



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 5.8 – The Doctrine of Providence or Preservation

### God's Concern for Governmental Authority on Earth

Out of love and concern for humanity, God has also instituted governmental authority on earth. Without such governmental authority, life on earth would be chaotic, for no crimes would be punished. The book of Judges describes such a time of lawlessness: **"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes"** (Judges 21:25).

At first, earthly authority was more or less a family affair. As head of the family, the father became also the chief of the tribe. In the days before the flood, God did not call for the death of the murderer Cain. Later Cain's descendant Lamech also became a murderer and dared anyone to punish him for his crimes (Genesis 4:23-24). In those days "might was right", and the rulers of the world were **"giants on the earth," "mighty men who were of old, men of renown"** (Genesis 6:4-5). These men were not necessarily giants in size, but giants in wickedness. The end result was that **"the earth was filled with violence"** (Genesis 6:11).

After the flood, however, God called for the capital punishment of murderers: **"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed"** (Genesis 9:6). In this way, God established governmental authority by directing human beings to punish human beings who were murderers. God did not establish a particular form of government, such as a monarchy, oligarchy, plutocracy, constitutional republic, or democracy. All such governments, if they hold the actual power of punishing wrong-doing and rewarding well-doing, are God's representatives and carry out His designs. The prophet Daniel declared: **"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise"** (Daniel 2:20-21). God is always in control of all governmental authority. Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar: **"The God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory"** (Daniel 2:37).

In the days of Jesus, the great governmental authority was the Roman Empire. When Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, claimed that he had power to crucify or release Jesus, Jesus replied: **"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above"** (John 19:11). Both Paul and Peter taught that all of us who live in a certain jurisdiction are obligated to obey all the laws of the governmental authority over us. We are to regard our government as being in the service of God, who punishes evildoers on earth through the government's temporal authority.

During the days of the mighty Roman Empire, the apostle Paul wrote: **"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For, because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor"** (Romans 13:1-7).

The apostle Peter brought the same word from God: **“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good”** (1 Peter 2:13-14).

Government is God’s gift to humanity. Through the government, evil is punished and good is protected. Whatever government is in actual control of a city or country, that particular government has been appointed by God and is God’s minister for carrying out His purposes. God gives government the authority to punish evildoers through physical harm, imprisonment, fines, and even death. The government is also a blessing from God for Christians. That is why Paul tells Timothy to teach his fellow-Christians to pray for governmental authority: **“for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence”** (1 Timothy 2:2).

Jesus Himself paid taxes (Matthew 17:27) and likewise taught the people to **“render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”** (Matthew 22:21). God has given the government authority over such matters as marriage and divorce, injury to life and limb, protection of property, peace and war – in fact all of the items involved in the Second Table of the Law.

### Questions

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1. How is governmental authority a blessing from God for humanity?
2. How did God institute governmental authority after the flood?
3. What does God say about particular forms of government?
4. Where did King Nebuchadnezzar get his power?
5. Why are governments called the ministers of God?
6. What was Jesus’ conduct towards governmental authority?
7. In what way is governmental authority a special blessing for Christians?
8. What are some of the responsibilities Christians have toward the government?
9. What type of the government has actual authority in your locale?
10. What is your duty towards this government?