

The Rule of Love and The Safety of Children

Attorney General Jeff Sessions quoted Romans 13:1, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established," as a way of defending the horrific separation of children from their parents who are accused of illegally entering the United States. I was surprised by the lack of context given to the quote.

This simplistic and, frankly, misinformed reading of the text is one that has been used by preachers and politicians to affirm all sorts of ugly and unethical governmental behavior, including slavery. I cannot imagine the Attorney General meant to invoke memories of this theological malpractice, but his use of this verse as a defense for pulling apart families brought this terrible history from our country's past back to mind.

My surprise was also fueled by the simple fact that the government Paul was referencing eventually executed him. This same government executed Jesus, the one we call the Christ. I sincerely doubt any person of Christian faith would say at this point, "Well, that was terrible for Paul and Jesus but we must submit to the governing authorities." Of course not.

Part of my surprise is also due to the overall context of this portion of Paul's letter. The apostle concludes this thought proclaiming, "Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." Clearly, love of neighbor is the highest law.

Jesus said something similar, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Note the final phrase, "all the law." He's making a point very much like the one articulated by Paul, namely, the law of love is ultimate and it is the one by which we are called to live our lives.

In light of this one must ask, "How does the rule of love apply to the situation we are facing at the border?" The answer, as First Lady Laura Bush and many others have recently noted, is quite clear. Mrs. Bush wrote, "Our government should not be in the business of warehousing children in converted box stores or making plans to place them in tent cities in the desert outside of El Paso."

I agree with her. The debate over border security is one we should engage in with vigor and with the best of our intellect. Good people on both sides of the issue can recognize differences of opinion. There is much to say about this emotionally charged issue.

The law of love though is quite clear when we look at the families being torn apart. There is no other option for us than to do whatever is best for the children themselves. This means they will not be torn from their parents or housed in fenced-in spaces nor kept in tents in the middle of the desert. As Mrs. Bush asked, "In 2018, can we not as a nation find a kinder, more compassionate and more moral answer to this current crisis? I, for one, believe we can."

The law of love says we can and we must.