

Newsletter Reflection for July

Recently a Biblical scripture was used as justification for a political policy. The quote was from the book of Romans (13:1) which says: “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.” I think that more consideration by the speaker should have been given to the middle phrase of this verse which recognizes that God’s is the only true authority. Paul’s point is that the authority established by governments should be a restriction on bad behavior; on behavior contrary to God’s ways. He goes on to say some other things about obedience to authority, but the underlying assumption is that those in authority are executing and upholding the laws given by God. My son posted a comment/rebuttal to the original statement given in the politician’s speech which listed 6 different Biblical statutes or instructions given by God to God’s people which are indications of where God’s stand on these matters lies. Four of these were from Hebrew Scriptures (Leviticus 19:33-34, Deuteronomy 27:19, Ezekiel 47:22, Zechariah 7:9) and two were from the New Testament (Matthew 23:23 and Hebrews 13:2). Each of these texts would in the normal course of reading have been read before reaching Romans 13. And in fact, Romans 12 contains some verses (3, 9, 10, 16, 18, 21) which should be considered when understanding the message of God to humanity about behavior acceptable to God and what things are justified under God’s laws. There are many verses which carry this theme about God’s views of acceptable human behavior to be found scattered throughout our sacred texts. There are also many narratives related to how frequently humanity fails to listen or follow what God clearly states as the standard for human relationships—that the fulfillment of God’s law comes in the form of love for the other. Readings from 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles are some places where these occurrences can be found which describing behavior by those who rule that are “evil in the eyes of the Lord.” I shared Tony’s post to the Olney Facebook page ([facebook.com/Olney Presbyterian Church](https://facebook.com/Olney%20Presbyterian%20Church)) for any who wish to read the post. Someone who follows my posts on that page commented on this post saying that Olney as a church should not be involved in politics. The reason I shared Tony’s post was that I had a problem with the way the Biblical text was used which was clearly an example of proof texting (finding a Biblical verse to support a human agenda). My son and I were not alone in this objection to this use of the text; in fact, the objection was voiced by leaders of faith from across many denominations. That being said, I also have a problem with the idea that the church, that God’s people are not to lift their voices in matters “political”. Injustice and oppression of one group by another is always going to be “political”, and God has always spoken on these issues—from hearing the cry of the Egyptian slaves who were freed by God; including the voices of Isaiah and Amos and other prophets as found in Hebrew Scripture; to the voices of the gospel writers like Luke who record Jesus’ parables about the least, the lost and the last. Jesus’ word to his followers was political—he spoke of feeding the hungry, tending to the other and telling the Pharisees that God’s laws were more relevant than the “traditions of the elders” (Mark 7: 1-8). When I study the passages chosen through the Lectionary I seek to hear God’s word for this particular time and place. Our texts speak of God’s promises to us that give us hope, promises which provide comfort and healing. Our texts also call us to go into the world to serve others and witness to God’s love for humanity. Our texts also tell us that humanity has a tendency to lose sight of how God calls us to live in relationship to one another. When human authority loses sight of the fundamentals of God’s ways—then it seems that our sacred duty is to lift our voice—not in a partisan

way, but in a way that demands changes on the issue. You will find in this newsletter the text of an article printed in the February 18 issue of The Presbyterian Outlook magazine which I believe also speaks to this issue. The article was written by Rev. Maryann McKibben Dana.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby