POLITICAL DISSIDENCE PT. 1

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Big Idea:

- Our nation was built on the moral law of God.
- When the church rises up, people flourish. When the church is silent, everyone suffers.

The Question Behind the Moment

- One of the pastors asked me, he said, "What do you think? What do you think Glenn's motivation was for having you? Like, why were you there?"
- I said, "Well, I don't know either."
- I think Glenn reached out to us because the pressing question on Glenn Beck's mind, in a very genuine way—he's a very authentic, sweet, precious, humble, curious man—in a very authentic way, he's wanting to know:
    - **Does the Bible have anything to say about anything happening in our culture today?** He's genuinely like, "This is a clown show. Does the Bible have anything to say?"

Key Emphasis

- Does the Bible have anything to say about the days we are living in?

Why This Matters in Acts

- The question, "does the Bible have anything to say about what we're living in", is very relevant because we're in the book of Acts where all the apostles did was talk about how relevant the gospel of Jesus Christ is.

- In Acts 22, we see the story of Paul's dissidence beginning, truly beginning.

- We're going to see the story in Acts 22 beginning where Paul has a little scuffle with the local law enforcement officers and the local civil magistrates of his day.

- The last six or seven chapters of Acts is just him going up the civil magistrate food chain until he gets to the top.

- They realize:
    - "Yeah, this guy actually is saying what we think he is."
    - "He's stumping for another kingdom."
    - "He's going to put the safety and security of this kingdom at risk."
    - "So we need to murder him."

Key Emphasis

- They didn't murder Paul because they misunderstood him… they murdered Paul because they understood exactly what he was saying.

Paul's Message About Another Kingdom

- Paul wasn't there to undermine the Roman government as a scofflaw.
- He was there to preach against the Roman government that was saying, "Give allegiance to Caesar," that God, the only God, says is His.
- He was preaching and proclaiming a different kingdom.
- He didn't go inside it to work inside out.
- He stood outside it and preached and proclaimed the kingdom of God over it.

Illustration

- Paul going up the civil magistrate food chain.

Key Emphasis

- Proclaiming the kingdom of God over earthly powers.

Why Go Back to Romans 13

- Romans 13 is the foundation of Paul's dissidence.
- Here's why this is important:

    - In Acts 20:1:

        - "When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and after encouraging them said goodbye and set out from Macedonia."

        - "He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece where he stayed for three months."

- What I didn't tell you when we got to verse 3 a few weeks ago was:

    - What Paul did, along with preaching the gospel and proclaiming the kingdom of God and encouraging the saints in Macedonia, while he was there—or excuse me—in Greece for three months, is he also wrote the book of Romans while there for three months.

The Misuse of Romans 13

- It struck me this week as I was thinking about the fact that Romans 13 is the passage that was used during kind of crazy government overreach three and four years ago during COVID as the Bible verse to say:

    - We should do whatever the government says, even if it doesn't make sense.
    - Even if it doesn't align with logic, reasoning, or science.
    - Even if it violates the word of God.

- It was kind of a shocking realization, the amount of shallow thinking churches and Christians have done because of the blanket of freedom we've lived under.

- That blanket hasn't required us to think deeply about these things.

- Then the blanket gets snatched off and all of a sudden we're like:

    - "Wow, this is cold out here."
    - "Does the Bible have anything to say about what we should do right now?"

And we said yes, we think it does. The Bible does have something to say about what we should do right now.

Paul Wrote Romans 13, Then Lived It

- Paul writes Romans 13 in chapter 20, and then in chapter 22 he is in it.

- He is in constant conflict with the government of his time until his eventual death, murder.

- What I want to do this morning is take a quick look at Romans 13 to make sure that we have it under our belt, at least in the sense of a cursory study, as we move into the rest of the book of Acts.
- Romans 13 gives us the framework and foundation for Paul's thinking when he moves into all of these interactions with the civil magistrates.
- The reason that's important is because if we disconnect the writing of Paul from the life of Paul, we'll miss the message of Paul.
- We don't want to miss the message of Paul's life because his life is a hermeneutic for how we study his writings.
- He was living an inspired life by the Spirit of God, Not perfectly, but he was.
- He's showing us what it looks like to live out what he wrote in Romans 13.

Key Emphasis

- If we disconnect the writing of Paul from the life of Paul, we'll miss the message of Paul.

Romans 13: Submission to Governing Authorities

Scripture Reference

- Romans 13:1–4
- "Submission to governing authorities"—that's the heading of his chapter.

- Verse 1:
    - "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established."

- Important: "The authorities that exist have been established by God."

- "Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

Observations

- When he says they are in authority as ones put there by God, that is a two-sided coin.
- The only side of the coin that many were talking about a few years ago was:
    - God put them there, so you've got to do what they say.

- The other side of the coin is:
    - God put them there, so they have to do what God says.

8. Authority Under God

- Yes, they're there as God's appointed officers.

- They're there for the people's good.

- They're there as ones who will be held accountable before God if they don't lead according to God's word.

The second thing to know here in this text: Paul's assuming a righteous government.

- Because he says:
    - They are there for your good.
    - If you rebel against them, God will bring judgment against you.

Supporting Argument

- It's the same thing God says to kids:
    - I've put parents in your life as ones in authority over your life for your good and your blessing.
    - Because you're young and foolish and need help.
    - That's why I've given you parents.

- If you rebel against your parents, it's the same as rebelling against God.
- Children are like, "How do I rebel against God?"
- You rebel against the authority structures that God has placed in your life through your parents.

Illustration

- Parent and child.
- Now if a parent tells a kid to go rob a bank, that child has the God-given authority to say:
    - "No. I submit to a higher allegiance, namely God."

- "If you're going to require me as your child to disobey the law of God, then I have to go around you and submit to Jesus."

Key Emphasis

- If a parent is submitted to God, their authority is righteous.
- If a parent is not submitted to God, their authority is illegitimate.

Right and Wrong Must Be Defined by God

- Verse 3:
  - "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong."
- The question is:
  - Who gets to define, or by what standard do we define, the definition of right and wrong?

- What's Paul assuming in his mind? That God gets to define right and wrong
  - He's not saying some arbitrary standard of right and wrong that whoever is in power at the time gets to determine.

  - So if the powers that be determine that marriage is this, not this, then you've got to submit to it? **No**

Under-girding all of this conversation is the moral law of God and the natural law of God that Paul's appealing to.

The Government Bears the Sword

- "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right..."
- "Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and you'll be commended."
- "For the one in authority is God's servant for your good."
- He's assuming a righteous government acting on behalf of God, in submission to His standards, for the good of the people.
- "But if you do wrong... be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason."
- "They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment to the wrongdoer."

Scripture Reference

- Romans 13:3–4

- God gives the jurisdiction of the government authority to exercise the sword for the sake of justice, order, and peace in the land.
- Evil does not restrain itself.
- It must be restrained by righteous men with swords.

Illustration

- If someone committed a crime against my family and I hunted them down and murdered them, that would be unjust retribution.

- If law enforcement tracked them down, cornered them in a building, and the guy decides to shoot it out, that's not retribution—that's justice.

- Because they've been given authority by God to bear the sword against evil in order to protect good.

Key Emphasis

- Evil must be restrained.
- Government has authority to bear the sword for justice.

When the Sword Is Neutered, Everyone Suffers

- When a nation or a government or a state decides to enact crazy laws that neuter the power and dull the edge of the sword that law enforcement has to use to bring evil to justice, everyone suffers.
- No one flourishes when bad guys aren't held accountable.

Foundations for Paul's Dissidence

1. Holy Jurisdiction

- God has established a lane of government.
- It is a holy jurisdiction that God has established for the good flourishing of humanity.
- It's a lane that God has created.

- We as Christians and Bible-believing followers of Jesus should be thankful for government.
- We should pray for government.
- Many of you might even get involved in government.
- That is a good and honorable thing.
- It can be very challenging in these days.
- But it is not illegitimate in the eyes of God.
- It is a good office and jurisdiction that God created.

Holy Limitations

- The limits of the jurisdiction's rule are clear:
    - Punish evil.
    - Reward good.
    - Protect citizens.

- Government is to be a friend of righteousness, enemy to evil.

- What's crazy in Romans 13, where Paul is unpacking the most explicit explanation of the bounds of jurisdictional authority government has, it's quite limited in what he talks about.

- The more expansive the bureaucratic state becomes, the more complicated it becomes, the more tyrannical.
- The pole of the brokenness of humanity will naturally move it down to the left away from the promises and statutes of God.

Holy Submission

- Submission to authority is a consistent theme in Scripture.

- Foundation for order, blessing, unity, and human flourishing.

- We as followers of Jesus, over any other group in the world, believe in the goodness of the word submission.

- When we stand and say, "Excuse me, this is wrong," we're not doing it as rebels.

- We're not doing it as agents of chaos.

- We're not doing it as promoters of anarchy.

- We're not doing it as scofflaws.

- We're doing it as friends of the rule of law.

Illustration

- During COVID, when you have a ruler who's issuing so many edicts that no one can follow, and after a while everyone stops even trying, you're degrading the value of the rule of law.

Illustration

- I read a book one time, the premise was that every American under the current bureaucratic state commits at least three felonies a day unwittingly.

- The tactic is to put so many rules on the books. And then: say
    - "We're not actually going to enforce it."

- No No No. Don't make up rules that you're unwilling to enforce because that devalues the rule of law.

- No one flourishes when no one cares about the law.

- But when you put all these rules in place and don't enforce them until it's convenient for you to enforce them against people you don't like, now you have selective enforcement.

Key Emphasis

- Submission to authority is a good thing.
- Selective enforcement is not good for anybody.

In Authority Under Authority

- When government acts unrighteously, it should have the same fear that Paul warns the evil person to have.
- Paul was speaking and saying:

    - If you're acting out against a righteous government, you should tremble in fear because they can act against you as the hand of God.

- The flip side of that is:

    - If the government acts outside of the word of God, they should have that same fear because God will hold them accountable.

- There is a jurisdiction that God has given the authority to hold the government accountable, It's the jurisdiction of the church.

Key Emphasis

- Government is in authority, under authority.

The Church Must Not Go Silent

- That's what we see in the book of Acts.
- We see the apostolic boldness of God's men holding a rogue and increasingly evil government accountable to the standards of God.
- If the church goes quiet, and if the pulpits go silent, there's no one to instruct a government as to the nature of righteousness.
- Our nation was founded on the foundation of righteousness that was laid in the minds and hearts of the founding fathers by the pulpits of their day.
- We have to understand:
    - If the church goes silent, if the pulpits go silent, no one in the world has a clue which way is up and down.
    - Because it's the word of God that draws the line between right and wrong.

- That's why we've been talking about there's this tension being created in your life where you're in places of work or employment where they're enacting, quite frankly, evil policies.

- You're feeling the tension:
    - If I speak up, I'll get fired.
    - But to be silent is to have my conscience torn.

Key Emphasis

- If the pulpits go silent and the church goes silent, the world will have no witness as to which way to go.

Courage in Everyday Places

- We don't do it obnoxiously
- But we should do it courageously.

Illustration

- I talked to a brother in this church in an industry where, for their HR training, he was asked to sit through training on how a man can dress as a woman. You know what industry he's in? Selling insurance.
- He's like:
    - "I'm just not going."
    - "This is crazy."
    - "I don't care what you say, the emperor is naked."
    - "I'm going to call it out."
    - "Fire me if you want."
    - "That's okay."
    - "I'm just telling you this is nuts."

Key Emphasis

- Silence becomes complicity.
- One or two stand up, you shoot them.
- Hope the rumor spreads.
- Then everyone with their silence allows evil to advance.

- This is an us thing that God's going to call us to look at the life and example of the Apostle Paul and the Christian church in the book of Acts and say:
    - This is what it looks like to live in a culture that's increasingly going mad.

- This means that life might get a little uncomfortable from time to time and That's okay because Jesus is with you.

The Cost of Truth

Illustration

- The story of the gal that got baptized a few weeks ago. She had stage four cancer.
- "Cancer saved my life."

- Remember her story. "I'd rather be dying of cancer and alive in Christ than healthy as a horse and dead to Christ."

Key Emphasis

- The blessing of God is worth whatever sacrifice you think you might make to follow Him faithfully.

Holy Accountability

- When a government acts unrighteously, it should have the same fear that Paul says the evil person should have.

Holy Foundations

- There is moral law and natural law that supersedes and undergirds civil law.

- The assumption Paul was working from:

    - Civil law is built on the moral law of God.

Illustration / Scripture-Adjacent Reference

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."

"Endowed with unalienable rights..."

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"Governments are instituted to protect these rights."

- What's the assumption there?
    - God, not men, gave rights to men.

- If God is the giver of rights, man cannot be the taker of rights.
- It's God who gave humanity these unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- It's government that merely acknowledges that and builds their civil law on the moral law of God so as to protect the flourishing of humanity.

Key Emphasis

- If God is the giver of rights, man cannot be the taker of rights.

Holy Dissidence

- When government wields its power to undermine God's law, it is an illegitimate government in need of gentle correction or strong rebuke.

- This is what we're going to see Paul in the rest of the book of Acts.

- It's just Paul going:
  "Nope. Nope. No, no, no. Super no. Really holy no. My gosh, is anyone listening out there?"
- And he just keeps saying no until they cut his head off.

Key Emphasis

- Holy dissidence is the obligation and privilege of the church.
- Gentle always, but strong in its rebuke if necessary.

Higher Allegiance

- When we push back, we do not act as rebels. We act as heavenly friends of earthly rebels.
- We owe allegiance to God first.

- Throughout the book of Acts, you will never see or hear Paul acting ungodly.

Illustration

- I heard a pastor recently say:

- "I'm okay with politics as long as it stays inside the church, just don't let it go outside the church."

- That's the playbook of the enemy.
    - Keep your Christianity inside the four walls of the church and we'll be fine.

Analogy

- That's right out of *The Screwtape Letters*.
    - "Let them have their worship service. No big deal, that doesn't affect anything. Just make sure they're not allowed to take their worship out into the streets, because then we'd have problems. Make them think they're okay if they get to play church on their own, just don't let them be Christians when they leave the front door of the church."

The Church Must Speak Beyond Its Walls

- When people say:
    - "Look, you can talk politics in your church, but we're not called to disciple the world, so just don't take your politics out there."

- I'm like:
    - Let's talk about the definition of politics, because everything is politics these days.

- If you're talking about true politics
    - How to pave roads.
    - Where to put the water tank for the development.
- But when you step into the line of morality, now that's the church's lane, and we've got to have a conversation.
- To think that the message of the church in relationship to civil magistrates shouldn't go outside the church is to have never read your Bible.

Scripture References / Illustrations

- John the Baptist went to Herod and said:

    - "You are screwing around with your brother's wife. That is immoral in the eyes of God, which makes you illegitimate as a head of state, **you need to repent**."

- And they cut his head off.
- But let's be clear:
    - The message of John the Baptist went outside the walls of the church.

- Paul's not even in a church family. He's out literally in the marketplace proclaiming the word of God.

Key Emphasis

- The church has a higher allegiance to God.

Greater Good

- When the church speaks up for righteousness, it is for the good of all.
- When the church is silent, everyone suffers.

- We said this during COVID and We say it now.
    - If the church goes silent on the moral law of God, that community will continue to decay and rot until more and more people are going to be hurt.
    - Because the laws that are being enacted in our government schools and the laws that are being enacted in our state specifically are hurting real people right now.
    - They are hurting children.
    - They are hurting families.
    - Marriage is being attacked.
    - The family is being undermined.
    - The family is the cornerstone of any society and so if it crumbles, so too will that society.

- Because the church should be the champion of God's jurisdiction of marriage and family.

Key Emphasis

- When the church speaks up for righteousness, it is for the good of all.

Positive World, Neutral World, Negative World

- A few weeks ago I gave you this grid:
    - Positive
    - Neutral
    - Negative
- Positive world:
    - What we used to experience in our nation.
- Neutral world:
    - What we pivoted to.
- Then we're in late-stage negative world.
    - Entertainment fell.
    - Media fell.
    - Academia fell.
    - Families are falling.
    - Businesses have fallen.
    - Government is the last line of defense before it falls.
- The question we're asking is:
    - What's the missiological strategy in this day?
- Seeker-sensitive strategy for the church in positive world.
- Cultural engagement strategy in neutral world.
- There's yet to be one written or defined for negative world.

Key Emphasis

- Apostolic boldness is the road map for negative world reality.

The Missiological Strategy for Negative World

→ ***Apostolic boldness.***

- That is the example that we see in the book of Acts.
  Apostolic boldness:
    - Unapologetic.
    - Clear.
    - Brokenhearted.
    - Humble.
    - Setting forth the truth plainly.
    - Bold

Key Emphasis

- God rewards boldness.

Big Idea One: Our Nation Was Built on the Moral Law of God

- Without question.
- Unequivocally.
- Even though it's being rewritten and erased, this is the reality of what caused the blessing of our nation.
- Now that blessing is waning.
- Our influence is failing in the world, and rightfully so, because we've left our foundation.

Big Idea Two: When the Church Rises Up, People Flourish

- When the church rises up, people flourish.
- When the church is silent, everyone suffers.

Example: The Salem Witch Trials

- The Salem Witch Trials were going on in Massachusetts.
- Twenty-seven people were unrighteously and unjustly hung, burned, murdered because of the crazy scare that was going on—the social contagion of witchcraft.
- It was happening so quickly that the mob was taking over, the same thing is going on in Europe.

- Two Protestant pastors, elders of a local church, step up and go: "Whoa, whoa, whoa we're not saying we're pro-witches and pro-demonic, but this is crazy."
- Then from the word of God, they began unpacking doctrines of justice.
- They began unpacking what God's word had to say about the authority that civil magistrates have and don't have in any given society.
- They began unpacking the word of God as it related to the crazy social contagion and politics of their day.
- They began getting the ear of those in authority and over the course of eighteen months, nineteen months, trials start slowing down and hangings stop happening.
- Because of the preaching of these two pastors and the writing of these two pastors, people realize:
    - We are men of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips. And then they repent.
- It ushers in a season of spiritual renewal and revival in the northern colonies pre-1776.
- At the same time, the same thing is happening in Europe, but no pastors speak up, no churches step up and over the course of many, many years, over 500,000 people are hung in the witch trials of Europe.

Key Emphasis

- When the church goes silent, everyone suffers.

Analogy

- They were hanging people on witch hunts during the Salem Witch Trials.
- They're mutilating children as a step toward mental health in our day.

Key Emphasis

- God's word has something to say about everything going on in any day in culture.

John Wise and the Founding of the Nation

- John Wise was one of those pastors who spoke up and eventually he died. Fifty years later, someone discovers his sermons and compiles them in a little book. Those very sermons he preached in the days of the Salem Witch Trial, talking about the jurisdictions of God and the holiness of God and the moral law of God and the justice of God.
- One of the men reading this booklet—his name is Thomas Jefferson.

- If you compare the sermons of John Wise in this book, printed fifty years after he died, to the Declaration and Constitution, you will see that this was written on the foundation of this.
- Literally phrases and turns of phrases and sentences and words and ideas that you and I recognize as the foundation of our nation were taken verbatim, word for word, from sermons preached by a Protestant pastor who was standing to bring the word of God to bear to the political hot topics of his day.

Key Emphasis

- Our nation was founded on the moral law of God.

Slavery, Lincoln, and National Turning

- They write the Declaration, they write the Constitution, they take out the abolition of slavery to keep the unity, the unanimity, of the colonies because they believe that the seeds of freedom are in the Constitution.
- Flash forward to Abraham Lincoln. He's in the middle of the Civil War.
- He goes to Gettysburg, just a horse ride from Washington, D.C.
- He sees 50,000 dead men.
- He thinks:
    - "Dear God, if there is not a God in heaven making this evil right, then this world makes no sense."

- On his way home, he stops at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. He's standing in the hall where the founding fathers built the Declaration and the Constitution on the foundation of sermons preached by a Protestant pastor.
- He thinks:
    - "I'm going to lose on my watch what these men put their life on the line for."

- It breaks him and he has a radical conversion experience, gives his life to Jesus.
- In diaries talking about by grace through faith in the blood of Christ. Like a full-on born-again evangelical, as we would say, Christian.

Prayer, Fasting, and the Tide of War

- He gets back to Washington, D.C.
- Under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, calls for thirty days of prayer and fasting of Congress to pray for the end of the war.

- Up until that point, Confederates have won all but two major battles.
- At the end of those thirty days of prayer and fasting, the Confederate Army loses all but two battles.

Lincoln's Assassination and the Weight of History

- A few weeks later, Lincoln is under the burden of what he's been carrying, realizes he'll probably be assassinated. Has a dream about it. Travels to Ford's Theater.
- While in Ford's Theater, John Wilkes Booth keys into the suite and assassinates our president.

- These are the documents that are being shredded.
- This is the history that's being erased.

Final Charge

- Our nation was founded on the moral law of God.
- To the degree that we stray from that will be the degree that we suffer and we bring judgment on ourselves.
- When the church rises up, people flourish.
- When the church is silent, everyone suffers.
- I do not know what it will look like for us to collectively rise up in these days. But rise up is what we're going to do.