

VI. Laws of Divine Establishment and the Royal Family Honor Code: The Julio-Claudian Caesar

D. The Poor Character of an Official is No Excuse for Sedition

Circumstances in the United States are far better than those in evidence during the time in which Paul wrote Romans.

The first century, prior to and immediately following the Incarnation, saw a series of tyrannical and even psychotic men rule the Roman Empire.

In order for you to appreciate the times in which you live, it is important that we develop a brief biographical sketch of the Roman emperors during the first century.

We will note the Julio-Claudian emperors who ruled the Roman Empire from 27 B.C.-A.D. 68:

Augustus: (27 B.C.-A.D. 14)

He came into favor with his great-uncle, Julius Caesar, who adopted him as his son and heir in 45 B.C. After the death of Caesar in 44 B.C., he gained control of Italy and, along with Mark Antony and Lepidus, established the Second Triumvirate. Augustus and Antony, defeated Brutus and Cassius at Philippi in 42 B.C. He had great administrative ability and promoted the arts, his reign becoming known as the Augustan Age which referred to the golden age of Latin literature. Augustus is mentioned in Scripture in:

Luke 2:1 - Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

Tiberius: (14-37 A.D.)

Adopted by Augustus in 4 A.D., Tiberius became the Empire's second emperor. He was a good administrator but was blamed for the tyrannical actions of Sejanus \se-JAY-nus \ whom Tiberius eventually had executed. In his later years he became perverted. In 26 A.D. he retired to the Island of Capri where he indulged in almost every form of immorality. Tiberius was the emperor during the time of the Incarnation and is mentioned by name once in Scripture:

Luke 3:1 - Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar ...

However, he is mentioned in three other very significant passages:

Matthew 22:17 - Tell us [the Pharisees and the Herodians] therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar or not?

Matthew 22:18 - But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?"

Matthew 22:19 - Show me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius.

Matthew 22:20 - And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"

Matthew 22:21 - They said to Him, "Tiberius Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Tiberius the things that are Tiberius's; and to God the things that are God's."

Parallel passages to this one can be found in Mark 12:13, Mark 12:14, Mark 12:15, Mark 12:16, Mark 12:17 and Luke 20:22, Luke 20:23, Luke 20:24, Luke 20:25. John 19:12

Pilate made efforts to release Jesus but the Jews cried out saying, "*If you release this Man you are no friend of Tiberius; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Tiberius.*"

John 19:15 - They cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Tiberius."

Caligula: (37-41 A.D.)

He destroyed the fiscal stability of the Empire established by Tiberius. His rule was so erratic and marked by cruel behavior that ancient historians are so biased against him that it is difficult to make an objective evaluation. In short, Caligula was a despot—he had absolute power and he used it abusively and oppressively. He was assassinated by a tribune at the Palatine games. Caligula goes unmentioned in Scripture.

Claudius: (41-54 A.D.)

A nephew of Tiberius. Ill health, unattractive appearance, clumsiness of manner, and coarseness of taste did not recommend him for a public life. The imperial family considered him something of an embarrassment. His elevation to the throne came unexpectedly after Caligula's murder. The Praetorian Guards, the imperial household troops, made him emperor the day following Caligula's death.

Claudius was ruthless and occasionally cruel in his dealings with senators and knights. He had a Cliff Clavin personality, that is, he delivered boring intellectual lectures but, unlike Cliff, Claude knew what he was talking about. Claudius vacillated between periods of humane and despotic behavior. His marriage to Messalina had a bloody ending. She married one Gaius Silius at which time Claudius had them both executed. He then married his niece Agrippa. To satisfy her lust for power, Claudius adopted her son Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, later known as the Nero. To do this he had to ignore his own highly qualified son, Britannicus. When he later expressed regret for this decision, Agrippa poisoned him with a plate of bad mushrooms.

Lucius Seneca derided Claudius in a satire in which he ridiculed his uncouth physical appearance, and attributed his mistakes to his weakness of character and the influence of his wives. Nevertheless, Claudius was apparently pro-Semitic. He marked the opening year of his reign by issuing edicts in favor of the Jews who were permitted in all parts of the empire to observe their laws and customs in a free and peaceable manner. The Jews in Rome, however, who had become very numerous, were not allowed to hold assemblies there. This is mentioned in Scripture in:

Acts 18:1 - After these things [Paul] left Athens and went to Corinth.

Acts 18:2 - And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

Claudius' pro-Semitic attitude was due largely to his intimacy with Herod Agrippa who had been living in Rome and had been in some measure instrumental in securing the succession of Caligula. As a reward for his service, Judea was added to the tetrarchies of Philip and Antipas and Herod was made ruler. Herod zealously pursued orthodox Jewish policies, earning the friendship of the Jews. In line with this policy, he vigorously repressed the Jewish Christians, executing the Apostle James and imprisoning the Apostle Peter. This is the subject of:

Acts 12:1 - Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them.

Acts 12:2 - And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

Acts 12:3 - And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

Acts 12:3 - And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him ...

Acts 12:19 - And when Herod had searched for him and had not found him he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

Acts 12:20 - Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country.

Acts 12:21 - And on an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them.

Acts 12:22 - And the people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"

Acts 12:23 - And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

The first-century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, documents this account of Herod's death in book 9, chapter 8 of his *Antiquities of the Jews*:

A severe pain arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, "I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life." When he said this, his pain was become violent. When he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign; four years under Caligula and three years under the reign of Claudius.

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It is interesting to note the lack of detail given by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

Herod Agrippa I. Vol. 5 of Encyclopaedia Britannica. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.:

In the spring of 44 [Herod] was host at a spectacular series of games at Caesarea to honor Claudius. There he died. Finally, the Bible mentions a famine which the prophet Agabus foresaw in:

Acts 11:27 - Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Acts 11:28 - And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Holy Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.

Nero: (54-68 A.D.)

Last of the Julio-Claudian line of emperors. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (s.v. Nero), gives this analysis of the character of Nero:

Nero ranks with Caligula for folly and vice while his cruelties recall the worst years of Tiberius. Very effeminate in his tastes, particular about the arrangement of his hair, and proud of his voice, his greatest fault was inordinate vanity which courted applause. Nero was very susceptible to female charms. He was licentious in the extreme, even to guilt of that nameless vice of antiquity—love of a male favorite.

Nero's self-absorption was expressed in the way he treated Christians following the burning of Rome. Although Nero was innocent of starting the fire and did all he could to bring it under control, the people suspected him nonetheless.

In order to absolve himself in the eyes of his subjects, he knowingly and wrongfully accused the Christians of being the incendiaries.

Christians were arrested and put to death by methods of mockery. Some were covered with skins of wild beasts and then torn by dogs, some were crucified, some were burned as torches to give light at night. Tacitus clearly implies that the Christians were innocent and that Nero employed them simply as scapegoats.

Nero is not mentioned by name in Scripture but he is the Caesar to whom Paul made his appeal in Acts 25. In fact, Nero is referred to nine times throughout the four chapters of Acts 25-28.

It was Nero who executed both Paul and Peter and it was Nero who was the emperor of Rome when both Apostles issued their mandates to honor the king.

1 Peter 2:13 - Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,

1 Peter 2:14 - or to governors as sent by him.

1 Peter 2:17 - Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king [Nero].

Romans 13:1 - All mankind: keep on subordinating yourselves to governing authorities. For there is no authority except that which has its source of origin from God; that is, those which do exist have been delegated by God.

The circumstances were obviously much worse for the believers of Paul and Peter's day than ours and therefore we have no excuse to disobey this principle of establishment morality.

What is needed is a proper perspective of our permanent status in the plan of God and the temporal nature of our earthly environment.

D. Modus Operandi for the Believer Under an Antireligious Government

Our original parents rejected the authority of Jesus Christ in the Garden when they ate of the forbidden fruit.

As a result, God turned the administration of the earth over to man but under the aegis of Satan who is the supreme ruler of the world.

Although Satan's expressed objective is to be like the Most High, he is instead leading the world into an ever-enlarging state of chaos.

This entropy will continue until arrested by Jesus Christ at the Second Advent.

Our Lord's only concern for the goings-on of Cosmos Diabolicus is how they might affect the progress of His calling out of the elect from among the lost.

In order for all mankind to exist in an environment of general order, there must be government with its positions of human authority.

No position of authority exists that the Lord did not sanction, nor does any person hold any such position without His permission.

Therefore, the Apostles command us to submit obediently to the divinely sanctioned authorities.