

Rebels without a Cause?

With all of the confusion and blatant dishonesty coming out of Washington these days, how are we to respond to a government that seems, at times, to be out of control? Of all of the people on radio and television who're supposedly representing the Christian viewpoint on many important issues pertaining to our government and our government leaders, who are we to listen to? What can we learn from a careful study of the scriptures? Each year, the last Sunday in October is set aside as Reformation Sunday, a day in which we remember ways in which the 16th century Protestant Reformation was instrumental in bringing many issues of scripture—including the doctrine of justification by faith alone—back to the forefront of the teaching of the church. In this series of articles I want to look at another important area of scriptural truth that was brought to the forefront by the Reformers, i.e., the teaching concerning civil government in general, a Christian response to government, and why this truth is relevant no matter which political party is in power at the moment.

In the opening chapters of Holy Scripture we discover that sin is directly traced to the Fall of Adam in Genesis 3. And yet, sin did not remain exclusively with Adam and Eve. “So death spread to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). We conclude, then, that we sin because we're sinners. But God, by his grace, provided salvation from sin through the “offspring of the woman” (Genesis 3:15), i.e., Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). As Christians, we're saved from our sins and, by grace, we also seek to grow in holiness (1 Peter 1:15). If we're to continue to turn from our sin, it's crucial that we recognize ways in which our sin expresses itself. The scriptures are clear that one of the primary and foundational ways in which we express our sinfulness is in rebelling against authority. Adam's disobedience is directly connected to an unwillingness to submit to the commands of God.

Given the fact that our first parents rebelled against the authority of God, we immediately see how that sin will express itself in mankind in general; we're prone to rebel against God, as well as the human authorities, roles and structures which God has established. For example, the loving and mutually benefiting roles of husband and wife, now shattered by sin, will take on a completely different look. The loving and protecting headship given to the husband before the Fall will now, often, be a source of irritation to the wife as she chafes under the leadership of her husband and seeks at every turn to throw off his authority, either by stealth or outright rebellion. It's also true that the loving headship and authority given to the husband will often express itself sinfully as domineering, despotic, iron handed rule (Ephesians 5:22-33). Sadly, from our first parents, we inherit sin in general and particularly the sin of rebellion against authority. Far too often, we don't want anyone to tell us to do anything we're not of a mind to do ourselves.

Although it's true that there's nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9), it seems that we live in a time that's particularly struggling with this issue of rebellion against authority. In the last fifty years there's been a proliferation of involvement with illegal drugs as well as

involvement in illicit sexual relationships. Both of these sins came to the forefront of society in the 1960's. These sins and many others are merely an expression of the foundational problem that also rose out of that decade—the seeking to overthrow every vestige of authority. Those of us who lived during that time will remember the motto, “Don't trust anyone over thirty.”

Although it's true that there are those who, by their actions, contributed to the loss of trust in our leaders, Christians are never at liberty to go against the teaching of scripture in this or any other area.

If you want to test your heart, look at the ways in which you respond to the authority that God has placed over you. We see this manifested in every societal structure that God has put in place, including the family, the workplace, the church, as well as the government. We must recognize that any rebellion against legitimate authority that God has established is an outright rejection of and rebellion against God himself. This is very serious! In this series of articles, we'll see if there's any just cause to ever be in rebellion against the authority structures that God has put in place. Our primary focus will be the authority of the civil government.

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