

Romans Part 46 – Chapter 13

Sunday, April 2, 2023

With input from Shapiro/MacArthur Interview, BibleRef.com, <https://centeronconscience.org/>, <https://whataboutjesus.com/can-a-christian-fight-in-a-war/>

Today we will view our last segment of the interview between Ben Shapiro and John MacArthur. The passage of Isaiah 53 is discussed. Let's prepare by looking at that chapter:

Isaiah 53:

Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

11 After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Romans 13:1-7:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Paul chooses not to address in this section something he faced in his own life: What do you do when a human government tells you to do something that contradicts God's commands? Or when the government is not acting fairly, or morally, or in good faith? In that case, a believer must defy ungodly commands and willingly face the consequences (Acts 5:27–29 ...but Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men”). Paul's instruction here speaks of subjection and submission, but he is not discussing disobedience versus obedience. This distinction was lived out by Jesus' closest followers. Nearly all the apostles were eventually killed by government authorities for preaching the gospel: they refused to obey when told to be silent, but they submitted to the punishment and authority of the government.

Paul is clear that this applies to every person. He calls for us to be in submission to government authorities, though he does not say that we must obey them in all cases.

Every authority in the world was established by God. This would include, of course, good leaders, evil leaders, and everyone in-between. Paul's instruction here, then, is not about blind nationalism or

absolute obedience to men. Rather, it is a recognition that human government—in general—is a legitimate authority, and that Christians cannot use their faith as an excuse for civil lawlessness. God puts all leaders in place for the specific reasons Paul will describe in the following verses.

We should remember that Paul is writing this letter to Christians in Rome. The government of Rome ruled much of the known world at the time. It was led by the Emperor Nero from AD 54–68. Nero is famous for his cruel and unfair treatment of Christians, among other groups. We must not assume that Paul is writing these words lightly. He was aware of the implications of his teaching.

R.C. Sproul: I personally believe in a separation of spheres of authority between the church and state. I think it is a marvelous structure in the United States of America that does not allow for the state to rule the church or the church to rule the state. Historically that meant that the church was answerable to God and the state was answerable to God. Separation of church and state assumed a division of labor; the church has its job, and the state has its job. The church is not to maintain a standing army, and the state is not to do evangelism or to administer the sacraments. Nevertheless, they are both regarded as being under God.

Unfortunately, in today's culture separation of church and state means separation of state and God, as if the state and the government were answerable to no one but themselves--as if the government didn't have to respond to God. But God monitors governments; God raises them up and brings them down. Every human government is accountable to God and is accountable to maintain its affairs with justice and with righteousness. When the government is no longer acting justly and no longer protecting life—sanctioning abortions, for example—then it is the task of the church to be the prophetic voice, to call the state to task and tell the state to repent and do what God commands it to do.

John MacArthur: “To spend your time altering the state when you could be offering people eternal salvation is a bad bargain. To abandon the message that gives life to the eternal soul in favor of temporal change prostitutes the purpose of a believer's life. That would be like a heart surgeon abandoning his life-saving practice to become a make-up artist. The church needs to use all its power and resources to bring men and women to Jesus Christ. That's what God has called us to do.”

It seems odd to most people that a stock investor can be energized by a market that has a down turn. It is because they know opportunities will arise to make a profit. They keep their eye on the goal and resist making emotional decisions.

A follower of Christ can seem odd to many people when difficult days of crisis and despair come and yet they acknowledge at least two things; The Lord is returning soon, and God works through problems to bring people to a saving knowledge of Himself.

Focus on the Family: God is sovereign over human events. At the same time, He gives people the freedom to make their own choices and go their own way. In other words, no one can become a king, emperor, governor, president, assemblyman, or senator apart from God's will. But this doesn't mean that possession of political power amounts to a stamp of approval from God. That's where the “will of the creatures” and the “liberty and contingency” of a whole host of secondary causes come into play. After all, the Bible calls King Nebuchadnezzar God's “servant” (Jeremiah 25:9). This obviously does not imply that Nebuchadnezzar was a godly man.

The long and short of it, then, is that God is always in charge. We may not trust the governing authorities, but we have to trust Him. Under normal circumstances, we can demonstrate that trust by cooperating with the state, paying our taxes, participating in the system, and staying out of trouble. But this doesn't mean that we should be blind. We can never forget that the power of human rulers is subject to a higher power. It's contingent upon the absolute sovereignty of God. Should a situation arise in which these two authorities come into clear conflict with one another, Christians have to "obey God rather than men"

But what about going to war?

In Scripture, we do not find a nice, simple list that God gives of acceptable reasons for fighting in a war; neither do we find a list of unacceptable reasons. So we are left to apply some biblical examples and principals to help us arrive at an answer to the question at hand.

As God guided his people throughout Old Testament history, there were many occasions on which he commanded his people to wage war against enemies. Often times this was an effort to keep the sinful practices of neighboring nations (e.g., idolatry or sexual immorality) from influencing Israel. Not only did God specifically tell his people to go to war in some cases, but he also gave his blessing by granting them victory. It would seem to be a contradiction then for God to command the Old Testament believers to go to war if fighting in a war was unacceptable to him.

In the New Testament John the Baptist preached a sermon once. Afterward, some soldiers approached him and asked how they could show that they were sorry for their sins. John didn't tell them to stop sinning by serving as soldiers or that they couldn't go to war, but said, "Don't exhort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay" (Luke 3:14). Certainly we would expect some sort of admonition if it was wrong or sinful to serve as a soldier. Moreover, we would hardly expect to hear the apostle Paul use the term "soldier" in a complementary manner in his letters if serving as a soldier was contrary to God's will (Philippians 2:25; 2 Timothy 2:3,4).

Finally, war is a responsibility given to governments by God. "[The government] is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13:4). God has given governments the responsibility of upholding justice. Governments then carry out that responsibility by enlisting people to serve in various agencies, like police forces or the military. Therefore, when a person serves in that capacity, the person is serving as a representative of the government. The Christian then can in good conscience serve in such a role knowing that he is both serving God's representatives in the government (in keeping with the 4th Commandment), and serving and protecting his fellowman (in keeping with the 5th Commandment).

What is conscientious objection?

Generally, conscientious objection is a sincere conviction, motivated by conscience, that forbids someone from taking part in organized killing. This objection may apply to all forms or to particular aspects of war.

What types of conscientious objectors are recognized by federal law?

The Military Selective Service Act and government regulations recognize two types of conscientious objectors:

Conscientious Objectors: These are persons who, by reason of religious, ethical, or moral belief, are “conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.” These people may be discharged from military service. They are exempt from military service, in the event of a draft. If called up, they may perform alternative service as civilians.

Non-combatant Conscientious Objectors: These are persons who, by reason of religious, ethical or moral belief, are conscientiously opposed to killing in war in any form but who do not object to performing non-combatant duties (such as being a medic). These people are reassigned to non-combatant duties in the Armed Forces or, in the event of a draft, are trained without weapons and assigned to non-combatant service.

Despite this, there are those who go so far as to refuse to pay taxes when we go to war. That would be a more difficult stand to take when Paul tells us in verses 6-7:

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

We are blessed to belong to a country where our faith and practice are still (currently?) accepted and exemption or provision is made to accommodate our religious beliefs in many different areas of life. We are grateful for those who died for that freedom.