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TACTICAL DIVERSION

Romans 13:1-7

Public schools increasingly are promoting an agenda that tells kids beginning in some cases as early as kindergarten that they can choose their own gender, that they may have been born in the wrong body, that having two mommies or two daddies is no different than having a mommy and a daddy, and that they should not pay attention to their parents on issues like these. Last Thanksgiving our niece Michelle and her family joined us for the holiday. She is not very happy with the fact that her kids have never been taught the history of Thanksgiving in school. By the way, she teaches in the public school system.

Perhaps you saw the video of Vice President Harris introducing herself at a meeting by saying, “My pronouns are she and her.” Oh, thank you for informing me that you are a female. I kind of suspected that, but now I don’t have to assume. The big push from our government now is everyone gets to choose their own pronouns. I have decided when referring to me you should use “Your highness” as my pronoun.

The National Archives Records Administration, which is responsible for overseeing our national archives, including the Declaration Of Independence and the Constitution, has recently placed a “harmful language alert” on its catalog of our nation’s founding documents. The warning says that these documents contain, “some content that may be harmful or difficult to view.” It claims the language “may reflect outdated, biased, offensive and possible violent views and opinions.” Better watch out for those terrible, offensive documents. Probably they should be burned lest their offenses might cause some snowflake to melt.

What in the name of George Washington is going on? For younger people who might not know who he was because they haven’t been taught about him in school, he was the heterosexual, white male oppressor who was the first President of our country. If you couldn’t tell, I am not happy with much of what is coming out of Washington these days. Same with Sacramento. You might say, “Well, that’s not too surprising since you’re a crotchety old man who probably yells at kids to get off his lawn.” I may be old, and maybe I am becoming crotchety, but I don’t yell at kids and I love seeing them play, even if they’re on our yard. But I confess I get pretty grumpy about our government these days. You may ask, “What are you going to do about it, your highness?” I have consulted God’s Word to see what He says about it. It is very helpful. Let’s look at Romans 13:1-7 to see what God says.

THIS PASSAGE:

IS ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP TO AUTHORITIES

After explaining the Gospel of grace in chapters 1-11, Paul turned to discussing how we practically should live our faith out in chapter 12. At the end of that chapter he challenged us with a radical way to live, calling on us to overcome evil with good. He said we should not give in to the temptation to hit back when people mistreat us, but we should give only good to them. These verses continue that discussion by addressing one particular way people might mistreat followers of Jesus. It had to do with governing authorities. It’s not hard to understand why this would have been a problem for these early Jesus followers in Rome.

Widespread, top down government sponsored persecution of Christians had not started when Paul wrote this letter. He wrote it around 57 A. D., and the first persecution coming from the top of the empire would start 6 or 7 years later. However, that did not mean early believers had no issues with their governing authorities. Paul is going to instruct believers to respect the authorities over them. This would have been difficult for them to do. Nero had become Caesar in 54. He promoted worship of the pantheon of Roman gods, which would have been abhorrent to believers in Jesus. He is generally known to have been tyrannical, self-indulgent and debauched in the extreme.

This was not a man it would have been easy for Christians to respect. So that was a problem. But there were issues at other levels as well. Christians were often mistreated and persecuted at a lower level by governors and local authorities. They were often disliked and viewed negatively because they refused to worship the traditional gods and did not partake in temple activities. By this time, they were being viewed as a new cult by some, and many authorities considered them illegal. So it was not uncommon for them to be arrested and brought to trial.

It could be easy for us to skim over these verses because we don’t see a lot of relevance to us. I suspect that most of us have never been mistreated by a government authority, other than possibly an uninterested and unhelpful bureaucrat at some point. We do not have any interest in rebelling against our government.

Sometimes in the discussions of our government’s failings, we lose sight of the good things about our nation. We have a nation that is founded on the rule of law. No one is above the law. This is different from what has happened in much of the world throughout history, where laws are basically the whims and edicts of one dictator or king. We believe that everyone is equal before the law, and that every person has inalienable rights. we cherish and protect those individual rights and freedoms.

A man named Michael Blakely described something he witnessed first hand. He was at a café in Malibu, when an activist, radical man began railing against the United States, criticizing just about everything about our country. He was very passionate, and it seemed like people were buying what he was selling. But there was one older man sitting alone, eating soup, just ignoring the guy. So the radical went over to his table, sat down and said to the man, “You don’t seem to agree with me, but tell me even one thing this country has ever done for you.” The man put down his spoon, looked at the radical and with a heavy Russian accent said, “Ve hold zees truz to be self evident, dat all men created equal, life, liberty, perzuit of happiness.” Then he picked up his spoon and went back to his soup. The radical was totally defeated.

When we remember these things about our country it helps us to be more appreciative of what we have. Nevertheless, it is not perfect. It is galling that increasingly our government is pushing a message and an agenda that is hostile to our faith. Historian Niall Ferguson who has been a professor at Stanford, Harvard and Oxford, wrote a book titled *Civilization: The West and The Rest*. In the book he related an interview he had with a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which is an arm of the Chinese Communist Party. This person told him that they had studied the West to try to determine what accounted for its success. They looked at everything from the historical, political, economic and cultural perspectives. He said they first thought it was due to the west’s superior weapons and military, but found that not to be true. Then they thought it was the political system, then the economic system, but had concluded none of those were the key. He said, “In the past 20 years we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion, Christianity. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life” was the key. Then he said, “We don’t have any doubt about that.” They know it. This is a big part of why our country’s efforts at nation building in other parts of the world haven’t been very effective, because nations without that foundation will struggle to have a successful democracy. It is weird is to see our leaders and our government trying to eradicate that foundation. It becomes very easy to feel alienated and angry at what’s going on. These verses can help us have a right attitude about our government.

Here is what this passage tells us about government. God has established the government. Verse 1 says, “there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” In verse 4 Paul said, “They are God’s servants.” Really Paul? Have you watched Fox News recently? You’re claiming tyrannical, self-indulgent, debauched Nero was God’s servant, put in authority by God? The authorities that were arresting Christians were put in their position by God?

That’s what Paul teaches in this passage. It’s pretty hard to get around it. Daniel 2:21 says of the Lord, “He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others.” Proverbs 21:1 says, “In the Lord’s hand the king’s heart is like a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him.” God decides who rules. They are there because God has chosen to have them in power. Governor Newsom, our nut job Legislature, the people in Congress, our President, would not be in place if God did not want them to be. Whatever our opinion of them, we should always remember this.

Second, the government’s primary role is to maintain order. Verse 4 says, “They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” That role would include both defense, for wrong doers could be other nations, and enforcing laws. Today government does a whole lot more than that, but that’s the primary role because that is the only way there can be peace and order in a nation.

Third, verse 2 says, “Whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.” If someone tries to overthrow the authorities in government, they are rebelling against God. 1 Peter 2:13-14 says, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority; whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong.” This is not referring to voting people out of office. In Paul’s day people didn’t get positions of power by winning elections. A normal part of a democracy is electing people and voting people out of office. This is talking about something entirely different. This is about overthrowing the whole system.

RAISES SOME QUESTIONS

Doesn’t this make God responsible for horrible leaders who have done, and continue to do, horrible things? Doesn’t this say that Adolf Hitler was God’s instituted authority for Germany? So that would make it God’s will for that man to kill millions of people? Doesn’t that mean God put Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad in place over Iraq and Syria, so they could murder their own people using chemical weapons?

That’s a pretty tough pill to swallow. How are we to understand this? I’m going to tell you right up front that I don’t have a pat answer for this one that will satisfy any question you might have. But there are some truths we need to remember. The first is that it is never God’s will for people to do evil. One of the most dangerous ideas humans have is that the ends justify the means, so that if you are pursuing a good goal, that justifies it if you have to step on a few toes in the process. God is absolutely opposed to that idea. Remember what we learned at the end of Romans 12. You cannot accomplish good by doing evil. God is pure good. There is no evil in him. He would never put people in power for the purpose of doing evil. Nor would he condone them doing evil to supposedly bring about some good.

There undoubtedly have been some psychopaths and sociopaths throughout history who have gained power. Such people have no concern for good or evil, no concern for the suffering of others. But most of the monsters who have perpetrated horrible suffering on people usually have had some justification, some rationale that somehow it was for the greater good. They had some good in mind that was so important it outweighed the horrors they inflicted on people. Hey, you can’t make an omelet without breaking some eggs, right? So we get Stalin’s programs that caused the deaths of millions of people and his Gulags, because it was all going to lead to a Socialist Utopia.

God says you cannot accomplish good by doing evil. So God did not want Stalin, or Hitler, or Mao, Saddam Hussein, or Kim Jong Un or any other tyrant to bring about the kinds of evil that they have perpetrated, whatever their justification. God does not want leaders to cause suffering for people. Verse 4 says, “the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.” That is God’s will for governing leaders. All governing leaders. They are to seek the good of the people. Highlight those words. This is what God wants from leaders. When they do otherwise, they are disobeying God. So let’s be clear that the leaders who have been so awful are living in disobedience to God and his clearly defined will.

Another thing we need to think about is what Paul’s intent was behind these verses. I realize that trying to determine a writer’s intent can be a slippery slope, but it can be important for grasping the point of a passage rather than missing it. Paul didn’t want the Christians in Rome to seize upon the injustice that had been perpetrated on them and the depraved nature of much of the leadership of the Roman Empire, and use it as an excuse for outright rebellion against Rome. Even that government was in place for the purpose of having a civilized society, for having peace that allowed people to live their lives.

Most of the time, any government, even one we would consider bad, is better than no government at all. If there is no authority maintaining law and order, chaos results, and it is a chaos that is terrible for everyone. Consider Somalia today. No doubt you are aware of the “Black Hawk Down” battle. That occurred because our nation along with others were trying to bring food and aid to Somalia. People were starving there because there was no central authority and the nation was being torn apart by fighting between war lords. The war lords prevented aid from reaching the people. The effort resulted in the battle of Mogadishu that cost the lives of 18 members of our army, and many hundreds of Somalians. Things have not gotten much better today. There still is no infrastructure. So there is little clean water, only 34% of the population has access to sanitation, and disease is rampant. Businesses are scarce due to looting. Inflation is sky high. There is little to no judicial system so disputes often end in violence. War and poverty are constant. Women and children face danger on a daily basis. This is what comes from no government. Paul was saying that as bad as the government of Rome might have been, it was still a blessing, because it made life possible for people. And that is true of government throughout the world even today.

Still, if God is sovereign, if people can only get in positions of authority if he allows that to happen, doesn’t that mean that God allowed all those tyrants to rule? Ultimately I would have to say that it does. But there we get into the murky intersection of God’s sovereignty and the free will of people. In the end, I cannot explain why God would let some people rule and do the horrible things they do, anymore than I can explain why God would allow any tragedy.

Our tendency is to always turn everything into a law, black and white. But I don’t think that’s what Paul had in mind. He was reminding the Roman Christians that God is sovereign, and in the end, we must trust in his sovereignty. God was greater than Nero, and he’s greater that Vladimir Putin, or Kim Jong Un or even President Biden for that matter. Paul was telling us to put our trust in God, not in our ability to control our lives or governments. This is the critical point. Our hope is in God, not any government system or any person. God is greater than all of it. Paul also wanted us to understand that there is something much larger going on in the world than kings, governors, presidents and governments. He wanted us to put our minds on these greater things.

So the next question this raises is, “Is it wrong for a Christian to oppose a government or to rebel against it?” We know for a fact that these verses do not mean one cannot oppose authorities. In Exodus 1:16 the king of Egypt ordered the midwives of the Jewish people to kill any baby boy they delivered. They didn’t obey him. They let the boys live. When he learned what they were doing, he confronted the midwives. They said in verse 19, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.” The only problem with that statement was, it wasn’t true. They lied to cover up what they were doing.

They disobeyed the authority and then they lied about it. That looks like 2 wrongs. Three lefts may make a right, but two wrongs absolutely do not. God must have been irked by this disobedience, right? Verse 20 says, “So God was kind to the midwives. Verse 21 says, “Because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.”

In Acts 4:18 the leaders of the Jewish people ordered Peter and John to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. In verses 19-20 the apostles answered, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” In other words, forget you, we’re doing what God has told us to do.

Jesus’ familiar and brilliant comment on the believer’s relation to government is found in Matthew 22:21. His opponents tried to trap him and put him in a corner by asking whether they should pay taxes. This was a hot button issue because those taxes enabled the Romans to oppress the Jews. Jesus, as you know, asked whose image was on the coin. It was Caesar’s. Then he said, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

Hey, the money has Caesar all over it, just like our money has our government all over it. So give Caesar what is his, but give to God what is his. What is his is our love and service and worship with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength. Jesus was saying, “Life is not about the money. Life is about worshiping God. So, sure, give Caesar the money he wants, but give God the love and worship he deserves.”

In his book, *From Guilt To Glory*, Ray Stedman said, “What Caesar put his image on belongs to Caesar. But God has put his image on men; they belong to him…Rulers are under God; therefore they have no right to command men to do what God says ought not to be done… Governments are not to enslave men, because men belong to God. Governments are not to oppress men, because men bear the image of God. What bears God’s image must be given to God.”

We are to accept government as a gift of God and not resist the legitimate functions of government. But we are to always give ourselves to God. Does this passage mean that one must never seek to overthrow a government and that our revolution should never have taken place?

This is where we need to be a little careful about turning everything into a hard and fast law that applies in every situation. We know God wants us to tell the truth. But when the Hebrew midwives lied to Pharaoh, God rewarded them. Joshua 2 is a spy story. Israel sent 2 intelligence agents into the city of Jericho to gather intel in preparation for an attack. Somehow, someone identified them as Mossad agents and tracked them to the house of ill repute run by a woman named Rahab. I assume they went there because they figured it was common for unfamiliar men to show up there and they thought they could blend in. The Jericho FBI sent agents to her house to arrest them. She had hidden the spies on her roof under some flax. In verses 4-5 she said to the FBI guys, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.”

You see any problems with that? Yeah, it was blatant lying. She knew exactly who those guys were and where they came from. And they hadn’t left, they were up on her roof where she had stashed them. What did God think of this? Joshua 6:25 tells us that after Jericho was conquered the Jews destroyed everything as God instructed, except for Rahab. She was spared as God wanted. Later in Matthew 1 you can see the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. It is not scintillating reading, but there is something worth noting. Verse 5 tells us that one of Christ’s ancestors was, “Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.” Wait, Boaz, who married Ruth in that great story, was Rahab’s son? Yep. Meaning Rahab produced the line of Messiah. It seems God wasn’t too upset with her lying.

There are some principles God teaches us. He puts government in place for our good. Our ability to find life doesn’t come through having government that is to our liking, but is through living in fellowship with him and in obedience to him.

RELATES TO BIG ISSUES IN OUR LIVES

There are two questions we must answer that point out the implications of these verses for us.

***Do I believe God is ruling in all things in this world?***

If God rules, why doesn’t he see to it that good people of humility and integrity are in power so that as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:2 “we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness”? This issue is an aspect of the problem of pain. Why does God allow so much suffering? I do not have an answer to the problem of pain that no one else has discovered, and I don’t have nice neat solution for this aspect of it. However, there are some things that I know are true that can help us.

First, it will help us if we remember that God is sovereign. Psalm 135:6 says, “The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.” The Scriptures tell us he is eternal. He sees the beginning from the end. So he is working a plan that encompasses the entire universe and all of time. Our problem is we see only our little sliver of time in a minuscule place in the cosmos. We are like a person who decides that, yes, indeed, there certainly is global warming because it has been really hot here this week. That guy makes that decision with no idea of what temperatures are like in the rest of the world. He has no idea how these temperatures compare with temperatures from 50 or 100 years ago. He even forgets that we just had the coolest July we’ve had in more than 20 years.

God makes decisions on the basis of the long term good, and we have little idea what that is. We don’t know what the consequences of things will be. I mentioned last week that Laurie has great ability to anticipate the consequences of things. I mentioned that when I fail to listen to her, I inevitably regret it because it turns out badly, as she predicted it would. I know that. I preached that. And this week she was ordering a dinner from a take out restaurant, and I said she should order differently than she was. She said, “I think that’s too spicy for us.” I said, “No, it says it’s mild. That’s what we want.” I ended up kicking myself again. I just preached about this! I know she is going to be right. Our problem is we do the same thing with God. We intellectually say we know he has a plan and it’s a good one, then we argue and fight with him about it, wanting our own way. We need to truly trust that he knows what he is doing.

Job never knew why all those terrible things happened to him. He never got an answer. But God has used the story of the terrible things that happened to him to comfort and encourage millions of people for thousands of years. Don’t you think Job now believes that’s pretty cool? If he’d just been a rich man who had everything go his way, he would not have helped us at all. Paul was arrested when people falsely accused him of something that would have been no big deal if he did it. They said he brought Gentiles into the temple in Jerusalem. Excuse me, but that doesn’t feel like a capital crime. But he didn’t even do that. He was totally innocent, yet he was put in prison and kept there by a corrupt judge who knew he was innocent. He was in prison for years. But because of that Paul was able to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to people in the imperial palace, and even to members of Caesar’s family. But even that wasn’t the coolest part. While in prison Paul wrote some letters. How would you like to do without Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians? God worked a plan that Paul had no clue about, that is impacting us today, 2000 years later. Don’t you think we can trust that our sovereign God knows what he’s doing even when we have no clue what it is?

There is something else. God uses the hard things of this world, including cruel authorities, to pull back the curtain on the truth of this world. We want to believe that this world is the sum total of life, that true peace, true joy and fulfillment are found in the delights and pleasures of this world. We think if we can only find the right combination of circumstances then we will have that peace and joy that we long for. We will get life as we think it ought to be even as we aren’t exactly sure what that would feel like. So we focus on trying to manufacture that combination of circumstances. We are puzzled by the fact that we keep attaining those things, but then the life is still, somehow, just out of reach. We make this life the sum total of our existence, the whole point of it. This is all we have, we think.

God allows the hard things of this life to shatter that illusion, for that is what the dream of this world is. It is a mirage always just out of reach. God uses the hard things, the bad governments, to force us to see that this is a broken, fallen world. The delights and pleasures of this world can never fill our souls the way we dream they will.

There are two crucial components of finding the life we were created for. The first is coming to realize that we can only gain what we seek through God Himself. We are created for him. He is the source of life. We get the life we long for from him, from living in his presence and trusting him continually

I amazed at how dumb I sometimes was as a kid. Our family had a number of vacations at Carpenteria State Beach when I was a kid. We had great times there, in part because we were at the beach where it was in the 70’s and not home in Bakersfield where it was 212 degrees. We loved going in the ocean. As a kid I didn’t mind the very chilly water. Our parents would tell us we needed to get out at times because we were so cold. We’d say, “I’m not cold.” They’d say, “Then why are you shivering and your lips are blue?” But I remember the time when I thought I’d made a life changing discovery and couldn’t believe no one else had seen it. In school we had studied California history and learned about the gold rush and how miners panned for gold in the rivers. Well, one day I was in the shallow water about knee deep when I saw it. There was gold! It was in the water. There were flecks of it everywhere. I couldn’t believe it. I looked around and no one else seemed to be paying attention. I was so excited. I started trying to figure out how I could start harvesting all that gold without someone else noticing and jumping my claim. I was going to be rich. I thought I should loop my parents in on this incredible find. Maybe they would have some ideas about how to rake in the gold without giving away what we were doing. I was so excited when I went to tell them. I assume most of you have been to the beach and know what I’m talking about. I was in for a let down. You can pan for gold all you want in the water at the beach, but you will be disappointed, because there isn’t any gold there. What I was seeing was mica. Our problem is we are obsessed with thinking the things of this world are the gold we’re looking for. But you can mine for it all you want, and you’ll end up disappointed, because God himself is the gold we’re looking for. The hard things of this life that he allows point us back to him. C. S. Lewis said God whispers to us in our pleasures, and shouts to us in our pain.

The second key is to realize the life we long for is in the kingdom of God. Perfect peace, unrestrained joy, freedom of soul, total fulfillment, life without any trace of fear or guilt, are the traits of life in God’s eternal kingdom. That is the life we can never stop dreaming of. It’s what we were made for. That life will only be found in God’s kingdom, and that is where we should put our hope.

Have you ever heard of Sixto Rodriguez? Back in the 1960’s and 70’s he pursued a career as a musician. He did concerts, actually made two albums under contract to a label, but his career never took off. Finally in 1976 he gave up his dream. He got a job in demolition and got on with his life. Many years later his eldest daughter was surfing the Internet and was stunned to find a web site dedicated to her dad. Neither he nor any of his family had any knowledge of it. But from it she learned the surprising fact that while his music had never gone anywhere in the US, it had taken off in South Africa, Botswana, New Zealand and Australia. In fact he was wildly popular. He went to South Africa in 1998 and performed 6 sold out concerts to hugely enthusiastic audiences. He learned he had sold more records than Elvis Presley there. Dave Matthews of the Dave Matthews Band said of him, “The man is a legend.” He has returned several times to do concerts, but returns to his home in Detroit where he goes about a very modest life, unnoticed by anyone.

As followers of Jesus, we belong to another kingdom. It is a kingdom where our hope is rooted. In this world we go around unnoticed, looking like ordinary people with nothing special about us. But as we walk with Jesus each day, just being faithful to him, we are actually becoming famous in that other kingdom. The life we long for is in that kingdom. We will experience a taste of it as our lives become God’s kingdom, the place where he rules.

***What do I think is most important in life?***

Who rules, who has power, are things that seem like crucially important matters. The news media is in a continual frenzy over such things, and many Christians get tied up in knots over them. But Jacques Ellul wrote a book entitled *The Political Illusion* in which he asserted that the greatest lesson of the 20th century was that the belief that politics have the solution for the human condition not only proved to be an illusion, but it proved to be cataclysmic. Chuck Colson, who lived in the inner halls of power for a time, said, “Government by its very nature is limited in what it can accomplish. What it does best is perpetuate its own power and bolster its own bureaucracies.”

More than 30 years ago the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, sent his military into Kuwait and took over that country. There was an international outcry demanding he remove his troops, but as is the habit of bullies, he essentially said, “Make me.” He had the 4th most powerful military in the world, so that was not a trivial task. But a coalition formed to remove his troops from Kuwait, led by the United States. After months of build up, a month long air campaign began. But this task was going to take boots on the ground. Hussein warned his enemies they’d better prepare for the “Mother of all battles.” Everyone knew a ground campaign was coming, and it was going to be bloody and horrific. In the weeks leading up to it word leaked out that it would begin with an amphibious assault from the Persian Gulf by US Marines. This was to get around the massive defensive fortifications that had been built on Kuwait’s southern border. The media was able to get video of Marines boarding ships in preparation for the assault. The ships left port, heading for the designated locations. Leaflets were dropped on the beaches and Iraqi troop strong points warning that the Marines were coming, would swarm over the beaches and overwhelm them. Then probing attacks began into the teeth of the Iraqi defenses on the southern border. Clearly these were designed to convince the Iraqis that’s where the main attack was going to come, not on the beaches. Finally the attack began. Only it wasn’t an amphibious attack. Out to the west in the empty Saudi desert, out of sight from everyone, especially Hussein’s intelligence people, the coalition had staged a massive assault force. When the ground war began it swept north and east, completely catching Iraqi units by surprise as they were attacked from behind. The Iraqis were totally defeated in the space of 100 hours. There never was an amphibious attack. The whole thing had been a ruse, a deception to capture the total attention of the Iraqis and set them up for what is now known as the famous Left Hook that they never saw coming. The plan was based on what military strategists call Magruder’s Principle, which is it’s much easier to encourage an enemy to believe what he wants to believe than to convince him to believe something different.

I tell you that story because much of what goes on in this world, especially having to do with politics and power, is a diversion by the enemy that is intended to keep us from seeing what is really going on. He is using Magruder’s Principle against us. It is about dazzling us, distracting us, setting us up to be ruined by the enemy’s attacks.

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Do we believe that? The world is going to keep throwing diversions at us to keep us from looking at the kingdom of God. Politics certainly is one of them, but so are success, money, the approval of others, notice, fame, power and so much more. None of those are of ultimate importance. The kingdom of God is what the entire universe is about. It is the kingdom that will last forever. So our focus should always be on that kingdom.

How do we do that? We live to have God rule in our lives. We don’t get distracted by the diversionary attacks and actions. At the end of this section Paul says simply, pay your taxes, give respect and give honor to people. Live simply, focused on serving God, respecting every human being, affirming and honoring others instead of ourselves. It means trusting God and his kingdom will win, being confident of that, and living each day faithful to him.