



Ekklesia

By Pastor Rob McCoy

As I travel the country and speak to pastors, I'll often hear something like "I don't do politics." This is not an uncommon position, but I believe it comes from a fundamental misunderstanding of what God intends for the body of Christ. A misunderstanding that stems from a single word that was translated incorrectly in the King James Bible, and which persists to this day.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says to Peter, "*Upon this rock I will build my church.*"

At least that's probably how you've always heard it translated. But here's the problem. Jesus didn't use the word church. He said "**ekklesia**," and that meant something entirely different.

Jesus borrowed a secular term, and the people to whom he was speaking would have clearly understood this context. He didn't say synagogue, he didn't say temple, he didn't use a religious term. He deliberately used *ekklesia*, a secular term which means *assembly or public square*.

The ekklesia existed hundreds of years before Jesus spoke. In Greek culture, it was the place where the citizens would gather to decide the political future of their community. And above the door of every ekklesia were two words, *elefthería* and *isonomia*—liberty and equality. Jesus always intended for His people to be engaged in the public square. But over 50 years ago, the church decided to abdicate the public square, and just "do church." And while we've been doing church for decades, focusing on buildings, budgets, and baptisms, the secular progressive left has been dominating the ekklesia. We wonder what's happened in our country, but it's easy to understand—we've educated Christians that we don't do politics, just church.

Aristotle said politics is the highest form of community. It's how we figure out how to live together as people. The truth is that everybody is political, and where does politics happen? In the public square. But as Christians in America, we've abdicated our responsibility in the public square. We stepped away. Too many Christians, especially pastors, have stood behind one passage of scripture to justify their behavior. It's the same passage Nazi Germany relied on to silence the churches. Romans 13.

Romans 13:1–4 says...

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. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.



Many Christians will quote Romans 13 to say we must submit to our government. It's like they're saying, "God appoints all positions of authority, and you will submit and do as you're told."

But this is not submission without limits or qualifications. Ephesians 5:21–22 says...

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.

God tells women to willingly submit to their husbands because that's the order of creation, that's God's design. But that doesn't mean that the husband demands her submission. He isn't called to be a tyrant.

And Ephesians 6:1–3 says...

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Does that mean a child must submit to the father if he demands that that child does something like child prostitution, as happens in many countries around the world? Not at all! That is not what God intended. That is an abuse of authority. That is a tyrant.

In the same way, a wife doesn't have to submit to tyrannical demands that go against God's law. She would be complicit and the children would suffer. God doesn't tolerate that in our families. He doesn't tolerate it in government either.

Jonathan Mayhew was an American preacher. He died in 1766, 10 years before the Declaration of Independence would be signed. He had a doctorate of divinity from Harvard, and he preached a sermon from Romans 13 that transformed the American landscape and started the American Revolution. It was John Adams who said he was the most instrumental minister to bring about the American Revolution.

This same passage that is used today, and was used in Nazi Germany, to pressure Christians to unconditionally submit to a tyrannical government, was the basis for a sermon that helped spark the American Revolution.

Mayhew's sermon resulted in the motto for the American Revolution, "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God". What was his message? He said Romans 13 teaches that "God appoints all positions of authority, and that we're to submit to those." But then, he goes on to say, "But that authority is there for our good."

His conclusion was inspired by a man named John Locke, who was one of the enlightenment thinkers. He concluded that if a leader is not *doing good* they lose their right to be the authority. If the king is a tyrant, he loses his kingship. There are limits to the authority, limits to our submission. The problem is that pastors in our nation look at Romans 13 and they apply unlimited submission.

John Locke said, "Our Savior's great rule, that we should love our neighbors as ourselves, is such a fundamental truth for the regulating of human society, that I think that by that alone one might without difficulty determine all the cases and doubts in social morality."



He understood love, and he understood serving one another. He also understood that when a tyrant steps in and starts to rule in an ungodly manner, it's our right and our responsibility to remove that tyrant—because they've forfeited the right to exercise their authority.

Jonathan Mayhew preached this sermon in 1766, long before we established the U.S. Constitution with the preamble that says "We the People." Those three words are crucial, because with We the People, Romans 13 takes on a whole new meaning. Yes, we are to submit to authority. But who is the authority? We the people. The authority is us.

So those who govern do so by our consent. And when they step outside the boundaries of the Constitution, it is our responsibility to push back against the tyrants.

But there's another issue we've neglected as churches. We've neglected the law. It's found in Galatians 3. It's found throughout the book of Romans. The law was given to Moses by God after He sent Moses to deliver 3 to 5 million Jews from slavery in Egypt.

After Israel was freed from captivity in Egypt, Moses went up on Mount Sinai and God gave him the Ten Commandments. It's a moral law. Four commandments pertain to our relationship with God. The next six pertain to our relationship with each other.

Next, Moses obeyed God's command and taught the law to the people of Israel, instructing them to keep it as the center of the community. Five million people lived together for 40 years without a police force or a standing army. How? Because they had moral law.

Today, the church has abandoned this moral law under the mistaken assumption that it has no place in the New Covenant life of a believer. As a result, we don't understand what the Bible has to say...

- ... about immigration,
- ... about government,
- ... about capitalism,
- ... about socialism.

The Bible has a lot to say about those topics, and much more. We just don't study it, because people think the law is antiquated. Churches just want people to get saved. But remember what Jesus said to one of the lawyers who was trying to trip Him up. The lawyer said, "What is the greatest commandment?" And Jesus responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets".

Love God, love each other. The moral law of God hangs on those two. Love God, love each other. And then, out of that moral law comes civil law. Scripture speaks on what we're supposed to do with immigration and capitalism, it's all laid out in scripture, but we just don't study it anymore. The law isn't just meant to show us that we need Christ, and that we're saved by grace through faith, or to point out that we can't keep the law. The law is the wise restraints that make men free.

We must apply restraints towards evil in order to pursue excellence. And anyone who governs by our consent is bound by these restraints.

Romans 13:8-10 says...



Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

You want to love your neighbor? Set them free. Christ has come that you would know the truth and the truth would set you free. Christ has come to set the captives free. The law was given to give us freedom. Engage in your community. Stand for what is true. You want to love your neighbor? It's going to cost you something.

The problem is we don't want to sacrifice. We don't want to lay our life down. You know how you love your neighbor? The same way a husband loves his wife—you lay your life down. It's not about you. It's not about your ego. It's not about your popularity. It's about standing for what's right. When people know the truth, the truth will set them free. Still, some will say "we compromise so that more people can hear the gospel."

What gospel? The gospel that makes no difference? The gospel of lies and compromise? Take a stand. Defend the unborn. Be a voice for the voiceless. Love your neighbors that don't have a voice. Stand for the least of these. If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God, be a servant of all. (Matthew 20:26) What you do unto the least of these, you've done unto me. (Matthew 25:40)

Jonathan Mayhew concluded his sermon that lit up the eastern seaboard with these words...

Let us all learn to be free, to be loyal. Let us not profess ourselves vassals to a lawless pleasure of any man on earth, but let us remember, at the same time, government is sacred and not to be trifled with. It is our happiness to live under the government of a prince who is satisfied with ruling according to the law. As every other good prince will, we will enjoy under the administration all the liberty that is proper and expedient for us. It becomes us, therefore, to be contented, and dutiful subjects to kings that are good.

Do you love your neighbor?

Then contend for them. Contend for truth because the truth will set them free. Contend at the school board, contend at the council, contend at every level of the public square. God is saying, "Stand upon truth". And you say, "Well, it's going to cost me". Amen. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13)

Take Your Study Further

For biblical passages about submission: See Romans 13, Ephesians 5 and 6, 1 Peter 2:13-25, Matthew 22:21

For verses about loving others: See Romans 13:8-10, John 13:34, John 14:15, John 15:13, 1 Peter 4:8

For inspiration to serve others as Christ serves: See Matthew 5:16, Galatians 5:13, Matthew 23:11, Mark 10:45, 1 Peter 4:10, Philippians 2:6-11



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