and even grown spiritually cold, but He has not lost you. Come back to Jesus.

Friend, if you hear my voice and you have not yet hoped in the Lord Jesus Christ, He's calling you to do that at this moment. Don't run away any longer; come back to the fellowship. Jesus is still here in our midst when we gather to worship Him and encourage others in their walk of faith. All is not lost. In fact, all is found. In Jesus.