

As a kid, we used to tell the story about someone looking for direction in the Bible...

Open the Bible at random and pick a verse: "And Judas went out and hung himself."

Bad idea. Let's try again: "Go, thou, and do likewise."

Anytime Scripture is taken out of context, we miss the whole point

Yet, I find people doing that all the time

We make assumptions based on a brief passage of Scripture that is not correct

3 weeks ago, we considered the wars in the Old Testament—called a justification for violence

Yet, when you take a comprehensive look at the instructions to follow God

And the reality that they did not follow military strategy

One has an entirely different picture of the use of violence in the Old Testament

2 weeks ago we looked at passages where Jesus talks about turning the cheek—submission!

Yet, that doesn't really make sense—why would Jesus just say to ask for more abuse?

Looking at the cultural context, we see a larger picture

Jesus is giving them a means of non-violent resistance which exposes the truth

Last week, we looked at the basis for the peace testimony—usually thought to be our distinctive

By looking at the teachings of Jesus as a whole we see that peace is consistent

Taking the teachings of Jesus seriously, is a message to everyone to live in peace

It is pretty inexcusable to think there is any other way to understand the gospels

Before we get into our passage for this week—Note that there've been significant changes to Scripture

In the original languages, there were no chapter breaks, nor were there separate verses

There were no headings breaking up scripture into manageable chunks

While there were separate books and some divisions in places

The divisions seen in our modern day scriptures were not there at all

Chapters were added in about the 13th century and verses in the 16th century

This is an important distinction

A new chapter is only a human construct about a new teaching or thought

It may in fact, be deeply connected to what is in the previous chapter

Another thing is that all translations have their bias

King James Version—was commissioned by the King of England

It intentionally emphasizes the hierarchy and authority of the King and religion

If we begin reading Romans 13:1-2 we get lulled into the thinking that our leaders are God appointed

Therefore, we must obey no matter what

It is said that we are absolved of guilt if we obey a direct order from the authority

This flows out of a hierarchical view of human society

Those with more authority are seen as closer to God

Therefore, if we follow an authority figure's orders—we are following God

This was Augustine's argument and a foundation for the just war theory

But to have integrity with our text, we must look further at the context—first reading before/after

Chapter 12 begins with an admonition to live a life holy and acceptable before God

To not be conformed to the world—but transformed and discerning what is good

To live connected to the body of Christ, aware of our different gifts

In verse 9, love is emphasized and we are to bless our persecutors

We are to live peaceably with all and never avenge ourselves, rather feed our enemy

In that context, we come to chapter 13:1-10 which ends with an emphasis on love

Reminding us of the greatest commandment—love God and your neighbor as yourself

Again, Walter Wink is helpful in making sense of this passage

The governing authorities are necessary social structures of human life and important to God

In fact, God made them

It's been asserted that the creation story in Genesis doesn't end with creating the world

Rather, creation ends in Genesis 10 with the creation of the nations

Without institutionalization, ideas never materialize into action

Institutions and systems of authority are necessary for human existence

Governments and authorities have purpose

But order is not sufficient—something more complex is required

So that the massiveness of order doesn't degenerate into repetition

Forcing control to serve itself and lift itself up

Governments and authorities can also violate the harmony of the whole

By elevating their own purposes to ultimate power over their subjects

Yet they cannot exist separate from the people within the system

Like cancer cannot exist separate from the host

Authorities can only do evil by means of the processes given to them in creation

We have to be careful—to assert that God created the governments and authorities

Doesn't mean that God endorses any particular government or power at any given time

God didn't create capitalism or socialism—but there must be some economic system

There must also be some kind of governmental authority

The simultaneity of creation, fall, and redemption means that God at one and the same time—

God upholds a given political or economic system since one is required to support life

God condemns that system insofar as it is destructive of full human actualization

God presses for its transformation into a more humane order

Conservatives stress upholding the political/economic systems

Revolutionaries stress condemning the political/economic systems

Reformers stress the press for transformation of the political/economic systems

Christians are expected to hold all three together—uphold, condemn, transform

This is the point of this passage in Romans 13:1-7

It does not legitimate blind obedience to an oppressive system

Rather, it says governments are indispensable

For the preservation of social order

And protection against criminals and invaders

They are supposed to be a terror to bad conduct

Not a terror to good conduct

Oppressive regimes, however do the reverse—

Rewarding bad conduct and a terror to good conduct

To say that the governing authorities are created by God, does not imply endorsement

It recognizes it is God's plan for us to live in interrelationship with each other

And to this end God has determined that there will be subsystems to serve us

But those systems can place their own good above general welfare

However, they are answerable to their Creator and God's system

Therefore, that means they are redeemable

No power/government/authority is intrinsically evil

They are only fallen

What sinks can rise again

We are freed then, from the temptation to satanize the perpetrators of evil
We can love our nation, not blindly, but critically—
 Recalling it to its own highest self-professed ideals and identities
We can challenge our nation to live up to the vocation given to it by creation
We can oppose the actions of our nation while honoring its necessity

Walter Wink uses the example of a factory that is polluting the water and air of our city...

In the same way, the Women's March yesterday—in which many of you participated—
Was an engagement with our government—a peaceful march that communicated well
It was an acknowledgement that our society is both sexist and racist
 And that President Trump has made statements we disagree with
 It was a huge sea of humanity gathering to say we stand together in solidarity
 We believe in civil rights for all people—that everyone has purpose and value
 Women, blacks, immigrants, lesbians, children, disabled, poor—all have value!
It was a movement that spoke truth to power
It was a movement that did all three—uphold, condemn, work to transform government
 It upheld the truth of our current government and the right to peaceful protest
 It condemned the vilification of persons in our society
 It called for the transformation of our country to truly respect and honor all

What's next?

We've started the conversation and the march proved that many are involved
We continue the conversation in both small and large groups
We ask God to show us where the Openings are and faithfully walk through them
We choose not to get ahead of our Leadings and take matters into our hands
We commit that all actions will be non-violent
We stay in honor and respect for all persons, including those we disagree with
We pray for our president and our government—
 Calling them to their God-given purposes and responsibilities
We believe that redemption is possible for our current systems
We stand in hope and the "Fear Not!" message of trust in the Living God
And...

Sermon based on *Following Jesus in the way of Peace*, resources from Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends for use during Peace Month January 2017. Sermon suggestions written by Paul Anderson and Cherice Bock. For this message, the following resource was used...

"Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination" by Walter Wink, pp 66-68