

THE GOVERNMENT AND JUSTICE

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I think one of the facts that makes it enjoyable for us to be a family together in God, is that none of us here believes we're party line people. I think God has brought together a bunch of individualists, and we believe strongly that we each ought to have a relationship with God, and be guided by his voice in our consciences. And it seems to me my job is to try to express the spirit of this dear word (the Bible).

Your job is to get from God what each of you are to do in your situations. I say that because we're still talking about this question of how we, as God's children, relate to the political situation and to the government. And it might interest you to know that there are attorneys here this morning who are defending people who run their own education for their own children in their homes. There are others of us here who are, at the moment, involved in legal cases in regard to our right to witness as we want in our work situation. So loved ones, I'd point out to you that there is a diverse group of us here, morning by morning. We believe that we're one in Spirit, but that finally, you have to obey God rather than men.

So it's important to see that, otherwise you'll begin to think everybody takes exactly what I say on Sunday and lives their lives by it and that would be a tragedy, that would be terrible. Because that brings us under fear of man and under man's guidance. It seems to me that we're a living body of Jesus. We're not a bunch of robots. We're not a group of "following one man" kind of people. We're a group of individuals who are guided by God's Spirit. And yet it seems to me God has given us a great love for each other, and has given you a great love and prayerfulness for me, so that I'll try to get God's Spirit from this dear book (the Bible). It seems to me that that's what Jesus wants in his body. So it's in that spirit that I'd like to go on a little further this morning.

When the moment eventually comes, as it presumably will, when a group of militant humanists march on Washington to protest against tax-exemption for churches or to protest against the right even to have Christian schools, and they pitch their tents in front of the (Lincoln) Memorial there in Washington, and stop the traffic and begin to operate sit-ins on Capitol Hill, and they do everything to force the government to bring in bills that will eliminate tax-exemption for churches and will close all the Christian schools in the nation -- what should you and I do? Should we march on Washington to show our strength? Should we pitch our tents in front of the Memorial? Should we refuse to pay our taxes in order to bring about what we think is the right solution? Loved ones, the answer is no. Even when that day comes no, we don't march on Washington. Children of God don't tackle the solution to the problem that way, and the reason is Romans 13:1. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." We have a one-man, one-vote democracy and the spirit of that system is to encourage every individual to express his own will as to how he thinks things should be done. That's the spirit underlying our one-man, one-vote democratic system; he elects Representatives so that they will express his opinion as nearly as they can, in order to pass bills that will run the country the way each individual wants it run.

Now if he finds that his Representative is not voting the way he wants him to on certain bills, or he finds that his Representative in Congress is not reading his letters, then every two or four years, he can replace that Representative; he can vote that person out and he can vote another one in. Anything that gets between the individual voter and his Representative in Congress or in the Senate begins to destroy that system. That is, anything that begins to exercise pressure on the Representative, apart from the pressure that he feels in responsibility to the people who have

freely elected him, begins to destroy that system -- such as a mass march to Washington. Because such a march, for one thing, gives a lop-sided presentation of the proportion of people that are either for Christian schools or against Christian schools.

Why does it give a lop-sided presentation? Because we can't all leave our jobs and march to Washington. And in a way forced marches to Washington are rather a clumsy way of exercising the universal franchise. So forced marches to Washington actually give a wrong picture of the proportion of people that may feel one way or another, because they contain only the people that can at that moment, march to Washington. So do sit-ins or anything that stops the traffic, or stops the life of the nation, because that brings an extra pressure on your Representative in Congress beyond the pressure of obligation that he feels to all of us who have voted him in.

What pressure does it bring? Oh, it brings upon him the kind of pressure that, "If I don't do what these protestors want, they're going to hang this whole city up. They're stopping the traffic now, they're going to stop the very commerce and the life of the nation if I don't bow to them, so I'll bow to them." So they are governed by a pressure of fear and intimidation, rather than a by a sense of responsibility to the many little people out here in the nation who voted them in but who can't up and leave their jobs and go off and battle in Washington.

So loved ones when you begin to run your Representatives by intimidation and by fear and by that kind of emergency pressure instead of by the power of the ballot box, you begin to create all kinds of fear in our legislature. And instead of legislators voting by their conscience, or voting on behalf of what they know are your feelings and mine, they begin to vote by fear and by intimidation. They begin to pass the "Pork Barrel" legislation that satisfies and keeps the people back home quiet, whether it's the right legislation or the wrong. So loved ones, that's why it's not right for God's children to do anything that would destroy the system of democracy that we have -- anything that would encourage the kind of mob-rule pressure, or the anarchy that destroyed Jesus. We believe that those same pressures will actually destroy the system that he has allowed us to be governed by.

Some of us might feel, as we shared last Sunday; "But wait a minute, doesn't the Constitution, doesn't the First Amendment give us the right to assemble? It gives the people the right to assemble and to petition the government." We said last Sunday that the Declaration does give that right -- but it says it should not be used for light and transient causes but only for a train or of abuses and usurpations such as those America had to put up with from the King of Britain over a period of years. But whenever you use the right to assemble and petition government for something other than to protect the very fabric of our Constitution, when you use it to pass legislation, right or wrong, just because you want it, then we're beginning to abuse the system, and we're beginning to take away the freedom that democracy brings to the littlest person in this whole nation -- the littlest old lady, the littlest old gentleman, the weakest little person lying in a hospital bed can still vote -- they can't exercise pressure and force on their Representatives, that is, physical or emotional or psychological -- but they can vote.

Loved ones, part of our responsibility is to preserve that, and to preserve that atmosphere of understanding and moderation. There's a greater reason why we don't need to march in Washington -- we don't need to exercise that kind of coercion on our Representatives. Here it is loved ones, if you look at Romans 13:4a it's the first part of the verse; "For he is God's servant for your good." Because he is God's servant for our good. Who? The very moldable freshman Congressman that has just gone up to Washington? The cynical Senator that has been taking bribes for years? The Supreme Court

Judges who may be Liberal or may be Conservative? No. Romans 13:3, "Then do what is good and you will receive his approval." I mentioned to you that the Greek pronoun is "outes", it really means "it's" approval. Who is "it"? Look at the middle of Romans 13:3; "Would you have no fear of him who is in authority?" That's the "it" and it's the "it" that is God's servant for our good.

In other words, God's servant for our good is not the freshmen Congressmen. God's servant for our good is not the cynical Senator who has been use to taking bribes. God's servant for our good is not the President who may be for our cause or not be for our cause. If they were our servants for our good, then we're equally at the mercy of the agnostic senator, or the guy who hates Christian schools, of the President who has no Christianity in him at all. But the fact is loved ones, it's the authority that God has set up that is our servant for our good. It's the whole authority, it's everything that is there; it's the Senators -- the good ones and the bad ones, it's the Congressmen -- the favorable and the unfavorable ones, it's the Supreme Court Judges -- the Liberal and the Conservative ones, it's the Presidents -- Christian or non-Christian. And then more importantly, it's the Senator's wives and the Congressmen's children and the Supreme Court Judges' grandchildren.

Then more importantly than that, it's all the events in their lives, all the little things that happened to them and influenced their concentration in their thinking when they're passing a bill or they're opposing a bill. It's the new suit that some Senator bought, it's the emergency that another Congressman has with his mother in hospital, it's the battle that another husband and wife are having who are in the Senate, it's another financial difficulty that a Supreme Court Judge is having -- it's all those circumstances and events. It's the combination of diverse permutations that combine to enable that whole body politic to operate. That authority is God's servant for our good, that's it. It's all of that -- it's all of that together.

We're not dependent on even our Representatives from the State of Minnesota, we're not dependent on a President whether he happens to be Christian or non-Christian. This verse is saying, the whole authority, the whole civil authority is God's servant for our good, all of it put together. In other words, this great God of ours works all things according to the counsel of his will. He knows which Congressman has just had a little baby, and he knows which Senator has not slept too well last night, and he knows which Supreme Court Judge has met a Christian and has been impressed. And then he knows all the other myriad events that are taking place in their lives as they head towards the Senate or Congress to vote on a bill, and our God works all those things according to the counsel of his will for our good.

Maybe you'd say to me, "All of that is God's servant for our good, is that all? Is that all that is God's servant for our good?" No, because that, even though it seems very important -- all those human factors -- strangely enough, they're only the tip of the iceberg. I'll show you why -- it's in Ephesians 6:12; "For we are not contending against flesh and blood", we're not contending against the freshmen Congressmen. We're not contending against the cynical old Senator. "For we are not contenting against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places." That's what governs those dear ones.

The Senators and the Congressmen and the Judges and all the rest that make up their staff are sometimes the servants, and sometimes the slaves, and sometimes the dupes of the great world rulers of darkness; of all kinds of spirit powers, all kinds of psychic forces, all kinds of deceiving spirits. And half the time they don't know why they vote a certain way, half the time they don't

know why they do a certain thing, half the time they don't know why they act as they do, because in fact, the great majority of them aren't free at all. They are being governed by all kinds of psychological complexes, all kinds of psychic forces, all kinds of deceiving and deceptive spirits. "Well, surely those work against us." No, loved ones. Look at Colossians 2:15.

Colossians 2:15, "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." That was Jesus -- he has disarmed those powers. He allows them to continue to strengthen and to prolong free will in the universe, but he has disarmed and destroyed their power to do anything that was not God's will for you and me. So all those psychic and spiritual powers that are operating in the lives of our legislators, all those are God's servant for our good, and they are all under his control and under his power. So loved ones, do you see those dear guys and those women in Congress or in Washington cannot do anything but what God will permit and can use in your life and mine? They are God's servant for our good. He will use them for our good. That's why we have no need to pervert the democratic system by all kinds of pressure plays.

What do we do? We vote, that's our right. We write to our Congressmen and to our Senators, that's our right -- we can write to them every day if we want. We run for local office and we run for national office as God guides us. But the most important thing we do together with fulfilling those civil and legal opportunities and obligations that we have is we pray for those people and we exercise faith in God that he's got the whole world in his hands -- that he is in control -- that we're not at the mercy of what men do, but that God has the whole thing in control.

Loved ones, that's the same in regard to the second part of the verse that we're looking at today, if you look at Romans 13:4, "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." You're going to Wisconsin, and you're doing 61 miles an hour and you know what happens; you hit the local speed trap and the highway patrol man leads you to the local tavern where the local judge pronounces the fine and you pay your fine in cash.

That is man's mockery of his fellow citizens. And it is Satan's attempt to get us all to criticize and to cease to show respect for the law, and to say that the legal system is a farce -- that, what we often feel is an unfair speed trap, that is setup simply to roll in the money. That, loved ones, is not God's servant and it is not that local judge that bears the sword. It is not even the highway patrol man that bears the sword. It is the authority that lies behind them; it is God's authority. It's God's use of them in your life -- that's what bears the sword, and that's why you should respect and be afraid, -- not of them but of God who lies behind them. That's why it's important to respect the law and to respect the legal system, even when men in their foolishness pervert it and try to make a mockery of it, still loved ones, that is God's protection for us and he wants us to look up to it and respect it.

That's why he has created the speed limits; it brings great good to us. It saves the Jaguars and the Corvettes that can do 120-140 mph from mowing us down like ninepins. It's why he has speed limits -- to preserve us from each other's selfishness. It's why he has industrial regulations -- to preserve our environment from all kinds of selfishness. It's why he has regulations that govern factories -- to keep us safe and to protect us. That's part of God's sword to protect us and our children, and it's something that he wants us to respect and to be thankful for and, in a sense, to be afraid of disobeying. So there's every reason to look beyond the guy who takes unfair advantage of you, to look beyond the legal authority who seems not to be using all the wisdom and balance that he could, to look behind that and to see in the eyes of faith that God is working beyond their little petty limitations to protect you and me and to protect us from things that would destroy us.

So loved ones, there are things that we need to be thankful for. We need to be thankful that the prostitution and pornography is limited as far as it is limited than our city -- far beyond what it is limited in other countries. We need to be thankful to God for the fact that he limits the drunkenness and the brawling that could take place in our neighborhoods and could destroy any peace that we have in our homes. We need to see that God, through the power of the sword, has limited the more widespread use of drugs that could actually take place than occurs now in our society. All these things are part of the benefit of God's sword of protection to us and that's why he wants us not to have a carping attitude towards our government, but to see that in many ways, it is God's sword of protection to us and to our children. That's why undoubtedly he wants us to bring up our children to respect it and to love it, rather than to disregard it and despise it because it's his way of bringing stability and security into our own lives.

Loved ones, what would it be like if we really all had to carry guns -- if our only safety was to carry them with us wherever we went? In many and miraculous ways, God has brought great protection to us. It's the same with our rights, our civil rights, and to the respect people have for our rights and for our possessions and our property. Think what it would be like if we could not go to anybody if somebody stole from us -- if we had to simply take the law into our own hands and go back and gather it back ourselves, somehow or other. God's sword is something that is dear and precious and brings the peace and stability into our lives that many of us enjoy.

Then, God's sword brings us religious good and spiritual good too. Every time you see a man like (Senator) Sam Irwin, a guy that has morals and who has beliefs and convictions and stays with them, and who together with their civil duties, express the reality of God in their own lives, you begin to see that, yes, the sword of the civil authority not only protects us, not only brings us moral good and civil good, not only brings us physical good from the point of view of our own safety, but even brings us religious and spiritual good.

Then you see why God wants us to thank him for this sword of civil authority that often is a nuisance to us and often times is not exercised fairly -- but it's not the people that are doing it, it's not the policemen, it's not the judge, it's not the Senator; it's the authority behind them that is God's sword and God's servant for our good. And God will always use it for our good, and we will never obey it, or submit to it, but what God will use it for good in our lives.

So I'd just ask you to think again whenever you tear the whole thing apart and criticize it. I agree with you -- I think there's a lot to be put right and it's our job as citizens to put it right, and to vote so that it will be made right. But we need to be sure that we don't miss the wood for the trees; that we don't see the great blessing it is to us, and the great servant of God it is for us. And the reason why we need to see that is that every time you fail to exercise faith in that, you actually undermine the power of government, and the authority that it has. You begin to spread a little more anarchy, a little more chaos and that will be the anti-Christ's excuse for coming and taking over world government eventually.

So there's every reason every morning we get up to exercise faith in the fact that God controls the whole thing and works it all for our good. So will you think about it -- especially when you're going over the speed limit! Think a little about it.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for making it plain to us that these things are not non-religious things. Father thank you for showing us that they are not civil things that have nothing to do with you, but that behind all this civil authority, you are there and you use them in manifold ways to protect us and to keep us safe, and then to restrain the breaking out of sin and selfishness in our lives. Lord, we thank you for that.

We would thank you this day for the men and women that are in Washington. We thank you Lord for Judges that sit in various places in judgment throughout the nation. We thank you Father for lawyers and attorneys, we thank you Lord for policemen, for all the government officials. Lord, we would turn away from our carping and our criticizing and our complains and we would begin to exercise faith for the authority that lies behind them, that you, our Father, would bring it close to your own heart and close to the mind of Christ that we might be peaceably governed so that your life might be given to more of our fellow citizens. We ask this for your glory.

The grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.