



AFRICAN AMERICAN SENATORS



Hiram Revels
1870-1871
Rep. Mississippi



Blanche Bruce
1875-1881
Rep. Mississippi



Edward Brooke III
1967-1969
Rep. Massachusetts



Carol Moseley Braun
1993-1999
Rep. Illinois

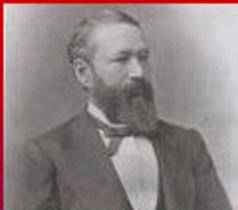


Barack Obama
2005-2008
Rep. Illinois



Roland Burris
2009-Present
Rep. Illinois

AFRICAN AMERICAN GOVERNORS



Pinckney Pinchback
Louisiana
Dec. 1872-Jan. 1873



Douglas Wilder
Virginia
1990-1994



Deval Patrick
Massachusetts
2007-Present



David Patterson
New York
2008-Present

PRAYER FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS DAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Tuesday, November 2, 2010 (Can also be celebrated the Sunday before Election Day, including mid-term elections)

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Lection - Romans 13:1-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v.1) Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. (v. 2) Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (v. 3) For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; (v. 4) for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. (v. 5) Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. (v. 6) For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. (v. 7) Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

There is no more exciting a time in the political life of African Americans than today. The election of our country's first African American president was an unimaginable accomplishment to many, and countless numbers of men and women of color serve diligently in governmental leadership.

The biblical narrative is replete with examples of prophetic personalities and concerned communities praying fervently for their national leaders and governing bodies. Scripture encourages that we pray without ceasing. Now more than ever this exercise of faith needs to continue. Amid a season of American economic uncertainty, legislative lethargy, and international unrest, prayer for our leaders to govern under the authority of God is warranted.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Romans 13:1-7

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

Slavery, segregation, and oppression are undeniable realities of African Diaspora history. Four-plus centuries of incessant abuse and subjugation of African personhood has forever colored our worldview. Imperial rule and government-sanctioned colonization has caused economic disparity and socio-cultural disenfranchisement, as well as political and judicial manipulation and dehumanization throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas.

As a hip-hop generation member (those born between 1965 and 1984) who came of age in the eighties and nineties, I possess a distrust and suspicion towards governmental authority. It is government that is principally organized to establish law and maintain order. Government is purposed to provide protection, ensure inalienable rights, and represent people as well as defend right. Yet the record indicates that this is not often the case. Domestic public policy and political leadership has historically threatened and thwarted more than helped people of color in America.

This hermeneutic of suspicion, coupled with the fact that the Church owes its highest authority to God, makes Romans 13:1-7 an interesting twenty-first century passage for black folk to discuss.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

At first glance, it is easier to identify what the text is not than what it is. Paul purposed his exhortation towards Christians stationed in Rome. However, for too many years, Paul's statement has served as justification by governments to employ violence and retribution for protection of its interests. Also, Paul's words are sometimes twisted against the Church, pressing the Church to support state-sponsored agendas and endeavors. Not supporting such efforts can cause one to be branded as unpatriotic.

Romans 13 should not be understood as a doctrine of the state. Nor is the text fodder for separation of church and state debates. Instead, Paul's advisement is birthed out of his pastoral concern. It is advice extended to a particular community in its context at a specific moment in time

The major theological theme of this passage is righteousness. Paul's statement endeavors to have Christians living in the Empire and beyond practice righteousness. Righteousness is being in right-alignment and relationship with God's will and way. Although he challenged local, national, and international governments, Dr. Martin Luther King is still celebrated around the world as a righteous man. In challenging laws that were unjust, he was always clear to show that he was in right-alignment with God's will and way. Ultimately, those who branded him as a law-breaker, unpatriotic, and anti-government were drowned out by those who recognized that his appeal was for righteousness—the type of righteousness that claimed for all people equal treatment and equal rights. King, as do the biblical exemplars, show us that righteousness will place everything in right alignment with God, us, and our government.

In Romans 12:1-3, Paul appeals to Roman Christians to submit to the rule of government authorities for three reasons. First, God is the ultimate authority and no authority exists without God's allowing. Second, an individual who exercises good conduct should not fear the authorities. Authorities exist not to terrorize good rather to redress bad, Paul asserts. Third, ruling authorities are servants unto God's will. Paul's understanding does not acknowledge separation of earthly authorities and heavenly powers. Rather, the two are interconnected. Righteousness is exhibited by Christians who submit to earthly authorities as appropriate.

A master communicator, Paul, uses just the right words to make himself clear. One Greek word used is *hypotasso*. In this context, the term means to “place under.” Voluntary submission to authority results in one being covered by God. God's design of earthly institutions provides for each of us covering while presenting or positioning us to serve as covering for each other and for the least of these.

The term *tasso* is also important to note in this passage. *Tasso* has multiple meanings. However, Paul's use here implies "bringing something into line." Paul believes submission and honoring of ruling officials help achieve order or congruence; it brings a community/state/country into line. The incongruent nature of society is kept in check by means of government properly exercising its authority. Paul's recognition that God is a God of order and decency helps to develop his articulation of the roles of government officials.

Paul's addressing of the attitude that Christians are to take toward ruling authorities is in keeping with his theme of directing persons toward righteous living. Governmental leadership operates out of the agency of God. Verse 4 notes that governing authorities are servants of God and keepers of good. Such institutions and persons are expected to dutifully reflect God's disposition, discipline, and dedication. Christians, too, are expected to represent the character of God in and through our actions, as persons performing functions on behalf of God. These same rulers execute wrath on wrongdoers. Wrath is not an emotional response, but it is a correct response to those who violate laws by not living righteously.

In verses 6 and 7 the responsibility of paying what is due the government is raised. This imperative unites the two spiritual disciplines of submission and sacrifice. Submit to God by submitting to earthly authorities and give the government what is needed to fulfill your spiritual and civic obligations. Any act of withholding of one's commitment would be deemed a subversive act within Pauline culture.

Though our contemporary governmental leaders are flawed and some are faithless, we must honor God by honoring our government officials. Allegiance to the ultimate authority of God through acknowledgment of the role of governmental authorities is a righteous act.

Challenge

Scripture reminds us that righteousness is forever rewarded. Being in right-alignment with God is rewarded. You can be politically correct and not be righteous. What you do may be socially acceptable. You may know people in high places. You may even say all the right things to gain favor with the right people. However, righteousness will always be what God rewards.

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details of this passage include:

Sounds: Political rhetoric;

Sights: Governmental leaders with swords; citizens paying their taxes; and

Metaphor: A sword as a servant of God executing wrath on wrongdoers.

III. Other Materials That Preachers and Others Can Use

Kitwana, Barkari. The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture. New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2002.

Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986.