

Dear Lillian Methodist Church family,

The Apostle Peter has surprising words about the emperor of Rome. In I Peter chapter 2, he says to "Honor the Emperor." His name was Nero, the same emperor who would later unleash persecution of Christians and eventually execute Peter. So why the honor in I Peter?

The Roman Empire ruled most of the world then. With that rule came a social stability previously unknown in the world. "Pax Romana," the "Roman Peace," was the result of Roman authority. Peter explains his call for honor, and in doing so, sets forth the purpose of government: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good."

Human government is ordained by God, and as long as it uses its authority as God intended, it is to be obeyed. God's purpose for human government can be reduced to Peter's simple words "....to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good." Even Nero, as long as Rome protected the innocent and punished the wicked, was to be honored.

Peter's words echo the teaching of Paul concerning government that is ordained by God. "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.....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." (Romans 13) This is social justice at its most basic.

Paul, like Peter, was speaking well of Nero, as far as his administration of civil government conformed with God's purposes by rewarding good conduct and punishing wrongdoers. Protecting the innocent and punishing evil made even the most unlikely leader a servant of God.

I believe these scriptures are just as applicable today, especially with a looming presidential election. Concerning human government, scripture seems clear that good policies are more desirable than good personalities. This goes against almost everything promoted by our ungodly culture. Our media-driven world reduces candidates to sound bites and slogans. Emotions rather than thoughtful inquiry. Scripture warns us against this. "Only a simpleton believes everything he's told. A prudent man understands the need for proof." (Proverbs 14:14 Living Bible)

Before you cast your ballot on election day, study these scriptures and then vote in a manner that honors the Word of God. Both candidates have a verifiable track record that proves what they have done, rather than what they say they will do. Vote for the candidate who best exemplifies the most basic necessity of civil government: rewarding the good, protecting the innocent, and punishing evil.

See y'all Sunday
Perry Cunningham
Lay Leader