

Text: Romans 13:1-10 (NIV)

¹Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ²Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. ⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Theme: The Christian's Life in the World

Many of you probably know the hymn, "I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home." It is true that as Christians we are not of the world. We are citizens of heaven. Jesus Christ has paid for our sins on the cross. He washed them away in Holy Baptism. We belong to God even in this world. We trust in His grace and mercy, and we know where we are going. We are going to be with the Lord. We are not of the world, but we are in the world. In these verses St. Paul shows us how the Christian is to live in this world.

I. He begins by telling us to obey the laws of the governing authorities.

They are owed certain things by us as Christians. Paul writes, "*If you owe taxes, pay taxes, if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect, if honor then honor.*" In that verse Paul shows that we owe the government both obedience and respect. As Christians we are called to pay the taxes that we owe. Jesus once said, "*Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.*" We are also called to give respect to the governing authorities. That means that we give them the proper respect of their titles, and that we obey the laws. (Mk 12:17) When Paul stood before King Agrippa, he showed such respect. He began his defense, "*King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you...Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.*" (Acts 26:2) In his letter Peter writes, "*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong, and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.*" (1 Peter 2:13ff) "*If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal.*" (1 Peter 4:15) Both Paul and Peter write that there is no authority except that which God has established. It is interesting how similar both Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 are. Government authorities are owed our respect and obedience because God has given them that position.

That doesn't matter if the government is just or unjust, Christian or pagan. That was already true in Old Testament times. In the book of Genesis Joseph became a high official of Pharaoh, and Daniel became a high official in Babylonian and Persian governments. When Babylon conquered Jerusalem, Jeremiah told the people to serve the king of Babylon. (Jer 40:9) Throughout His ministry Jesus made it clear that He was not leading an uprising. When asked whether we should pay taxes, He answered, "*Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.*" In the New Testament era instead of submitting to the Roman authorities, many of the Jews tried to rebel. In the end it brought about the destruction of Jerusalem. Throughout the Bible however, we are told to honor and obey the governing authorities, no matter who they might be.

Why should we obey them? Paul writes that we don't obey them out of fear of punishment but out of conscience. The authorities bear the sword. God has given them authority to punish those who do wrong, but that is not why we should obey them. We obey them because they are God's servants to bring order to society. If people obey the laws only when someone is watching, then chaos breaks out when no one is watching. It seems today that far too often when there are no camera or burglar alarms or when things are not locked, it is theirs for the taking. Most of the laws which we have, serve to bring order in our society. As Christians God calls us to obey the laws whether someone is watching or not. We obey them out of respect for God because He has given the government the authority to make those laws that bring peace and order.

II. As Christians we are also called to obey's God's laws to love and serve our neighbor.

Paul goes on to write, "*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another*". We should not owe our neighbors money, but we in view of God's mercy for us, we owe them our love. (Rom 12:1) That is a hard lesson that we in our country have learned over the past few years. We might complain about predatory lending, but far too often we have gotten ourselves over our heads in debt. Our eyes and appetites have gotten too big. For most of history in the Christian Church money was only borrowed when it was absolutely necessary. If someone charged interest, it was called "usury."

Paul writes that one rule applies here, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" We are called to treat our fellow citizens with respect and care for them in their needs. We don't only treat Christians this way. We are to treat all people that way. Hebrews 13:16 says, "*And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*" There are many admonitions in the New Testament for Christians to do good to all people. In the past week there have been appeals to help hurricane victims. Locally, in our families, and in our congregation God gives us opportunities to do good to those who need our help. The commandments teach us how to love and respect our neighbor, "Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not covet." When people only think of themselves, society breaks down, but when we follow the commandments that God has given to us, our society is strong. Christians should honor marriage, protect the possessions and reputation of others and be content with what God has given to us. We are called to love our neighbor as ourselves.

III. This is also a life of faith.

Paul wrote these words during the first five years of Nero's reign when Nero was a rather good ruler.

However, in 1 Timothy 2 when Nero was persecuting Christians Paul also writes that we should pray for kings and all in authority. As Christians we live by faith that God is ruling all things for the good of His kingdom, even through earthly rulers. When we look back, we can see several examples of that. God used Pharaoh to save Jacob and his family during a great famine. God allowed Babylon to conquer Jerusalem, so that His people would finally get rid of their idolatrous ways. Then God used King Cyrus to bring them back to the promised land. God used a census that Caesar Augustus ordered so that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. He used the Roman Empire which the Jews hated so much to spread the Gospel. Because of the peace and transportation system that existed at that time in the Mediterranean world, Paul and the other apostles were able to spread the Gospel with ease throughout the Roman Empire. Even when the empire began to persecute the church, God used those persecutions to strengthen the faith of His people and to help the church grow. In the 1500's God used the Turkish threat in the southern part of Europe to distract the emperor enough, that he didn't have time to put down those who supported the Reformation. Every event in history has been used by God to bring the good news of Jesus Christ our Savior into this world. He has everything under control.

As we look at this text we also see how we have failed. There have been times when we have failed to give the authorities the respect that is due them and times when we have not obeyed the laws. Sometimes like Peter and John, we have to say, "*We have to obey God rather than man,*" when we are told to act contrary to God's Word. However, there are plenty of times when we have disobeyed laws of the land which were made for our good. On the other hand we have not always loved our neighbor as ourselves. We have all failed to follow the Ten Commandments perfectly. Because we have failed to follow the laws of the land and of our God, we are all guilty of bringing disorder into this world. But thanks be to God, we are citizens of heaven. Today's Gospel lesson speaks of confession and forgiveness in God's kingdom. We confess our sins and trust that God forgives them all through Jesus Christ our Savior.

These verses tell us how important the government is. God has instituted it to bring order and peace to society. As Christians we are called to obey the laws of the governing authorities, just as we also want to follow our Lord's 10 Commandments. We thank God that we live in a land that is free and has just laws, and we pray that by His grace we will live as good citizens in this country that He has blessed us with.

Amen.

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