

“2KG - MOM AND POP PAPERS – BOLD, BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR A ROBUST, PUBLIC CHRISTIAN LIFE.

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9. VOCATIONAL RESPECT SEEKING JUSTICE!

“Defund the Police!” “Abolish ICE!” “Censure the police!” “Accept no limitations!” Such are the cries of a particular segment of American politics today. The other side says, “Support the police,” “Be Law-abiding citizens” emphasizing the honoring of law-enforcement, and the civilizing force of law and order over chaos and violence. How should a Two-Kingdom engagement of these issues proceed? Who is right? Who is wrong? Is it all just your perspective versus mine, your experience versus mine?

Here the Bible can give us some direction as to how to engage these kinds of divisive issues. In Romans 13:1-2, St. Paul instructs God’s people saying,

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

There is a priority, then, to one’s engagement with the “authorities.” Much like the 4th Commandment calls us to honor our fathers and mothers, the Bible prioritizes a “be subject first” attitude that honors what God has set in place for our good, calling for our obedience to those with authority over us in society as preserving gifts from Him. The word “rebel” in the text doesn’t just imply mere disagreement or protest, but a total disregard for those in authority; it ultimately exposes our rebelliousness against God’s authority over our lives as well.

But does such a “be subject first” attitude mean that we as citizens blindly follow whomever is in charge? Hardly. The apostles themselves guide us here. In Acts 5:29, Peter said, “We must obey God rather than men.” Here, such civil “disobedience” was not rooted merely in a passionate objection, or an offended will; it was rooted in the prioritizing of God’s clearly defined will over and against the fickle will of those in authority that day. That spirit would also temper our freedom and our exercise of our own will both towards God and towards one another.

When engaging the authorities then, especially those that are legitimate, legally established, and consented to, there should be vocational respect for their position and for the laws that hold us all in common. And, if there yet be any challenges to such legitimate authority due to injustice, they should be engaged lawfully and orderly, for God is a god of order and peace (I Cor. 14:33).

In the American context, there’s a unique wrinkle to this discussion as well. The constitutional limitation of coercive authority describes the citizen’s (the one in subjection) authority to delineate the degree of that subjectivity. In fact, the citizen, with the God-given, inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, has the constitutional obligation to work

toward legally defining the boundaries of those in authority explicitly for the enduring of that freedom. As Christians, we are reminded here as well, that even in freedom we “should obey God not men,” even when those men or women are we, ourselves.

An LCRL rule of thumb for public engagement then, especially when it is controversial, is that our attitude should be one of “vocational respect that seeks justice.” This means seeking to honor those in authority as a rule, and, when necessary, also correcting their leadership if we must, but in a spirit of order and peace. Why? Because true justice and lasting peace are beyond our efforts to perfectly create and maintain. Therefore it’s best to be willing to let God do His preserving work through those in authority, while also putting our full faith in God’s saving work in Christ for all. Vocational respect seeks justice as an antidote to tyranny, anarchy, and chaos. But, it is no substitute for the ultimate justice, mercy, and peace that comes from the person and work of Jesus alone. The former is intended to provide opportunities to proclaim and live within the latter. That’s something to always keep in mind, especially when issues become heated and passionate.