

Government to Encourage Good, Punish Evil

by Thomas W. Jacobson (14 October 2013)

In another writing, “First Purpose of Civil Government,” I pointed to the amazing truth that the Creator Himself granted some of His authority to mankind to exercise civil authority on His behalf, in order to encourage righteousness, restrain wickedness, and establish justice.

To better understand God’s proscribed purpose for civil government, look at the foundation of His Sovereign throne:

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne” (Psalm 89:14).

All that is right and good, all that is righteous, comes from God, and so does justice based on His fixed, unchanging standard of good and evil.

Romans 13 gives greater clarity of the Divine design for civil authority:

“There is no authority (exousia) except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ... 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; 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” (vs. 1, 3-4).

The Greek word “exousia,” translated in English as “authority” or “power”, means the rightful exercise of lawful authority. It is not arbitrary!

The foundation of God’s throne is righteousness, yet He does not force us to do what is good and right. In like manner, righteousness is an essential foundation of stable civil government, but its power is never to be used to force people to do what is good and right.

The foundation of God’s throne is also justice, that is, right judgment, and He exercises force to punish all who do evil. The same is essential for stable civil government within its limited jurisdiction.

Therefore, ***the first purpose of civil government is to exercise lawful authority that is delegated by God to encourage (not force) good and punish (by force) those who do evil.***

To do this, those in government must accurately discern between good and evil. If they fail to do so, they will misuse that power, encourage those doing evil, and punish those doing good. They do this either because they are deceived about what is “good,” or because of the fear of man, or as a strategy to gain or retain power.