

Justin Martyr: A.D. 110–165 (1st Apology) c. 155

Chapter XVII.—Christ Taught Civil Obedience.

And everywhere we, more readily than all men, endeavour to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary,³³ as we have been taught by Him; for at that time some came to Him and asked Him, if one ought to pay tribute to Caesar; and He answered, “Tell Me, whose image does the coin bear?” And they said, “Caesar’s.” And again He answered them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”³⁴ Whence to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that with your kingly power you be found to possess also sound judgment.¹

Irenaeus: A.D. 120–202 (Against Heresies book 5)

Chapter XXIV.—Of the Constant Falsehood of the Devil, and of the Powers and Governments of the World, Which We Ought to Obey, Inasmuch as They are Appointed of God, Not of the Devil.

1. As therefore the devil lied at the beginning, so did he also in the end, when he said, “All these are delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give them.”²⁰⁶ For it is not he who has appointed the kingdoms of this world, but God; for “the heart of the king is in the hand of God.”²⁰⁷ And the Word also says by Solomon, “By me kings do reign, and princes administer justice. By me chiefs are raised up, and by me kings rule the earth.”²⁰⁸ Paul the apostle also says upon this same subject: “Be ye subject to all the higher powers; for there is no power but of God: now those which are have been ordained of God.”²⁰⁹ And again, in reference to them he says, “For he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, the avenger for wrath to him who does evil.”²¹⁰ Now, that he spake these words, not in regard to angelical powers, nor of invisible rulers—as some venture to expound the passage—but of those of actual human authorities, [he shows when] he says, “For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, doing service for this very thing.”²¹¹ This also the Lord confirmed, when He did not do what He was tempted to

³³ φορους και εισφορας. The former is the annual tribute; the latter, any occasional assessment. See Otto’s Note, and Thucyd. iii. 19.

³⁴ Matt. xxii. 17, 19, 20, 21.

¹ Roberts, A., Donaldson, J., & Coxe, A. C. (1997). *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I: Translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. The apostolic fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. (168). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

²⁰⁶ Matt. iv. 9; Luke iv. 6.

²⁰⁷ Prov. xxi. 1.

²⁰⁸ Prov. viii. 15.

²⁰⁹ Rom. xiii. 1.

²¹⁰ Rom. xiii. 4.

²¹¹ Rom. xiii. 6.

by the devil; but He gave directions that tribute should be paid to the tax-gatherers for Himself and Peter,²¹² because “they are the ministers of God, serving for this very thing.”

2. For since man, by departing from God, reached such a pitch of fury as even to look upon his brother as his enemy, and engaged without fear in every kind of restless conduct, and murder, and avarice; God imposed upon mankind the fear of man, as they did not acknowledge the fear of God, in order that, being subjected to the authority of men, and kept under restraint by their laws, they might attain to some degree of justice, and exercise mutual forbearance through dread of the sword suspended full in their view, as the apostle says: “For he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, the avenger for wrath upon him who does evil.” And for this reason too, magistrates themselves, having laws as a clothing of righteousness whenever they act in a just and legitimate manner, shall not be called in question for their conduct, nor be liable to punishment. But whatsoever they do to the subversion of justice, iniquitously, and impiously, and illegally, and tyrannically, in these things shall they also perish; for the just judgment of God comes equally upon all, and in no case is defective. Earthly rule, therefore, has been appointed by God for the benefit of nations,²¹³ and not by the devil, who is never at rest at all, nay, who does not love to see even nations conducting themselves after a quiet manner, so that under the fear of human rule, men may not eat each other up like fishes; but that, by means of the establishment of laws, they may keep down an excess of wickedness among the nations. And considered from this point of view, those who exact tribute from us are “God’s ministers, serving for this very purpose.”

3. As, then, “the powers that be are ordained of God,” it is clear that the devil lied when he said, “These are delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will, I give them.” For by the law of the same Being as calls men into existence are kings also appointed, adapted for those men who are at the time placed under their government. Some of these [rulers] are given for the correction and the benefit of their subjects, and for the preservation of justice; but others, for the purposes of fear and punishment and rebuke: others, as [the subjects] deserve it, are for deception, disgrace, and pride; while the just judgment of God, as I have observed already, passes equally upon all. The devil, however, as he is the apostate angel, can only go to this length, as he did at the beginning, [namely] to deceive and lead astray the mind of man into disobeying the commandments of God, and gradually to darken the hearts of those who would endeavour to serve him, to the forgetting of the true God, but to the adoration of himself as God.

4. Just as if any one, being an apostate, and seizing in a hostile manner another man’s territory, should harass the inhabitants of it, in order that he might claim for himself the glory of a king among those ignorant of his apostasy and robbery; so likewise also the devil, being one among those angels who are placed over the spirit of the air, as the Apostle Paul has declared in his Epistle to the Ephesians,²¹⁴ becoming envious of man, was rendered an apostate from the divine law: for envy is a thing foreign to God. And as

²¹² Matt. xvii. 27.

²¹³ [Well says Benjamin Franklin: “He who shall introduce into public affairs the principles of primitive Christianity will change the face of the world.” See Bancroft, *Hist. U.S.*, vol. ix. p. 492.]

²¹⁴ Eph. ii. 2.

his apostasy was exposed by man, and man became the [means of] searching out his thoughts (*et examinatio sententiae ejus, homo factus est*), he has set himself to this with greater and greater determination, in opposition to man, envying his life, and wishing to involve him in his own apostate power. The Word of God, however, the Maker of all things, conquering him by means of human nature, and showing him to be an apostate, has, on the contrary, put him under the power of man. For He says, “Behold, I confer upon you the power of treading upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy,”²¹⁵ in order that, as he obtained dominion over man by apostasy, so again his apostasy might be deprived of power by means of man turning back again to God.

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²¹⁵ Luke x. 19.

²Roberts, A., Donaldson, J., & Coxe, A. C. (1997). *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol.I : Translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. The apostolic fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. (552). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.