

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, November 29, 2020

Let Every Soul Be Subject Unto the Higher Powers

Romans 13

Submission to government, and authority of any kind, is abhorrent to the sinful human heart. It is a constant danger among Christians who know that we are spiritually separate - sojourners, citizens of another country, servants of another King, and at liberty in Christ – to likewise view ourselves as separate from the authority of human government; to become haughty and presumptuous in the thought that we are more righteous and wise than our rulers. We are constantly in danger of rallying to the banners of men - aligning ourselves with the causes of flesh - rather than rallying to the banner of Christ, and the cause of God and truth. There is constant temptation to align ourselves with a humanistic, contentious position or ideology, propping it up with spiritual sounding rhetoric. If we do that, then we will find ourselves dying on hills that have *nothing to do* with the wars of the Lord. Consider the particular danger of our circumstances in America in 2020:

- There is no soundness in this current form of government; if you give credence to the scriptures, then you know that our democratic and capitalistic society is selfish and weak *at it's very best!* [Daniel 2] (sermon: 3/12/17)
- We are well past the best days of this nation, when it comes to the moral character of society in general, and leaders who have any remote fear of God. He has indeed cursed this generation with rulers that are in constant confusion and contention.
- Likewise this nation has been cursed with a satanic media machine that glories in their shame; poisonous serpents that make full use of the unprecedented access that technology provides them to inject their hateful, godless venom into the bloodstream of this nation and world. The media leads the charge in undermining all types of authority: God, Government, Parents, etc.
- Further – as our society has turned farther and farther away from God, our vaunted “freedom of speech” has devolved into a license for every person to give voice to their most wicked, proud, self-gratifying thoughts. Again, when you combine that satanic spirit with technology, you have a perfect recipe for Satan to rule in this world; there is a boundless platform to publish, consume, and repeat every unlearned, prideful theory and accusation, at any moment, to anyone, anywhere in the world.
 - **2Peter 2:10-14** “10 ¶ But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. 11 Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. 12 But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and

destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; 13 And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; 14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:"

- *Haldane: "As there is nothing from which political partisans in the present day more widely differ than from the apostolic doctrine laid down in this chapter, Christians ought to give to it the more earnest heed, lest they be led away on the subject by the opinions of the world, or of those who 'despise government.' They ought to examine carefully what is here taught by the Apostle, without attempting to accommodate it to their preconceived views of civil liberty. ... With one consent, the generality of men, even in this country, which is comparatively so much enlightened by the Scriptures, proclaim that subjection to rulers is, even in things civil, limited and conditional – that in case of the breach of the supposed compact between the rulers and the ruled, rebellion is lawful, and resistance a duty."*

My friends – this is the darkness that surrounds us, and threatens to consume us, **every moment of every day!** We must resist Satan; we must resist the pride of our flesh; we must not join in with our contemporaries in speaking evil of dignities. To help us with a clear scriptural view of our duty on this topic, let us give some careful consideration to Romans 13.

Romans 13

Verse 1 *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."*

- Every soul: this is a comprehensive phrase that applies equally to every person, regardless of their station in life, their age, the type of master that rules over them, the type of government that has authority over them, or the behavior of the rulers in that government. We all must be subject to those that God has appointed over us.
 - **1Peter 2:13-25** *"13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; 14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. 15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. 17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. 18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. 19 For this*

is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. 21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: 24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. 25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

- Those that are put in authority over us were put there by God; He ordained (appointed) them; He gave them their power. This is not some passive thing that is done by Divine permission; it is done by Divine appointment. Rulers do not come to power by accident or happenstance. Again, this is a comprehensive statement – all power - all authority is appointed by God. The very worst government (in policy or person) is appointed by God, to execute upon His purpose, to bring about His glory. When a wicked ruler is in power, he has been given that power by God every bit as much as when a just ruler holds power. *Haldane: "Wicked rulers are necessary in God's plans to punish wicked nations. ... Whatever may have been the means of their exaltation, it is God who has exalted them either for a blessing or a curse to the people."*
 - **Romans 9:17** *"For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth."*
 - **Proverbs 21:1** *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."*
- Our duty to obey is not based upon principals of mutual benefit, mutual consent, or good conduct of rulers; it is based upon the principal that the power was ordained by God. Despite their best efforts, that power is not created or maintained by the best laid plans of men. Consider how God raised up Nebuchadnezzar, struck him low, and then brought him back to the throne. God's purpose, timing, and power on full display in this proud man.
 - **Daniel 4:16, 17** *"16 Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. 17 This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."*

- This duty to obey our rulers applied under the brutal and absolute monarchy of Daniel's day; It applied under the tyrannical despots of Paul's day; and it equally applies in the fickle, depraved circus of our day, called democracy.
- We can support our rulers in their work; we can petition, and entreat them to do their duty with fidelity to God by implementing and maintaining policies of righteousness; we can reprove, rebuke, and exhort them when they are engaging in clear, open sin (**Mark 6:18**); but we cannot cavil and rebel against them; we cannot mock and ridicule them in the execution of their duties.

Verse 2 *“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”*

- “Ordinance” in this context means: “command”. Simply put: to resist and disobey the authority that God has put over us is to resist and disobey the command of God. This is a plain and clear statement, which ought to make us consider such behavior as an awful crime against God, and a thing to strongly resist when it wells up within us. We cannot join our contemporaries in that behavior. We must resist it in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions. If we are going to speak faithful words of rebuke and exhortation to our rulers, then they **must be only that** – true, faithful words that are driven from a desire for the best good of their own soul, and those souls that they rule over. We must put away the flesh within us that brings forth all manner of self-righteousness, sarcasm, mockery, snark, etc.
- If we “resist” the rulers that God has put over us, then we will receive damnation. The word “damnation” used here means judgment, condemnation, punishment. If we rebel against authority, then they have the power to punish us – we bring sorrow upon ourselves and our loved ones, and we tarnish our testimony for Christ when we do such things. Certainly this is also rebellion against God, and can ultimately lead to eternal judgement, condemnation, and punishment.
- The scriptures only provide one exception to this rule: We will not bow to human authority where it is clearly contrary to our duty to God – in such cases we must obey God, and not man, because God is the higher authority. (**Daniel 3, Acts 5:29**) **But**, we must be **careful and prayerful** with this thinking, lest it become the rule rather than the exception. If we are going to rebel against our earthly masters, it had better be a clear-cut situation where obedience to our masters is a particular sin against God – not a matter of twisting logic to meet standards that we have created in the **name** of God.

Verse 3 *“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:”*

- In short: if you break the laws of your rulers, then you will be punished; if you wish to avoid incurring the displeasure of rulers, then simply do that which is good - instead of being punished, you will have commendation from them.

- You might be wondering how this verse aligns with our own experience – and the experience of our spiritual forefathers. We have indeed felt the wrath and terror of government because of our “good works” in faithfully preaching the Gospel of Christ to our neighbors. So why does this verse say that rulers are not a terror to good works? In this context, “good works” is not specific to the spiritually good works of our Christian walk. This is speaking to the fact that government is generally set up with laws to support the common good, and to punish those that injure their neighbors, the government, or the general peace. Rulers are a terror to people who break the laws; they are not (generally) a terror to those who obey them. Our obedience to them is a part of our duty to seek peace with all men; disobedience ought to put us in fear of our rulers, and the God that appointed them.
- If we live our lives in peace and obedience toward our earthly masters, then God will give us confidence and a good conscience when the moments arise that we **are** persecuted for Christ’s sake. We will then be able to boldly join our forefathers in saying: we will not be careful to answer the king **in this matter**. If we live our lives chafing against our rulers, in disobedience and strife, then our testimony for Christ is worthless, and the world will say truly: “You hypocrite! This is how you always behave – Christ is just another excuse for you to vent your spleen.”

Verse 4 *“For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”*

- Rulers are “ministers” of God – servants that are sent to do His bidding – regardless of what intention they have in their own heart. Government is certainly set up for the good of society generally; but in addition, we see here that God is causing them to work for **our** good, as Christians specifically. They are ministers “**to thee** for good”. The degeneracy of man is certainly found in every person in authority in this world, and shows itself in their pride, lust, greed, etc; and yet it is the same tendency found in every depraved man. Those failings of our rulers do not take away the fact that God has appointed them generally to protect and provide support for lawful citizens, and to punish those that do evil. We are not remotely immune to being punished by government for rebellion and disobedience. That ought to keep our hearts focused, and not chasing after the various political banners and ideologies; we have to be able to submit under whatever political and governmental construct the Lord puts us.
- *Haldane: “This is the characteristic of magistracy in all countries. In spite of all the evils that derogate from its proper character, it promotes the good of society. But none are so much indebted to it as Christians, to each of whom it may indeed be emphatically said, it is the minister to thee for good. Were the restraints of government removed, Christians would be attacked, persecuted, or destroyed in any country. Even the persecution of the worst government would not be so bad as the*

persecution of the world, if freed from the restraint of law. Notwithstanding the numerous persecutions endured by Christians under the Roman emperors, they were still to them the ministers of God for good, without whose government they would probably have been exterminated. 'The Christians to the lions!' was the common cry of the multitude among the pagans. The Roman government afforded protection to Paul for a long period, and saved him on different occasions from suffering death by his countrymen. Let Christians, then, in every country, instead of joining with the enemies of its established order, be thankful for the Divine ordinance of civil government, and exert themselves to maintain obedience and peace. It is of the utmost importance for them in every country to understand their duty to civil government. While they show that they fear not man, where he ordains what is contrary to the commandments of God, they ought likewise to show that obedience to God, and gratitude to Him who appoints civil government for their protection, obliges them to submit to the rulers in all things temporal. The institution of civil government is a dispensation of mercy ... Without the powerful obstacle presented by civil government to the selfish and malignant passions of men, it would be better to live among the beasts of the forest than in human society."

- *John Brown: "Indeed, civil government is more for the advantage of Christians than for that of others. They need its protection more than any other class of men. Were it not for the protection of government, Christians could not live even in the countries where there are the proudest boasts of enlargement of mind with respect to civil liberty."*

Verse 5 *"Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake."*

- We should certainly be afraid to transgress against our rulers, because of their power to punish – however, that is not the primary reason for obedience. If we have respect for the fact that God ordained them, then we should obey them out of a good conscience to God. We must align our will with the direction of our rulers (in **all matters** not directly contrary to God), and support their purposes with our words and deeds – because they are His ministers. We must NOT, employ our thoughts, words, or deeds to denigrate and inhibit their work.
- *Haldane: "Some feel it difficult to admit the plain and obvious doctrine contained in the preceding verses of this chapter, lest it should condemn what took place in bringing about the Revolution of 1688. But whatever may be thought of the manner in which that Revolution was produced, and however beneficial its effects have been, no such considerations ought to be allowed to interfere with, or in the smallest degree to modify or contravene, the authority of God, which is here so plainly expressed. In that Revolution there may have been much evil, and though God has in His holy providence overruled it so as to bring out of it much good, yet, like everything else, it*

must be judged of by the Scriptures, and not the Scriptures by it, or anything connected with it."

Verse 6 *"For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing."*

- This is plain: pay your taxes. Christ made this standard clear when he answered the rebellious Pharisees: *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* (**Mark 12:14**) Why? For the third time, we are told that they are God's ministers, attending upon the very business of civil government, which is of great value to everyone – most of all, the servants of God.
- We ought to be very grateful! How often do we thank God for this? Do we truly recognize the wonderful gift that our God has given us with our circumstance at this moment, both for our temporal comfort and sustainment, and for our ability to preach the Gospel? Do we give proper thought to the incredible infrastructure around us, and the fact that the Lord has put people in place to build, govern, and maintain it all? Or do we just take it for granted, and use it with proud and ungrateful hearts?
- We ought to watch our thoughts and our tongues regarding our rulers. We don't have a clue what it takes to do most of the jobs that those in authority do. For every complaint we have voiced, what have we done to actually try to entreat those in authority, so that we can help them to improve the thing we are complaining about? Much more importantly, have we gotten to God in prayer to give wisdom to our rulers, and to help us to be at peace with them? I'm not talking about making a show of this, I'm talking privately, sincerely getting to God in prayer about those matters, with a true desire that they would do right – for their own sake, for our neighbor's sake, and for our sake.
 - **Jeremiah 29:7** *"And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace."*
 - Even after Babylon slaughtered and destroyed Jerusalem, and the Jews were carried away captive to a society that worshiped false gods with their every breath, they were commanded to seek peace with their rulers, and to pray to God for it! No excuse to do otherwise! Remember, this was a city and kingdom that was imminently going to be destroyed – 70 years, and then their destruction would arrive.
 - **1Timothy 2:1,2** *"1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."*

Verse 7 *"Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."*

- We are to render what is owed to every man – as paying it unto God. He gives us four examples, but this applies to “**all**” debt (“dues”) that we carry, whether owed because of equity or love; in dollars or deeds. I believe that the apostle focuses on these particular elements, because while most men make no argument against paying the debt owed for goods and services, they are more than willing to skip payment of these examples.
 - **Tribute** (personal taxes) / **Custom** (business taxes): Again, pay your taxes. But what if our rulers are oppressive and tyrannical? What if they are greedy thieves? What if they abuse their power? What if they implement policies that are wicked? Should we then refuse to pay taxes, so that we don’t support that wicked behavior with our money? NO! This plain doctrine gives us no such exception! Consider the government in the days of Christ, when He expressly commanded taxes to be rendered to Caesar – our rulers have NOTHING on those brutal tyrants. When we run up against a master – of any form – that is hard, thorny, froward, etc., it is an opportunity to exercise the fruits of the Spirit of God in our own heart – plowing up our own pride, vanity, lust, etc. Submit to it with thanksgiving! Further, these taxes are called “dues”, meaning debt. It is a debt that we owe, for services rendered. As with any debt that we pay, we then have NO control over how those dollars are spent.
 - **Fear**: Fear of punishment is part of this concept, but I believe it is secondary. This is primarily a fear that aligns with our fear and reverence of God; it is a fear that acknowledges authority as appointed by God, and therefore we must fear to offend that authority lest we offend the God that appointed them. Each of us owes this fear (in our thoughts and deeds) to ALL of those in authority over us: Government, masters (bosses of all kinds), husbands, parents, elders, etc. (**1Peter 2:18, 1Peter 3:2, Ephesians 6:5**) How do we show this fear? We render cheerful, hearty, proactive obedience.
 - **Honor**: Generally speaking, we render honor to those in authority by rendering tribute, custom, and fear to them, as we just discussed. So why does Paul give a separate / specific instruction to honor? I don’t think he’s being repetitive - I think he is saying that we should peacefully observe whatever trappings of authority are required of us, thereby showing our respect for authority in front of others. To be clear – honor, NOT worship.

Verse 8 *“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.”*

- Render to all their dues, and Owe no man anything:
 - As I said before, we owe debts in money, and in our behavior. We should pay each of those debts with diligence - clear the balance fully, and as quickly as we are able, so that we can truly say that we owe no man anything. It is an

injury to men, and a reproach to Christ, when the servants of God neglect this duty. It is a breach of the 8th commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.”

- In the previous verse we discussed how this applies to some of the debts that we owe our rulers; let us briefly consider how this applies to our financial debts.
- For context, consider the world that we live in today. Our capitalistic society is built upon the foundation of greed and self-interest. The companies that hold all of the wealth in this nation are set up to feed the insatiable appetite of a generation of people who, like their sister Sodom, have lived their entire lives with fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness. There’s always a new thing being marketed to catch the eye, and provoke envy and covetousness. Buying stuff is the name of the game in this society – see it, want it, have it – NOW! Can you afford it? Irrelevant, because on the other side of this economy are the lending institutions that grind the faces of the poor with their usury. Their only desire is to keep people in debt – they don’t make money when you pay off your debt; they make money when you stay in debt – that’s how usury works. This is an awful cycle – a device of Satan - and we must be wise to it.
- Our first and best defense against this trap, is to avoid financial debt whenever possible.
- When we must take on debt, then it becomes our duty to pay what we owe with diligence. Consider the Proverb: **Proverbs 22:7** “*The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.*” This is a truism. Once we take on debt, we are a servant to the lender, and we must therefore satisfy our master. Make it your priority; have a plan; work the plan with diligence. If we turn aside to spend more money (that we don’t have), wracking up more debt on other things, that inhibit our ability to satisfy the first debt, then we are stealing from the original lender. When you are carrying a bunch of debt that you are struggling to pay, that is not the time to take an expensive vacation and pay for it on credit cards. That is not the time to add new pets. That is not the time for a new game system. That is not the time to build a bigger, fancier house. That is not the time to hand out money in the name of charity. Any of those behaviors is defrauding the master that you put yourself under when you took on the debt.
- In short, this instruction to “owe no man anything” tells us that we must live within our means. That is a difficult thing to do in this consumeristic generation. We must do it; we must help each other to do it.

- But to love one another:
 - Love one another: this is a debt that we always owe. This is an account that can never be paid in full – it constantly has a balance due; every day, every situation, toward every person, we have a fresh debt that must be paid. We owe this debt in our thoughts, in our words (toward or about someone), and in our deeds. Even when we’re not directly interacting with someone, we owe a godly spirit - thoughts that are shaped with humility, meekness, love; true desire for the good of each person that we have dealings with.
 - Paying this debt of love – love to God, and love to our neighbor – is the fulfillment of the law:
 - **Matthew 22:37-40** *“37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*
 - The payment due on this debt of love **increases** with our understanding and capacity; as the Lord gives us more grace – more understanding of **how** we are to love one another – we are required to pay at that level.

Verses 9, 10 *“9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”*

- Remember that the first half of the 10 Commandments outlines our duty to love God; the second half – which Paul includes here - outlines the practical application of our duty to love our fellow man: no sexual immorality, no murder, no stealing, no lying, no coveting. These are the same commandments that Christ wrapped up with the beautiful and sufficient command to “love thy neighbor as thyself”. Indeed, if we do these things – driven from our love toward God – then we work no ill to our neighbors. It is impossible for our dark, sinful hearts to do this perfectly, and yet it is required of us as the fulfilling of the law; we must strive to do it every day; we must provoke and encourage each other in this good work.

Verse 11 *“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”*

- My friends, we are burdened down by sin, forgetfulness, and our decaying bodies. We are constantly in danger of laying aside our armor, and leaving the narrow path to salvation; we are constantly in danger of spiritually falling asleep; we are constantly in danger of defaulting on this debt of love that we owe. We must watch for each other, and encourage each other as Paul does here. We must do it with urgency, because our opportunities to show our love for God and our neighbor are

slipping away like sands through the hour glass. Our possession of the salvation that Christ purchased for us is just ahead, and we want to be found faithful when the Lord requires our souls. None of us knows how many days we have left in this flesh, but there are certainly fewer than when we first believed, so we must therefore invest our affections upon heavenly and eternal things, as those who hope to be citizens of that better country to come.

Verses 12-14 *“12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. 13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”*

- “Let us walk honestly”: the word “honestly” is also translated as “decently”; it means “in a seemly or becoming manner”. In other words, we must put on behavior that matches our profession of faith, and our occupation as the servants of Christ. We cannot put on the behavior of the children of darkness.
- To the contrary, we should clothe ourselves in Christ. He has redeemed us – purchased us – and clothed us in the garment of His righteousness. Therefore, we must daily do the work of sanctification; we must be working and making provision for spiritual and heavenly needs, rather than making undue provision for the flesh. Invariably, if we give undue attention to fleshly things, then we will find ourselves embroiled in the behaviors listed above; we will find ourselves defaulting on the debt that we owe: to love one another.

I love you all. Amen.