POLITICAL DISSIDENCE PT. 2

Pastor: Josh McPherson

Romans 13 gave a framework for understanding government, submission, accountability, conscience, and allegiance.

1. Recap of the Romans 13 framework

- Paul laid out principles that are critical to understand in these days.
- This is a text that has not been studied much by Christians living in a Christian culture.
- In a Christian culture, people could "just kind of go with the flow," because government was seen as righteous government built on the natural and moral law of God.
- That kind of uncritical thinking had to change.
- A lot of bad thinking in relationship to Romans 13 showed up in the last several years.
- Careful thinking is needed so Christians can think better and more biblically about their role as citizens in a real world.

2. The nine truths drawn from Romans 13

- **Holy jurisdiction**
    - Government was God's idea.
    - Christians are not anti-government.
- **Holy limitations**
    - Government's job is to punish evil, reward good, and protect its citizens.
    - Its scope and nature are very limited.
- **Holy submission**
    - Christians are not scofflaws.
    - Submission is taught explicitly in Scripture as bringing blessing and favor on man.
    - We live in a hierarchical world:
- **Holy responsibility**
    - Those in power are there because God appointed them.
    - The text has recently been used to say, "See, you've got to do what they say."
    - Those in authority will be held accountable by God for how they exercise that authority.
- **Holy accountability**
    - They are in authority as ones under authority.

- **Holy foundation**
    - Natural law and moral law undergird life.
    - Civil law is not made up by whoever is in power.
    - Civil law has a God-given responsibility to be built on the foundation of natural law and moral law.
    - When civil law is built outside that foundation, it stands on a foundation that will crumble
    - But when a society sets itself against the natural law of God and the moral law of God, it is charting a course for destruction.
- **Holy dissidence**
    - Churches, governments, and conscience are there to correct and rebuke.
    - Government has not been created to exist as an entity unto itself, it is accountable to the law of God.
    - The jurisdiction of the church is there as a government's conscience.
- **Higher allegiance**
    - Allegiance is to God first.
- **Greater good**
    - When the church is silent, everyone suffers.

Transition from Romans 13 to Acts 22

- Paul wrote Romans 13 only a few months before this story.
- In Acts 22, Paul is living out what he wrote.
- Christians do not have to guess what Paul meant.
- They do not have to wonder what it looks like in real life under persecution and hostility.
  They can read the rest of Acts and see how Paul lived.

The story of Paul's dissidence shows Romans 13 lived out in real life.

1. Setting: negative world reality

- The church is learning how to be a Jesus-filled church in an increasingly negative world reality.

2. Paul is seized in the temple

Illustration

- Like that scene *Black Hawk Down* when the two snipers are in the downed hel getting surrounded. Not a nice flannel-board Bible story.

3. Government enters the scene

- This is now the jurisdiction of government.Their chaos became an issue Roman government had to handle. The commander took officers and soldiers and ran to the crowd and the crowd backed off.

4. Paul is arrested in the chaos

- The commander arrested Paul and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who Paul was and what he had done. The commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar. Government at that point at least appeared to care about the truth.

5. The mob is so violent soldiers have to carry Paul

- When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. The mob had such disregard for rule of law and such disrespect for authority that they were putting even the soldiers at risk.

6. Paul asks to speak

Paul's defense begins with identification, context, and testimony.

1. Paul begins: "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

- This is said to an angry, violent, demonically enraged crowd.

2. Paul speaks in Aramaic

Key emphasis

- This is a great example of contextualization.
- He is not contextualizing truth so that it becomes unrecognizable.
- He is contextualizing tradition and communication so they can understand.
- He wants to make the message intelligible.

3. Paul identifies with them

Key emphasis

- In the end, none of this works.
- That itself is a signal:

- if people hate you, they are going to hate you. trying harder to connect will not always change that

Paul's background highlights the importance of deep formation and education.

1. Paul studied under Gamaliel. Acts 5

2. Paul was fully immersed in formation

- The word used for being schooled is connected to the same word Paul uses in Ephesians 6 about how fathers raise children.
- It describes a fully immersive education: Not just during school hours, but in all of life.

3. Application to education

- This is why Garden City Academy is being started.
- A child is absorbing everything in the environment every day.
- Parents must make education God-centered and God-saturated.
- A Christian vision of education says:
  - if children are to grow up as followers of Jesus
  - if they are to see the world through a biblical lens
  - they must be saturated in biblical worldview and biblical culture
  - What they are absorbing, even unconsciously, must be Godliness, not worldliness.

4. A critique of current education

- The church needs to think faster, better, more biblically, and more critically about where children are being sent every day.
- There is a tax-funded weaponized institution aggressively pushing not merely a godless but a demonic worldview on children.
- At the same time, it is catastrophically failing in the basics and rudiments of education:
  - Math, English, literature, science, history, reading, logic, rhetoric, and the basic tools a human needs to have a functioning brain

5. The goal is to raise children who can think.

6. Thinking matters for reading the Word of God

- If students are not taught to think and reason, if they are not taught the laws of logic, they are crippled.

Illustration: George Whitefield

- George Whitefield got saved around age 24–26.
- In the first four months of his conversion, he spent his time on his knees in his rented flat reading his Greek New Testament.
- The question:
    - find five 25-year-olds in a nation of 350 million who could spend the first four months of their conversion reading their Greek New Testament
    - When education fails to equip people to think, they bring much less to the table when they open the Word of God.
- Whitefield, whose preaching lit the colonies on fire and helped shape the foundations of America, was a man whose brain worked because he had been given a world-class education and taught how to think.

Paul's conversion and calling are central to his defense.

1. Paul recounts the Damascus road

2. Response to Jesus

- When Jesus shows up, you do not argue with him.
- You ask him what you should do.

Illustration

- Not:
    - "I'm glad you showed up, King of Kings. I have a few beefs I'd like to talk to you about."
- But:
    - "Good Lord, I will do whatever you tell me to do if you will not strike me down dead right now."

- This is a great posture for the church today. Not fear of an abusive daddy.
- But a holy fear that says:
    - you are more terrifying and greater than anyone else
    - so what you say matters more than what anyone else thinks
    - "Tell me what to do and I'm on it."

3. Ananias and the job description

- God simply gives Paul his job description.

4. Jesus tells Paul to leave Jerusalem

Key emphasis

- Paul is underestimating the root of the religious spirit.

- Jesus sends him to fulfill the prophecies of old and to mirror the life of Jesus by going to the Gentiles.

The crowd erupts when Paul mentions mission, not merely testimony.

1. The crowd listens up to a point

2. The scene escalates again

3. Paul is about to be flogged

4. Paul invokes his citizenship

5. The commander responds

- Paul is not just going with the flow, he is wisely using his citizenship and political tactics.

Five tactics of Paul's dissidence.

1. Know your Jesus story thoroughly

- To be a Jesus-filled church in an increasingly negative world reality, believers must know who they are in Christ.
- To survive in the world, on the job, with a hostile family, in clownville woke mind-virus craziness, believers must know who they are and how Jesus saved them..

Questions

- Do you know your Jesus story?
- Have you revisited it?
- Reflected on it?
- Shared it?
  Key emphasis
- You can never tell your Jesus story enough.
- If the church is going to be faithful in crazy times, it must know its Jesus story well.
- There is more there than believers have yet seen.

- And the story is still being written.

2. Tell your Jesus story honestly and courageously

- Paul does not brush over his past, he does not say he had a few run-ins and was only slightly antagonistic. He says plainly that he was trying to murder Christians.
- The dark corners of the story matter because that is where the light of Christ shines brightest.

Illustration

- Some people once left because testimonies were "too explicit." Stories of suicidal despair were shared. But at some point, children need to hear that some people were so depressed they wanted to take their own life, and then Jesus saved them, and now they are giving their life voluntarily to King Jesus.

Key emphasis

- What is needed:
    - Humble, loving, kind, gracious, Godly, courageous, bold, unapologetic voices talking about what Jesus has done

Supporting argument

- People do not need some elite apologetics performance.
- They need to hear what Jesus has done for you.
- That is a compelling apologetic because no one can take away what God has done in you, to you, and through you.

Illustration: Lee Strobel invitation story

Analogy

- Every time you talk about Jesus, it is like wrapping future presents of Jesus's presence that you get to open later, either on earth or in heaven.
- Like putting Easter eggs in your future to discover and say, "Wow, that was cool."

3. Live your Jesus mission boldly, faithfully, unapologetically

- The crowd did not erupt until Paul got to the part about what God told him to do.

- People often will not care what you believe until you have the audacity to attempt to live it out.

Key emphasis

- Do not be satisfied with a culture that lets you believe whatever crazy things you want about Jesus as long as you keep them inside the building.
- If you submit to that demand from the world, you are prostituting yourself to a lesser god out of fear of reprisal.

Mission statement

- What God has called believers to do is to bring the rule and reign of his kingdom in an ever-increasing way into the world they live in.
- So they move into: schools, sports teams, places of employment under the reign of the King of kings
- Jesus is not king as a metaphor borrowed from earthly kings.
- He is the original King. Earthly kings take their cues about kingship from him.

4. Select your battlegrounds wisely

- Paul did not make certain points when no soldiers were there to protect him.
- This is not advocacy for foolish, unwise, eyes-closed, shoot-from-the-hip engagement.
- Paul was more sophisticated than that. He strategically selected when he would drop the bomb that would set everybody off.

5. Exercise your citizens' rights and responsibilities intelligently

- Paul understood Roman law and He was not afraid to use it as a citizen of Rome.
- For the next six chapters of Acts, he gives a clinic in Roman civics.

Exhortation

- This is instructive for American citizens, most of whom do not know basic constitutional realities.

Key emphasis

- Christians are called to live under godly rule of law.
- They are also called to uphold godly rule of law: with knowledge of law, with love for order, with willing submission when government is righteous, and with willing courage

to stand up when government is not righteous

Big Idea: The gospel has to land, and when it does it should cause a stir.

1. The gospel must not float above reality

- There are pastors, pulpits, and churches that want to talk about the gospel as though it floats above everything. They want it never really stepping into anything. They want to stay above the fray, above the mess, above the ugliness. They think that is faithfulness. **Key emphasis**
- But Paul demonstrates again and again that the gospel has to land in the middle of the mess. Two feet on the ground. In the gunk. Calling it like it sees it.
- Paul was landing the gospel in the middle of demonic idolatry and naming it. That is why they hated him.

3. Industries can be built on demonic worship

- If revival came and worship shifted from demons to Jesus, those industries would collapse
- Love of money, greed, and materialism are driving entire demonic industries.

- Christians must look at what is happening in the physical realm and discern what is happening in the spiritual realm.

Pastoral warning

- If pastors are bending the Word of God so that a demonic culture will approve of them, they will have to bend it until it breaks.
- The culture will still hate them.
- And they will have perverted the truth.

A word to pastors

- It is disingenuous to use the tithes and offerings of the church to build a bunker bubble where sermons can be prepared in safety while the people are walking through the minefields of the real world.
- It is disingenuous to sit in the ER while the troops you are supposed to lead are navigating a battlefield full of landmines and attacks.
- Pastors have to get out on the battlefield with their people.

- They have to lead from the front.

The gospel must answer real questions

Key emphasis

- The bold pastor, the effective church, the revival-sparking people of God:
    - know what time it is
    - take the timely Word of God
    - apply it to the real needs of the culture

Big Idea: Do not surrender earthly citizenship while exercising heavenly citizenship.

1. Earthly and heavenly citizenship belong together

- Some become so heavenly minded they become no earthly good.

2. Christians must think deeply about both

- If earthly citizenship gets too hard and believers unplug from it while living only in the ethos of future heavenly citizenry, they will not be much good to anybody while they are here.

3. What this will require

- A mindset set on heaven.
- A life lived through the mess of earth until God takes his people home.
- The future will be more complicated than the past.
  It means believers will have to: grow, read their Bibles more, feel their need for the Holy Spirit, need community, show up at prayer and worship nights because they need them more than air

- Believers will need:

    - the people of God
    - the presence of God
    - the praises of God
      the prayers of God's people

Condensed preaching flow

1. Romans 13 framework

2. Paul lives Romans 13 in Acts 22

3. Paul's defense

4. Five tactics of dissidence

1. know your Jesus story thoroughly
2. tell your Jesus story honestly and courageously
3. live your Jesus mission boldly, faithfully, unapologetically
4. select your battlegrounds wisely
5. exercise your citizens' rights and responsibilities intelligently

5. Two big ideas

- the gospel has to land, and when it does it should cause a stir
- do not surrender earthly citizenship while exercising heavenly citizenship