

“The Rule of Law”

Scripture testifies to the rule of impartial law to govern equally to every citizen. The rule of law comes from the just Divine Lawgiver. “You shall have the same law for stranger and for one from your own country; for I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 24:22). Scripture warns against two sets of law for a people, such as one for the privileged and another for the underprivileged. The king of Israel was not to establish differing laws for his people. The king was also subject to the same law (Deut. 17:18-20).

In contrast, a corrupt society can enlist the law to a particular side. Bribes are paid to get around the law or illegally using an official position to obtain property. The law is twisted or manipulated to help a particular side, such as depriving liberty to one group or justifying extra-constitutional actions to regain control.

The rule of law also stands in contrast to the rule by men. In the rule of man, standards of right and wrong can change based on preference. Life and liberty change according to the self-interest of those in power. But the rule of law presents an impartial standard of right and wrong that subjects every citizen, including those in power. All people and institutions are held equally accountable. All people and institutions have equal protection.

Two stories demonstrate the Christian influence of the rule of law. The first story is from the 4th century. The Roman Emperor Theodosius slaughtered 7,000 civilians involved in a riot. This event became known as the Massacre at Thessalonica. The bishop of Milan, Ambrose, was one of the counselors of Theodosius. When Ambrose heard about the massacre, he forbids Theodosius from receiving the Eucharist until he repented. Whereas in the Roman world an emperor could do almost anything he wanted, Ambrose confronted him by the authority of a higher law. The second story takes place in the 13th century. The barons of England convinced King John to sign the Magna Carta. By signing the Magna Carta, King John was now subject to a law higher than himself. One of the drafters of the Magna Carta was a bishop of Canterbury.

The rule by impartial law does not guarantee perfect justice, for it must be enforced by imperfect people. Bribery and extortion can still occur under the rule of law. But under the rule of impartial law, bribery and extortion remain lawless acts. It is still corruption.

Addressing corruption should not come by skirting the law to bring order. It comes by electing citizens who understand the impartial rule of law, applying it to themselves and enforcing it equally. And remember, Christian, the Lord will deal with civil authorities that make unjust laws (Is. 10:1).

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