

08.23.2017

**Will Live by The Faith That God Will Vindicate The
Righteous
Acts Chapter 24**

We are in Chapter Twenty-four of the Book of Acts. One of the things that I wanted you to see tonight was the interplay between the church, the government, and religion, and the distinction between, especially, the church and religion. As we look at the Book of Acts, some surprises come up. We saw in Romans last week that the government was viewed as an angel of God. Religion was viewed as an enemy. It is interesting as you look at an overview of the Book of Acts. I think there is a lot of confusion, and the evil one is good at causing confusion. By so doing, he causes us to fight the wrong foe. I think it is important that we are clear about who the enemy is. I want you to begin with me in Acts Chapter 2, and I want you to open up to seeing the sovereignty of God throughout all of this. As we see the sovereignty of God, we know that He is over both enemies in an adversarial situation. He has His angels who are guardians and who fulfill His will. We are going to see that interplay

throughout the Book of Acts. If you just take the Book of Acts, Scripture is revealing to us what the church should do and how the church should act in relation to the government. I would say that we see this in last few chapters. I would say a fourth of the book shows Paul dealing with the government. Think about that. A fourth of the book. I remember thinking as I read towards the end of the Book of Acts, “Why are we spending so much time with Paul being shipped here and there?” Also, he goes before this court; then he goes before that court. By the end of the Book of Acts, he ends up under house arrest in Rome. In Chapter 21, he was arrested. That leaves 7 more chapters until the end of the book. There are 28 chapters with 7 to 8 of them showing Paul dealing with the government. What we know is that this is a book about laying the foundation of the church. So, the question is: how is the church supposed to react or respond or deal with this kingdom on the earth? We know that every government is over a kingdom on the earth. The Book of Acts establishes the interplay. It is one of the things that the church historically has consistently handled wrongly. One of the big problems that happened at a very early stage was the church began to amalgamate

with the government. This was never the intent of Christ. In fact, his statement to Pilate is,

(John 18:36) “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world...’”

We see that the church has a very different calling. What the church must not do is see the government as its enemy even when in our minds we see the government as frustrating and even wrong in so many decisions that they make. Nevertheless, we know that God is using the government for a sovereign purpose. He called it an angel in Romans Chapter 13.

(Romans 13:4) “for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”

What we are going to see is how that looks as we begin to see the church and the interplay of the church with other institutions. I want you to see in Acts Chapter 2 the declaration of Peter in his sermon as he established that Jesus the Nazarene is really in control.

(Acts 2:22) “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-”

(Acts 2:23) “this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”

Though the world thinks it is in control, Jesus the Nazarene is the One who has been in control. It is not an accident here. You nailed Him to the cross. Did you have a hand in this? Yes. But you did not do anything that God was not sovereignly orchestrating.

(Acts 2: 24) “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”

I would say any power. That is what we will see as we continue. If you look at Chapter 3, a similar declaration is found:

(Acts 3:13) “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.”

Pilate was the Governor and the governmental authority at that time. The text tells us that there is another force controlling the hand of the government to do something that the government might not want to do. If you read that passage in the Gospels, it is very clear that Pilate did not want to crucify Jesus. This is not to say that he was an innocent person. But Pilate came to the conclusion that there was no guilt in this man. He was the one to declare what the purpose of the government was which was to declare what was right and what was wrong, what was just and what was unjust. In Luke Chapter 23 Verse 22, Pilate says, “I have to tell you, this is unjust because we will crucify a guiltless man. I find no fault in Him.”

Nevertheless, he will acquiesce to the push of religious leaders. If you look with me in:

(Acts 4:1) “As they were speaking to the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them,”

(Acts 4:2) “being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”

In the Book of Acts, you see very little emphasis by the government that indicated that it was upset that Jesus Christ was preached. In almost every case, it was religious leaders who were upset.

(Acts 4:3) “And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.”

Who did this? It was not the government. It was the priests. Yes. It was the priests. The hostility was coming not from the government, but from the religious leaders. If you go further in Acts Chapter 4 Verse 15, it was the Council members who conferred with one another. Then they made their decision:

(Acts 4:18) “And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or to teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

In whose name? Jesus’ name. Of course, the disciples said, “we cannot listen to you.” As you continue reading, the indication is that God is in charge of every force that is out there. It is the same declaration that was made in Chapter 2 which is repeated in Chapter 3 and now in Chapter 4. He quotes from David,

(Acts 4:23) “who by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things?’”

The kings of the earth took their stand. The rulers were gathered together against the Lord, Christ Jesus.

(Acts 4:27) “For truly in this city, there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,”

These are acting as agents of God, whom He anointed for a particular work.

(Acts 4:28) “to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”

You see the leading and directing by God through them. Now look in Chapter 5:

(Acts 5:17) “But the high priest rose up, along with his associates (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.”

It is because of jealousy. Right? Now go down to:

(Acts 5:27) “When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them,”

Acts 5:28) “saying, ‘We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.’”

(Acts 5:29) “But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’”

This is the second time that he said this. What did the religious leaders do?

(Acts 5:40) “They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.”

Still, the apostles did not listen to them:

(Acts 5:42) “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

In Chapter 6 Verse 9, you have this Synagogue of the Freedmen. They get upset with Stephen, who is speaking.

(Acts 6:10) “But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.”

(Acts 6:11) “Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’”

(Acts 6:12) “And they stirred up the people, the elders

and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council.”

Once again, these are the religious leaders. Colossians Chapter 2 Verse 23 uses the phrase “self-made religion.” Paul will talk about this in Romans Chapter 10 Verse 3 where he says, “You know, they have a righteousness; but it is not the righteousness of God.” Man invents his own kind of righteousness. What is clear all the way through Scripture is that religion is directly connected with money-making. This is why there has to be such a clear line between the church and religion. The church should not play into this because this is the way “religion” functions. Going on in Acts, Stephen indicts these men:

(Acts 7:51) “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.”

They were not listening. Their hearts were resisting the Holy Spirit. He goes on to say:

(Acts 7:52) “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously

announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;"

Who is he designating as the lawless ones? The religious leaders. Religion. Right. It is religion.

(Acts 7:53) "you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

They were breaking the law by murdering Stephen.

(Acts 7:57) "But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse."

(Acts 7:58) "When they had driven them out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul."

(Acts 8:1) "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem,..."

Stop here just a second. Who is persecuting the church? It is not the government. Right?

(Acts 8:1) "...and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

By the way, this was God's prophecy:

(Acts 1:8) “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

How would they move out of Jerusalem?

(Acts 8:3) “But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”

Here again, actions were done under the guise of religion. Later in Chapter 8, there is a guy named Simon who was a magician of sorts. He saw this whole thing about the Holy Spirit, and he wanted in on it. I mention Simon because the magic arts are a form of religion. You have Judaism and you have magic; both are man-made or, as Colossians Chapter 2 Verse 23 labels it, self-made religion. That is probably a better description. Right? Because it is made just for me. I was talking to somebody the other day and asked if he wanted to know why there are so many

religions. There are so many desires. People have to invent a religion to fit their desires. You know, it is all a form of greed; but it has to match their desires. So certain people gravitate towards certain things because they fit with their lifestyle. But the bottom line is that they are not looking for truth. They are looking to get rich or for some aggrandizement or self-fulfillment or self-gratification. They are not looking for truth. If you look in Chapter 8 Verse 18, that was the problem with Simon. He saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, and he offered them money. Is it any surprise that money was a part of this? I mean, as you look in Luke Chapter 16 Verse 14, how does it describe the Pharisees? Lovers of money. They were lovers of money. How do we know that? Well, they had these rules on the Sabbath. One was that they could not work unless their cow fell into the ditch. Then all bets were off and work was allowed. We can rescue my cow. Now we cannot help a guy who has a withered hand on the Sabbath. Cannot do that. But if my cow falls in the ditch, by George, we are going to get it fixed. We see in Acts Chapter 8 Verse 19 that he desired this authority. From what we know about Simon, he thought this was a moneymaker. Otherwise, he would not throw money at it. But he figured, "Okay, if I

can do this, I can make some money.” It is not like we see this at all on TV, is it?

(Acts 8:20) “But Peter responded to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!’”

Here again, it is religion.

(Acts 8:22) “Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.”

His intent was greed. If you drop on down though, you see a parallel with the government and government officials. In Verse 27, who is it who is about to be saved? The Ethiopian, a government official.

(Acts 8:27) “So he got up and went; there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.”

What was this guy doing? Well, he was searching. How do we know? Because he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

(Acts 8:30) “Philip ran up and heard him read in Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’”

(Acts 8:31) “And he said, ‘Well, how could I unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”

(Acts 8:34) “The eunuch answered Philip and said, ‘Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?’”

There was a desire. This was a searching heart. This was a government official.

(Acts 8:36) “As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘What prevents me from being baptized?’”

So, he was baptized. Now, Chapter 9 verse 1:

(Acts 9:1) “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at

Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

Here again, you see the hostility of religion. However, in contrast to that, we pick up in Chapter 10:

(Acts 10:1) “Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,”

Who was he? A government official. But also, he was:

(Acts 10:2) “a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.”

That is a pretty interesting parallel, isn't it? Religion went after its own desires, but the government officials were saved. Look a bit further in Chapter 12 where Herod the king was persecuting the church—something bad. The government was doing something bad in the sense that Herod was driven by the people. But the point is that God used that government to fulfill His plan. We do not see

the government really stirring these things up on its own. It is other pressures. Next, we see that Herod the king had James, the brother of Jesus, put to death. What was his motivation? I mean, that would not make his government run smoother. Look at Verse 3.

(Acts 12:3) “When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also...”

It was politics. It was just politics. The government did not hate their religion, but it did hate that its constituents were riled up. Herod wanted to appease them however he could. In Chapter 13, strangely enough we have another magician. His name is called son of Jesus. Strange name. I wonder if he made that one up. Maybe.

(Acts 13:6) “When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet,”

What would you call that? I call that religion. Simon was:

(Acts 13:7) “who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabus and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.”

In Verse 8, here comes religion, and what did it do? It started opposing them. Paul has to deal with religion:

(Acts 13:9) “But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him,”

By the way, for those of you who want to know, when did Saul’s name change take place? Verse 9 is pretty close. Saul, now Paul.

(Acts 13:10) “and said, ‘You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?’”

Full of deceit and fraud—Isn’t that money? See what religion does? It misrepresents God. We know what government does. Government represents law and order. But religion will come in and twist that which is already straight, that which is ordained by the church to proclaim

the word of God unapologetically without any nefarious motives at all. There is a desire to do what is right. Religion is sinister or twisted, we could say. If you look further in Chapter 13, does this surprise you?

(Acts 13:45) “But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.”

We deal with the same thing in our times. It does not matter what place. Religion is always jealous. Why is religion jealous? It thinks that we are taking their money. If money were not involved, they would not care.

(Acts 13:50) “But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.”

If you look in Chapter 14:

(Acts 14:2) “But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.”

(Acts 14:19) “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.”

This was a mob, not government. Look in:

(Acts 16:16) “It happened that as we were going to a place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.”

What is fortune telling? It is a form of religion. Right.

(Acts 16:19) “But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities,”

Obviously, the marketplace. They were losing their profit.

(Acts 16:20) “and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, ‘These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,’”

Was it these men who threw the city into confusion?

(Acts 16:21) “and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.”

Religion loves to manipulate government. Why? For the sake of its own benefit. They say to them whatever will get them to see that these are bad guys. Why are they bad? Well, they do not like you. Religion does not like the government. Unfortunately, a lot of churches add ammunition to that.

(Acts 16:22) “The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.”

(Acts 16:23) “When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely.”

Another parallel in this text—who was saved in all of this? The jailer. A government official. That is who was saved along with his whole house. The next day, the magistrates realized that they had done something illegal. You see, religion does not care if it is legal or not. It will do

whatever it wants. However, the government is wary of breaking the law.

(Acts 16:38) “The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,”

(Acts 16:39) “and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.”

In Chapter 17, Paul is in Thessalonica in the synagogue, Verse 5. This was his pattern, wasn't it? Why did the Jews form a mob? They were jealous. They took along some wicked men from where? The marketplace. Why? Because they were losing money. They formed a mob. They set the city in an uproar attacking the house of Jason. They were seeking to bring out the people. They then again tried to manipulate the government.

(Acts 17:7) “and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

There is nobody who hated Caesar more than the Jews.

(Acts 17:8) “They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.”

Why was everybody upset? Money. In Chapter 18, Aquila and Priscilla were together with Paul in Corinth. According to Verse 2, they had lived in Rome. Why were they in Corinth? Because Caesar had forced out the Jews, and they were Jews. What is that telling us about the Jews? They were stirring up trouble in Rome. Religion was causing a stir. When you look at most of the problems in the world today, what is the problem? The liberals are not wrong in this. The problem is religion. Do you understand what I am saying? It is not the church—it is religion. That is why, you know, liberals are scratching their heads and conservatives are going, “No, you cannot tell that we are the ones.” Well, I hope you are not identifying with religion. This was one of the big problems when, about two elections back, we had a man who was a Mormon running for the office. Everybody was saying, “Well, we are all from the same cloth.” I am not from the same cloth. Do not throw me in with that. That is the religion of man. I do not want to have anything to do with that. Because I see the religion of man to be the enemy, not the

government. What is the real enemy? The evil one who wants to twist and convolute and say that we are all part of the same cloth. Then in the end, he will give us all a bad name. Once we are identified with the other religions, we all have a bad name because religion has a terrible name. In Chapter 18:

(Acts 18:2) “But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,”

(Acts 18:3) “saying, ‘This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.’”

(Acts 18:4) “But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you;’”

Paul did not defend himself because the government moved in. The proconsul talked about what was legal. What had he done that was illegal? He drove them away. In Chapter 19,

(Acts 19:23) “About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way.”

(Acts 19:24) “For a man called Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen;”

(Acts 19:25) “these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that our prosperity depends on this business.’”

Wait a minute. I thought you were a religion. But it is just business. The whole crowd shouted, “Great is Artemis!” They have to bolster an idol because, as God says in the Old Testament, you have to carry your idols. Right? So how could they be so strong? You must carry them. It does not make sense. The crowd shouted for two hours. Who quiets the crowd according to Verse 35? The town clerk. The government. The government quiets the crowd. He tried to reason with them and told them that they were in danger.

(Acts 19: 40) “For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today’s events, since there is no cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering,”

He stifled the riot. The difference between the church and religion is that religion is concerned about money. The church is concerned about reputation, more specifically a reputation for righteousness, for doing what is right. We are concerned about that. That is why you see Paul not wondering if he can sue somebody for wrongful imprisonment. That is not a thought in his head. Neither did he want to straighten out his name. God represents the church, and we represent righteousness. Our kingdom is not of this world. In Chapter 20, Paul calls the elders of the church. Much of the conversation in religious organizations' business meetings is concerned about money. Will we meet our budget? But Paul said:

(Acts 20:18) “And when they had come to him, he said to them, ‘You yourselves know, from the first day I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,’”

(Acts 20:19) “serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;”

(Acts 20:20) “how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,”

(Acts 20:21) “solemnly testifying to both the Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(Acts 20:22) “And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,”

(Acts 20:23) “except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.”

(Acts 20:24) “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.”

(Acts 20:25) “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.”

(Acts 20:26) “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.”

(Acts 20:27) “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

Why did he throw in Verse 33?

(Acts 20:33) “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes.”

Why was it so important that they knew that? Because religion operates in that realm. That is its whole purpose for existence. When he wrote the church at Thessalonica:

(Thessalonians 2:9) “For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the Gospel of God.”

He also purposely did not take anything from the city of Corinth even though they were wealthy and could have well afforded it. He knew that they would have seen that as manipulation. He did take money from the church at Philippi and said:

(Philippians 4:11) “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.”

He took their money for their benefit because he truly believed that they gave it with a generous spirit. However, he was concerned about his reputation while religion was always concerned about the bottom line. In Chapter 21 Verse 27, the Jews began to stir up the crowd again.

(Acts 21:27) “crying out, ‘Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the law and this place;...’”

Of course, they were not concerned about the law, but they were using the law. They were using the government. This is what infuriates me. I see churches all the time manipulating the government for their own desires and doing it under the name of Jesus. Leave the government alone. They do what they do. God is orchestrating the government. It is an angel of the Lord who bears a sword. He takes care of that which is evil. If He wants to bring you home, He might use the angel to do that, and maybe with a sword. God uses the government to fulfill His work. This is why I tell people who have to go to court to tell the truth. If you did it, admit that you did it. Do you need a lawyer? I would not bring a lawyer with you. Just admit that you did it. You never see a lawyer with Paul. However, you do see a lawyer with religion. In Chapter 21 Verse 31, they were seeking to kill him. Who saved him? It was the government. The soldiers and the centurion ran to stop this mob that was coming to kill him. As Paul was about to be brought in the barracks, Verse 37, the commander

pulled him aside and asked if he was the Egyptian insurrectionist. Paul said no. The centurion then was okay. We are good then. In Chapter 22, what was Paul concerned about? Not money.

(Acts 22:1) “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.”

He began to defend the integrity of what he had been doing. He admits that there were certain things he did wrong and apologized for them. But, if you look in Chapter 22 and Verse 22, they listened to him up to a certain statement, that is to say the Jews, and then they start throwing dust in the air and wanted to kill him. Then if you look in Verse 24, who saved him? The commander saved him again. He saved him from the chief priests of the Council. If you look in Chapter 23 verse 1, Paul stands before the Council. What is he concerned about once again?

(Acts 23:1) “Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, ‘Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.’”

What is the church concerned about? The reputation of righteousness. We are concerned about the reputation of righteousness. We are not a pragmatic business. We are concerned about one question: Are we a light set up on a hill? Are we pointing to a faith in Christ? Do we trust in God or not? There will be times when it looks like the government is shafting us. What does the church need to do? We do not take it to court. We need to submit to whatever the government tells us to do and jump through whatever hoops they put before us, believing that God is orchestrating all things for His good through the government. In Chapter 23 Verse 12, there was a conspiracy by religion.

(Acts 23:14) “They came to the chief priest and the elders and said, ‘We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.’”

Was that legal to kill a man? Whom does Paul call for help? The Centurion – the government. The commander found a way to get this guy safely to the place he needed to go and wrote a letter to the governor on behalf of Paul. Wow. If you look at Chapter 24,

(Acts 24:1) “After five days the high priest Ananias came down with the elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.”

Who did they have with them? An attorney. Where was Paul's attorney? See. They were manipulating the law to get what they wanted. If you have to manipulate the law, if you do not believe that God is sovereign over the government, you have to manipulate the law. But if you believe God is sovereign in all things and that He uses the government as an angel to fulfill His will, what will you do? It could save a lot of people a lot of money. Lawyers are expensive. It goes on. The lawyer was very good with his words. He started off by saying, “Governor, we are really privileged to be in your presence. We acknowledge that you have made a lot of reforms for the nation.” He was a good lawyer. He did a good job of blowing smoke. That was what he was supposed to do. After he buttered up the governor, he said,

(Acts 24:5) “For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissensions among the Jews through the world and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”

(Acts 24:6) “And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. We wanted to judge him according to our own Law.”

There was not one true accusation.

(Acts 24:7) “But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands,”

Religion does not like the government. The governor then nodded his head and said, “Okay, Paul. You talk now. Paul began to talk saying one simple thing. “Look, I do not think they can prove anything.” Is that not the reason for Verse 13? “The only thing I can admit is that I have proclaimed the Way. That is the only thing I did.”

(Acts 24:16) “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”

Paul says about the Jews in Verse 19:

(Acts 24:19) “who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me.”

Where were the accusations? Where were the witnesses?

(Acts 24:20) “Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council,”

Felix, of course, then turns and says,

(Acts 24:22) “But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, ‘When Lysias the commander comes down I will decide your case.’”

What he said was that the government was concerned about what was right and what was wrong, even back then. God used the government to protect the church. Why was it that this point was so drawn out in Acts? Because it is the one thing that the church does not seem to understand. Let the government do its job. Do not criticize the government. Submit to its authority. It is not your enemy. Romans Thirteen is a chapter that we are focusing on tonight. I want to show you this whole

interplay of the government that we see. Romans Chapter 13 begins where Chapter 12 ends up. Chapter 12 ends off by saying:

(Romans 12:19) “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

The initial question at that juncture is what will God do to get vengeance for me? He will use the government.

(Romans 12:20) “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

Is this what the church is supposed to be doing? Yes. We are not supposed to be having crusades, stabbing people, slaying them with a sword. Peter tried that. Jesus rebuked him. Peter, “I am here to save people. I am not here to kill them. You think we can get that one down?” Even today, the church seems to be confused about this. We say that you have to fight fire with fire; but Christians do not fight this way.

(Romans 13:13) “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.”

(Romans 13:1) “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”

This is God ordained. Religion is self-made and not God ordained. It is hostile towards God. But the governments are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority is saying that they are not worthy of following. Do not ask that. It is like a kid saying, “I don't think my dad is right.” It does not matter.

(Romans 13:2) “Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”

When the church opposes the government, it should not wonder why it is feeling picked on. I do not know. Are you messing with God's angels?

(Romans 13:3) “For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of

authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;"

Keep in mind that the Book of Romans was written at a time when Nero was in office.

(Romans 1:4) "for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."

You can substitute angel for avenger. What is the minister? The government. It is a minister of God, an avenger. Therefore, it is necessary; but what if the government kills an innocent person? God ordained that as He allowed it with Christ. Therefore, it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but for conscience' sake. Remember how Paul said,

(Acts 24:16) "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men."

In other words, when he stood before the governor, what do you think he said? “I have not broken the law. I am not a lawbreaker. You tell me I cannot do anything, I do not do it unless it goes against Scripture. An example is to kill babies. I will **not** kill babies. But if in fact the law tells me to do something, even if I do not like the law, I will submit to it because I know that God is telling me to do that. It may look stupid, it may feel stupid, and the government may have all the wrong reasons for doing it.” But God ordained that all the world should be taxed to do what? To get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. To all the world, it looked like a big mistake. Mary and Joseph ended up exactly where they needed to be at that time. You might very well ask how do we reconcile, say, the Nazi party? It was government. Right. When that government goes against God in the sense of killing innocent people, then you do not rebuke the government. You run. You repress them and help people to escape. You do not have the authority nor do you have the power to retaliate. The way that you defeat that government is by doing good. What will be the good that you could do? Help people escape, hide people, rescue them. But, you cannot attack it. What God will do is use evil to defeat evil. He will raise up another nation, which He did with the Nazis. At the end of

days, Christ Himself will be the final authority who will take care of those governments that are against His people. What are you to do if what they tell you is wrong? Well, we cannot obey man if he goes against God. Peter said that we cannot go against what God says. But you also do not see Peter getting his sword. Peter already learned that lesson. He will not win that way. About taxes:

(Romans 13:6) “For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.”

(Romans 13:7) “Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

Matthew Chapter 6 is an indictment against religion. Parallel Chapter 6 with Matthew Chapter 23 where Jesus said over and over again, woe to the Pharisees, scribes, and hypocrites. Do you ever hear Jesus say woe to the government? As hostile as it was towards Him, do you ever see Him doing that? Never. But what did He indict? Religion. He always indicted religion. The beginning of Chapter 6 is about a facade. We know that religion is all about making money. It is not interested in helping

people; it is not interested in obeying the law. It is not interested in doing what is right. It will find a way around the law. Christ accused them of being hypocrites within the text. If you go on, His whole premise was that you cannot store up for yourselves treasures on the earth. I mean, that was His fundamental premise. Why were they doing what they were doing? It gave them a higher position and power. But what is the church concerned about? Reputation, not making money. We are to store up for ourselves treasure in heaven, what is righteous, what is right.

(Proverbs 19:22) “What is desirable in a man is his kindness, and it is better to be a poor man than a liar.”

What does the church seek? What is right? The goal is to represent Christ in an appropriate way. All the way through you see that fundamental truth. Religion rebels against authority, tries to manipulate authority, and seeks to attain the sovereignty of that authority. The church lives by faith. It submits to authority. That is an act of faith. Why do we do what the government instructs? Because we believe that God is in charge. That is faith. It does not require any faith to do what we normally want to

do. It does not require faith until it becomes something difficult. It makes no sense to us, but our faith is not according to our understanding. God is in charge. Do what He tells us to do. One other point that I want to mention and then I will close for tonight. It is extremely disconcerting to me, and I do not think I can overemphasize it. We are not united by ideology. We are united as a church by Christ. It is important that you understand the difference. Once ideology becomes the bond, fiscal balancing will draw us all together. Look at the strange bedfellows that makes! Take abortion. I am very much against abortion, but I will not unite with a group because it is against abortion. My ideology is not what will draw me to them. Their love for Christ is what will draw me to them. You might be on the same page with ideology, but you want to make sure you are not making these bedfellows. There will be times when God sovereignly will put a liberal into office. You may not like the decisions he makes, but you need to submit to him and not be critical. The church will not be critical of authority. It will criticize policy. There is nothing wrong with criticizing policy. In every case, you will see Paul respectful of authority. It did not matter if he stood before the governor, or Herod, or Caesar. In every single case, he

was respectful of authority. If you look at the Book of Acts with a clear head without bringing in the baggage of the world but simply read what it says, you see something very different than what we are seeing happen around us.

Prayer

Father, we give You thanks for Your word that directs us to truth. And, Father, we are so thankful that You are in control of these things, and we are so thankful that we do not have to make the world right. You will do that. As we submit to You and obey what You tell us, Father, we know that You cause all these things to work together for good. We give You thanks that Your sovereign hand is also gracious. We give You thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.