Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Christian's Responsibility to Government, Part 2
Scripture: Romans 13:1-3a
Code: 45-98

Let me say as you're sort of settling into your Bible about now that Christianity, as you know, is a total life experience. Christianity is not an addendum added to life. It is not peripheral. Christianity is a total life experience. It touches every element of life, though, word, deed, and relationship. Nothing is left unaffected by the transformation of the Lord Jesus Christ in a life. And so Christian living is not divisible. It is not segmentable. It cannot be isolated from any part of living.

And as you study the New Testament, it becomes obvious that the Spirit of God over and over lays out the totality of the Christian's experience. If you're looking at Ephesians5and6, for example, you begin to see that every relationship is touched by the affect of the Spirit of God in the life of a believer. It talks about husbands and wives and parents and children and masters and servants.

If you look at Colossians3, you see the very same thing. Every relationship impacted by the power of Christ in a life. But just for a moment, turn to 1Thessalonians4, and let me select one out of many possible passages that illustrate for us the totality of Christian experience.

Beginning in Verse1 of 1Thessalonians4, the Apostle Paul says, "Furthermore, therefore, we beseech you brethren, exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that has you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more." He says you ought to live according to your faith. And then in Verse3, he says, after having mentioned the commandments given to them through his agency from the Lord, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification. Abstain from fornication. Know how to possess your vessel," or your body.

Verse5, "Not in the lust of evil desire as the pagans who know not God." Verse6, "Do not go beyond and defraud your brother in any manner." Verse7 says, "God has not called us to uncleanness. And if you reject these laws," Verse8 says, "you're rejecting God, not man." "As touching brotherly love," Verse9, "you need not that I write unto you, for you, yourselves, are taught of God to love one another. And, indeed, you do it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we beseech you, brethren, that you increase more and more."

So what the apostle is saying is, "Now that you've become a believer, it affects every relationship. No more illicit relationships. No more lust. No more unclean relationships. But only true love and pure love." And Verse12, "You walk honestly toward all the people who are outside the faith, and that ye may lack nothing."

So whether you're talking about those who are in the faith with brotherly love, those who are outside the faith, you are to be sure that all relationships are properly impacted by your faith in Christ. And you can read the second chapter of James and see very similar teaching where James says, "As an assembly, you are not to have respect of persons. You are not to show partiality. You are not to say to a man who is wealthy, 'Sit in this place of prominence,' and to one who is poorly clad, 'Sit here under my feet out of the way.'"

All of these passages tell us the myriad of dimensions of relationships that are impacted by Christianity. It affects all of our relationships within the family, all of our relationships outside of the family. Our relationships to the poor and the rich are all covered. Now in our text the Apostle Paul says our Christianity affects our relationships to those in authority over us. It affects our relationship to government, to rulers, to leaders, whether on a local or a national level.

And what we are learning here is that we are given some very strict and clear direction from the Spirit of God as to how we relate to the government that is over us. and in affect, if we just bring the epistle into total focus, Paul has said, "Since you are justified by Grace through faith, since you have been made right with God, since you have become citizens of His Heavenly Kingdom, since you are now controlled by His Holy Spirit and living under His Lordship, every dimension of life is different," every dimension, he started out, didn't he, in Chapter12, Verses1and 2. We immediately have a different relationship with God, and we present ourselves to Him as living sacrifices.

And then beginning in Verse3, he talks about how different our relationship is to believers. We are to minister to them. We are to love them. We are to be kind to them. Our relationship to those in need is touched in Verse13, "We are distributing to the necessity of saints and given to hospitality." And then he talks about our relationship to those who reject and hate our Gospel, and us as well. We are to bless those who persecute, "Bless, and curse not."

And Verse17, "We give back evil? No, not for evil. We give back good for evil," says Verse21. We do not wreak vengeance on someone. So what he is saying is that all relationships are impacted by our justification. And that is the intention of this epistle. Many people feel the epistle to the Romans is a great treatise on the doctrine of salvation, and that that is its high point. May I suggest to you that that is only a means to an end?

If all Paul wanted to focus on was the matter of justification, he could have ended the epistle in Chapter11, but he doesn't. He goes on to deal with the implications of the doctrines, which have been laid down in the first 11chapters, which implications we are now looking at. And so it is essential that a Christian understand that his relationship to authority, his relationship to government and those who are over him is dramatically impacted by his salvation. We are called to live as model citizens that we may reach the world around us with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now last week we pointed out to you that this is not the only passage that deals with this truth. You remember what we saw in 1Peter2:12 where Peter says essentially the same thing "Having your behavior honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." How are we gonna get he Gentiles to glorify God? "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the King as supreme, or unto governors, as under them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well, for so is the will of God that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

In other words, how you behave under the authorities in your country, your nation, your city, whatever it is, will demonstrate your faith, the legitimacy of your faith, to that society. And so we are to submit then to the King, to the governor, to anyone who is over us in authority. I want to turn you to another passage that we haven't looked at in any detail, and just briefly mentioned last week, 1Timothy2. 1Timothy2:1to4. And I want you to notice something here that is going to be foundation for us as we go on in our study.

Now as the Apostle Paul writes instruction to Timothy, it is instruction basically for the church. It is for the church, Verse15 of Chapter3 says, "I want you to know how you ought to behave yourself in the House of God, which is the church." This is behavior principal for the church. "I exhort, therefore, that first of all," Chapter2, Verse1, "supplications, prayers, intersession, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Savior, who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Now there are two very, very essential points that comes out of that brief reading. 1)That we are to pray and intercede and supplicate and give thanks to God for kings and all that are in authority in order that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty or sincerity. In other words, if we want to live a quiet and peaceable life, if we want to be able to walk as God wants us to talk, and enjoy peace so that we can live out our godliness, our approach is to pray for those in authority over us. We do not affect our rulers by protest. We do not affect our rulers by disobedience. We do not affect our rulers by revolution and uprising, but by prayer.

And so the text says, "First of all, we come to God in prayer in order that as a result of that, we may lead the quiet and peaceable life, a life of godliness, a life of integrity, which will be the will of God, because through it, men will come to know the Savior." That is God's desire. In Jeremiah29:7 we read, "And seek the peace of the city to which I have caused you to be carried away captives." This is a message to the Jews in captivity in Babylon. And God's Word to them through Jeremiah is, "Seek the peace of that place. You're captive. You're prisoner. You've been taken hostage, as it were. But you seek the peace and pray unto the Lord for it."

And, again, the same instruction is given that if you want peace in a society, to enjoy your faith, and to spread your faith, then pray for those in authority over you. That is the God-designed pattern. And it fits, doesn't it? With 2Corinthians10:3and following, where Paul says, "The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly," are they? But they are spiritual. And they are might to the pulling down of strongholds. And the most powerful weapon we have as believers to pull down strongholds, if you will, strongholds of the enemy of God, are the weapons of prayer.

And so for Christians, revolution has no place. Pray has the priority place. In a very significant book, written by Robert Culver, entitled *Toward a Biblical View of Government*, he says this, "Churchmen whose Christian activism has taken mainly to placarding, marching, protesting, and shouting, might well absence the author of these Verses. And then they might observe him first at prayer, then in counsel with his friends, and after that, preaching in the homes and marketplaces.

When Paul came to be heard by the mighty, it was to defend his action as a preacher of a way to Heaven," end quote. In other words, Paul says, "When it comes to political changes, when it comes to governmental issues, pray. If you're going to be thrown in prison, make sure you're thrown there not for a political protest, but for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

The goal of that kind of praying is a quiet and peaceable life in order that -- and that's the second thing that comes out of that -- we will have opportunity to see men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. And so we pray that God will allow us the privilege of living peaceable, quiet life to radiate the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The tranquil, quiet, peaceful life is to be the distinctive mark of a Christian.

And I grieve, frankly, when I hear all of this rhetoric about anger and violence and reaction and uprising and revolution. Listen to Paul's word again to the Thessalonians church in Chapter4, Verse10. "We beseech you, brethren," as we left off a moment ago, "that you are to increase more and more," in love, is what he means, "and you study," he says, "to be quiet. Study to be quiet, to do your own business, to work with your own hands as we commanded you, that you may walk honestly toward them that are outside, that you may have lack of nothing." Study to be quiet. Learn to seek peace.

Frankly, beloved, all we can expect from government is protection of life, and protection of property, protection of life, and protection of property. If it does that, it serves God's intended purpose. Today, unfortunately, in our society, I think we see some failures, even in those areas. It seems as though with our government tolerating so many lawsuits that there are people who, in order to defend themselves, are losing some of their property; defending themselves when they're not even guilty of anything, but just to remain and maintain their innocence is a great cost.

And I think our country, in part, of course, fails in the protection of life with its millions upon millions of abortions. But in spite of those kinds of things, as Christians, we must pray and live a peaceful life, influencing the world, not by political protests, not by efforts to overthrow the government, but by godly living and bold, confrontive, forthright, preaching of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, that must be our message. Like the prophet, Amos, like the prophet, Neham, like the prophet, Malachi, we have every right to confront the sins of our society from the viewpoint of the Word of God, but not to engage in political acts of violence or overthrow or uprising or protest or revolution against the government.

And another passage that I would draw to your attention as we begin, is in Titus3. And, again, it's the same idea. And we're just picking up some of the things we briefly touched last week. in Titus3:1, Paul, again, setting things in order for the church over which Titus would have influence and responsibility says, "Put them in mind," or remind them, "to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men."

And then in Chapter3, Verse8, he says, "It's a faithful saying in these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works." So we are called again, to a spirit of submission to those in authority over us, a life of godliness, a life of good works, a life which seeks peace. That is the unmistakable principal with which we begin our look at Romans13. Now you can turn back to Romans13. With that in mind, we come to the text. And it begins with this statement, Verse1, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers."

That is the bottom line command given to Christians. It does not discuss their character, their qualifications, whether they're good or bad, whether they were elected or appointed, whether it is a republic or a monarchy. It doesn't discuss any of that. It says we are to be subject. It is remarkable to me that in Matthew23, our Lord spoke to the people in the temple setting, and He said, "The scribes and the Pharoses sit in Moses' seat. And whatever they show unto you to do, do it." They have a God-given place of authority.

He says, "Do what they tell you to do. Just don't be like them." They were hypocrites. But their authority is granted by God, even though they were perverse men in their own hearts. Now I'm amazed that some people, in spite of the clarity of this command, persist in disobeying it, not only in our society and in our culture, but in others as well.

And this week, I had occasion to read book entitled, *Bad News for Modern Men*. And in that book, the author calls for Christians to fight. In fact, he uses the word "unite and fight." He calls for them to fight using -- and these are the words -- "confrontation, activism, protest, civil disobedience, and uprising." In that entire book, from front to back, there is no mention of Romans13, understandably. If you're

going to take that view, you better avoid these verses. Jesus never taught His people to storm the Bastille.

Jesus never taught His people to revolt against the king. He never taught His people to kill unjust rulers. He never taught His people to march on city hall. He never taught them to barricade the administration building on the campus, to sit in to the President's office, to harass leaders, to violate law. Didn't matter what the form of government was, that was no issue. It's not even stated as to whether it's capitalistic or socialistic, democratic, or a monarchy, the matter is simple, we are supposed to reach the world.

And in order to reach the world we have demonstrate a godly, virtuous, peaceable kind of life so that what we possess and what we have is attractive to others. And if we are to let our light shine in a perverse and wicked generation, it must be the light of the glorious Gospel that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. now having said all of that, may I remind you of what we saw last time, that there is only one occasion tolerated in Scripture where we will violate this command, and that is when the government demands us to do what God forbids us to do, or demands us not to do what God commands us to do. Right?

The only time we violate this law, the only time we break this command to be subject to the higher power is when God, Himself, has called us to do something which we are being forbidden to do, or has commanded us not to do something we are being called to do. A couple of illustrations of this might help.

Turn in your Bible for a moment to Exodus1. And you'll notice in Verse15, the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, the name of the other was Puah. And he said, "When ye do the office of a midwife," that is when you're a part of the birth process, "to the Hebrew women and you see them upon the stools, if it be a son then you shall kill him. If it be a daughter then she shall life." Now they're caught in a difficult place.

Now the government is saying, "If a son is born, kill that son." This is the king of Egypt saying this. "But," Verse17 says, "the midwives feared God and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive." God blessed them. In Verse20, "Therefore, God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very mighty. And it came to pass because the midwives feared God that He gave them families."

Of course, what was the greatest blessing to a Jewish person? To have a family. And so they disobeyed because they would be in violation of a command of God. They would be murdering, and they could not overstep the Law of God. There was another occasion of this.

Look for a moment in your Bible to Daniel's prophesy. And here you have a very clear, precise illustration of a man who refused to do what the king said, because it would be in violation of what God had said. And you remember in Daniel1 that Daniel was taken in Babylon captive with other of the young princes of Israel, and several of them are named in Verse7. Their real Hebrew names are in Verse6, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

And it says in Verse8 that Daniel purposed in his heart he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's food, nor the wine which he drank. Now here you have the occasion where Daniel is instructed by the Babylonian monarch to take the food of Babylon and eat it. To do that would have been to violate that which he knew to be laws revealed by God, for the Jews had very circumspect dietary laws, and he would not defile himself with food that was not prescribed by God. And yet, in all of Daniel's attitude, there's a spirit of submission.

"He requested," Verse8 says, "of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." He asks permission. He goes to the one who is over him, over the king, and over him, and he seeks permission. And he gets into a little dialogue. He says, "Let's try a test. I'll commit myself to eating what I would prefer to eat, and after a period of certain days, you come back. We'll look at everybody, those who've eaten the king's meat, and myself having eaten just these vegetables. Ten days will go by and we'll see who looks the best."

And this was a wonderful and conciliating way for Daniel to seek to obey God without becoming abusive of this man who was carrying out orders from his king. And so in Verse14, the man consented and ten days passed. And, of course, you know the story. When the ten days were ended and the man came into to check everybody out, Daniel and his friends far and away surpassed all the others and rose to place of prominence.

Now Daniel could have protested. He could have revolted. He could have been respectful to the one over him. He could have badmouthed the king. He could have done all kings of things. But he saw to conciliating means to obey God in the midst of a difficult situation. But he would not compromise. Later on, as you follow through for a moment in the book of Daniel, you'll remember that three of his friends, of course, in Chapter3, refused to bow down to the idol image. And as a result of that, they had disobeyed the king. They were told to bow down. They would not, because they couldn't bow down to the king when God had told them to bow only to Him. And so they were caught in the same crux of the same dilemma. And they were true to God and they said, "If you want to throw us in the fire, throw us in the fire. If God wants to deliver us, He'll deliver us. And if He doesn't want to deliver us, we still won't bow down."

And so there was a no-compromise attitude. But there was a sense of respect in what they said in Verse17. "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. And He will deliver us out of thine hand, oh king. But if not, be it known unto thee, oh king, that we will not

serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou has set up." They did not speak any evil words against him. They were not disrespectful. They called him by his proper title. And they simply said, "We will not do this. But we are more than happy to suffer whatever consequences you feel are just for our seeming disbehavior."

And, again, their attitude is remarkably conciliating and gracious in the light of what they might have said. As a result of it, Chapter3, Verse30 says, "The king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon." They got a promotion because the king surely appreciated men with great conviction. He also wouldn't mind having people on his team who could walk through fiery furnaces. *(Laughter)*And then in Chapter6, we find, of course, that very familiar account of Daniel in the lion's den.

And now it's moved out of the Babylonian setting, and we're in the mido-Persian Kingdom. And by the way, I want to say as a footnote here, there is absolutely nothing wrong for anyone serving in a government position. There's nothing wrong with serving in a civil government role or a state government, or any other kind of leadership. That is an honored position. And Daniel is the single best example of that in the Scripture. And every time he was uncompromising, he got a greater reputation.

And because of his uncompromising spirit, he was constantly promoted 'till he finally became the prime minister of the whole nation, the whole Kingdom. It is an honorable thing to serve in government. It is not a dishonorable thing. Daniel is an illustration of that. But it was Daniel's wonderfully conciliating, and yet non-compromising attitude that caused him to prosper. You remember that Daniel prayed. And so those princes that wanted to get rid of Daniel got the king to sign an edict that no one was to pray to anybody, no one was to give obeisance to any other God.

And, of course, Daniel went on with his prayers. He went on with doing what he knew was right before God. And so he was thrown into the den of lions. But he was not at all disrespectful, as you know. In Verse21, just before God protected him, "Then said Daniel to the king," Verse21, "'Oh, king,'" what? "'Live forever. Long live the king.'" This seems a strange thing for a man about to be thrown in a den of lions by this king. But he understands that the powers that be are ordained of God. And he is submissive in a unique sense, and very trustful that no matter what that king does to him, he's in the hands of God.

God delivered him at the end of Chapter6, Verse28 says, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and the reign of Cyrus the Persian." Daniel's no-compromise approach, along with his friends, meant disobeying the government. But his attitude is a model for all those who come to that crossroads of having to face the reality that you can't do what the government says, or you can't not do what they say to stop doing. He never wavered from honoring the king, and neither did his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were never disrespectful.

In fact, just let me give you a little bit of a pattern that I see flowing out of the experience of Daniel. First of all, normally we obey, respect, and do everything in response to and to please those in authority. We are to be model citizens, obedient not only outwardly, but obedient in spirit. Secondly, we resist and disobey only when we are commanded to do something the Word of God forbids, or are forbidden to do something the Word of God commands. And those two things are illustrated in Daniel's prophesy. He would not do what the Word of God forbid, that is, eat a certain king of food. And he would not stop doing what God commanded him to do, and that was pray.

The third principal that flows out of it, even when government and the Word of God conflict, we should not disobey overtly until we have done all we can to try to resolve the conflict peacefully. Did you get that? To try to resole the conflict peacefully.

I will never forget in the State of California some years back when a group of Baptist Churches had their tax-exempt status removed. And they were slapped with large tax bills which they refused to pay. And some of those churches were boarded up by state officials. This is the State of California a few years back. It came to our attention when Sam Erickson who is an attorney in Washington now, of course, for the Christian Legal Society, was on our staff and here as a part of our church. And Sam said, "It is unbelievable that in the State of California these churches are being boarded up." And so he began to dig into it, and this is what had happened.

The IRS sent out a form to all churches -- a simple form to be signed. And what that form basically said was, "We, as a church, will not get engaged in political activities." In other words, "To keep our tax-exempt status, we have to be fully a church." Well, it's remarkable to me that the state understood some things that not all churches even understood about what a church is to be.

Now there are occasions when we do get involved in things which are political, like abortion and laws related to homosexual freedoms and those kinds of things. And there are times when we want to speak on issues that are very political, like capital punishment and dealing justly with criminals and so forth. So all we needed to do on that form was to say, "We will not engage in any political activities except for those times when the state is engaged in things which are spoken of in the Word of God. And then we feel they become matters of conscience and morality, and we have to speak."

All churches that wrote that, all the churches that sent that rather conciliating approach in had absolutely no problem. The churches that just said, "We won't sign your paper. We protest your paper. We'll get involved in anything we want," had their tax-exempt status removed, and some of them, because they didn't pay, were boarded up. Sam Erickson flew to Sacramento to talk to the state officials. He sat down in a meeting.

He explained to them that the intent was simply to say that there are times when Scripture intersects with the things the state does and so there are times when we have to speak on issues that are referendum issues or voting issues or issues of government. But not unless they relate to the Word of God and to our moral conscious, will we speak to those issues. And he said to them, "That's the problem here." The response of those people in the state was that, "If we had known that, we wouldn't have worded the form the way we did. We apologize." And those leaders of the state said to Sam, "We will never put out another form in this state related to this matter without consulting you first." *(Laughter)*It was simply and only a question of seeking a conciliating way to deal with an issue.

And Daniel went to the leaders of him and said, "Look, isn't there something we can work out here so that I can maintain my convictions and you can carry on with what you have to do?" Now that brings us to a fourth point that we learned from the pattern of Daniel, and that is that if disobedience is necessary, we must be willing to suffer the consequent punishment.

If we are called to obedience and our government says, "You're gonna be punished for that. We don't care if it is what you believe to be biblical," then we have to quietly and peacefully accept that punishment, just as Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did when they went into the fiery furnace, and just as Daniel did when he went into the lion's den. And all we simply do is commit ourselves to the safekeeping of the one who we're obeying. Right? And we couldn't be in safer hands.

But at all times, we say, as it were, with Daniel, "Oh, king, live forever." And we never have anything other than a respectful and honoring attitude to the authorities who are over us. This speaks volumes of the integrity of the Christian faith. And it also speaks loudly and clearly about the fact that Christianity is not a political viewpoint. It is not a political lobby. It is not a social perspective limited to some idea or some concept of social or economic existence. But it is a matter of soul salvation. That's the principal, and I've just tried to underscore it in many ways.

Now let's go back to Romans and at least take a brief look at how Paul unfolds the reasons why this principal is valid. We are to be subject to the powers that are over us. Why? He gives seven reasons, seven very logical, connected reasons. They flow out of each other, and actually, even overlap. And we'll take them one at a time. We'll take a few this time, and then a few more two weeks from tonight when we meet again. Let's begin with the beginning.

The first reason for this command to be subject to the higher powers, very important, is this, Verse1. "For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained by God." And so we say first of all, government is by divine decree. Government is by divine decree. Civil authority in any form comes directly from God. It's an institution like marriage is an institution. In a sense, it doesn't matter who the couple is, it doesn't matter what their lifestyle is, it doesn't matter the level of their commitment, marriage is an institution of God, isn't it? God designed for the passing on of society's preservation and meaningful relationships. And the church is an institution of God, and so is

government.

Government is an institution of God. Now notice how he says it. "There is no power but of God." Now that's to say this, there's no power anywhere in existence that isn't reflective of the purpose and will of God. Did you get that? That is an inclusive statement. There's now power anywhere that is not representative of God's authority. No civil government exists in any nation of the world, never has, never will, apart from God having instituted it.

Psalm62:11 says, "Power belongs to God." All power belongs to God. All creation belongs to God. All things belong to God in Heaven and in earth. The entire world belongs to God. Man and all of his social contacts, and all of his social connections is only what he is and relates to who he relates to by the creative act and purpose and will of God. He is imminent in the world. He, who created the world, controls the world. He manages the world for His own purposes. And he, alone, is sovereign. And anyone who possess any sovereignty on earth has delegated sovereignty.

God alone has sovereign rights, undelegated. So all authority comes from the Lord. It doesn't matter what that authority is. Now when you bring that into the area of government, we have to say that all authority is from God. You say, "Now wait a minute. Are you talking about Communist China?" Yes. "You talking about Russia?" Yes. And you can just keep going, because it isn't gonna change. All power that exists is ordained of God, and there is not any power that is not reflective of a God-ordained authority. That's just the way it is.

God is the ultimate sovereign. I think this is reflective of a thought given by the Apostle Paul preaching on Marse Hill in Acts17. He talks about the nations. And he says in Verse26, that "all nations of men who dwell on all the face of the earth," that is speaking of God, "has determined the times before appointed and the boundaries of their habitation." In other words, God is the one who has designed and created nations. The length -- that is their duration on the earth -- and the breadth -- that is their identifying and signifying marks. So the gift of authority is a divine gift. No tyrant ever seized power without God allowing him.

Now you're gonna ask yourself some questions. You're probably doing it right now. You say, "What about the cruel governments? How can you say that about communist governments? How can you say that about Adolph Hitler? How can you say that about abusive kinds of government? How can you say that those are ordained of God?" Well let me answer it by saying this; I didn't say it. I just read it. The Bible said it. So I'm off the hook, folks. This is not my problem. *(Laughter)*There is no power but of God.

And then the other side of it is, the power that is, is ordained by God. "You mean in our nation that's what it says?" If it is a power, it's ordained by God. Well you say, "What about the cruel abuses?" Listen, the cruel abuses and the injustices and the wrongs of governments are no reflection of God's

holy nature, and no reflection of God's holy will, any more than divorce in a marriage is a reflection of God's holy will. But marriage is no less an institution of God. And though there is apostasy in the church, the church is still an institution ordained of God. But the apostasy is no reflection of the nature of God.

No, abuses do not deny the sacredness nor the divine trust and authority in any of God's institutions, be it the home, the church, or the government. Frankly, men abuse all God's gifts, don't they? And wicked rulers are part of God's plan to punish wicked nations, and to allow evil to run its course toward destruction. If the truth were known, and perhaps someday in Heaven, God has designed by His sovereign purpose and will, a reason for every government that exists on the face of the earth. Some are for the benefit of those who have done well. Some are for the punishment of those peoples who have done evil. We cannot second-guess why God institutes a certain kind of government in a certain place.

God has ordained government to protect and preserve men, to protect their life and their property. To do that, there must be the role of government to repress evil, to repress crime, and to hold up and honor those who are virtuous and good. So Paul says, "The powers that be are ordained by God." The powers that be -- I hope you know this -- are not the will of the majority. The majority only reflects the sovereign purpose of God. The powers that be are God design. And that means any governmental power in any form.

So here, beloved, is Reason Number1 why we submit to the government, because the government is in place by the decree of God. It is the time for God to do in a nation what He chooses to do. It is expressive of the divine will. Sometimes He wants to punish a nation. Sometimes He wants to prosper a nation. Sometimes He wants to bless a people. Sometimes He chooses to judge a people. But government in all its form is by divine decree.

Now that leads us to the second principal. And, indeed, it is a dramatic principal. It is this, "Resistance to government --" here's another reason why we submit, "resistance to government is rebellion against God." That follows, doesn't it? Verse2, "Whosoever, therefore," obviously the "therefore" is there to connect it up with what was just said, "Since all government is ordained of God, whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the institution of God." That couldn't be more clear.

If you resist the government, you resist the institution of God. The word "ordinance" there, sometimes translated "ordinance" is the word, neatage. It means institute. Because God is the power behind all government, whoever resists the authority of government, whoever is anti-taso, whoever lines up against the government -- and it's in a perfect form. Whosever has and continues the permanent attitude of resistance against the government, whoever arranged himself against the government by refusing to support, by disobeying, resists God.

Way back in 1839, Robert Halldane, writing in his wonderful commentary on Romans wrote, "The people of God, then, ought to consider resistance to the government under which they live as a very awful crime, even as resistance to God, Himself," end quote. It's quite a remarkable statement, and one which I mentioned to you last week, is whole-heartedly ascribed to by Georgie Vins and those who have come out of Russia to tell us that the dear Christian brothers and sisters in Russia will make no resistance against their government. And if they are imprisoned, it will be simply and only because of their love and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It was not consequential whether the Roman emperor was kind or good, whether he was a persecutor of Christians, or a lover of Christians. It was not consequential whether he was elected by the people, whether he was appointed by the senate, or whether he took over in a military coo. It was not consequential worker the assertion of imperial authority by Caesar was just or unjust, whether he was wicked or whether he was basically good. None of that was consequential.

It was simply and only that government, as it exists in any situation, is for the purpose of God in that situation. And resistance and rebellion against that government is resistance and rebellion against God, now again I say, unless it is obvious that the government has overstepped its bounds and is forcing you to do that which is contrary and counter to all that Scripture indicates. God operates in the maintenance of government. We obey.

We honor that government whether the president or the governor or the senate, house, the police, whatever it is. And I'm thinking back, do you remember David's horror when he had occasion to kill Saul? Do you remember that? But he wouldn't do it. He just couldn't do it. He understood this truth of honoring the one in authority. It was so important in Israel to teach children this that the penalty for a disobedient child, one who was disobedient to his parents, was what? Death.

So government is divinely decreed, and to resist it, is to resist God. Now I want to take you to a third thought as we wrap up. Those who resist will be punished. Look at Verse2, again. "They that resist shall receive to themselves judgment." If you resist the government, you're going to be punished. That's the way it is. The word is "crima." It's a word that means judgment.

It's used in 1Corinthians11:29, of the judgment of God. But here it's used I think primarily in reference to the punishment that comes from God through civil authorities, through civil authorities. God has ordained government to punish evildoers. And if you resist the government, you're gonna get punished. Now, if like Daniel, you have to because you have a higher command, then you accept the punishment. But if it's not in that situation, if it's just a choice you make to resist, of course, you're gonna receive the punishment. Now that was true in the Old Testament economy.

If I can digress for just a moment to give you a little bit of an insight. Old Testament punishment is very interesting. If you go back to the Old Testament and see how criminals were punished, it's quite a fascinating study. We don't have time, obviously, to exhaust that study. But as you study the Old Testament economy, you see that there were ways in which people were punished. And let me suggest what they were, to you, just in general. Restitution was one.

In other words, whatever you took, you had to bring back. Recently our home was robbed. They took some things of value like a gold watch that I've had for years. It was my grandfather's. And they took some of the silver that we received when we were married, and they took some things like that. And recently the police called and said, "We caught the guys that did this. We know, because they mentioned this watch and so forth and so on. But they took it down to a receiver or a fencing place down in Hollywood, a pawnshop, and it's melted in the back and out the door before we could get it back. And we now have them in custody. One of them is released on bail. The other one's here because there's another warrant for his arrest, and so forth and so forth and so on."

They said, "We regret to say that there's no way that you'll ever recover the goods that were taken," which is not a big issue. But what I thought about was the Old Testament pattern of restitution. The way a criminal was punished was not to then take him and stick him somewhere where he's no earthly good to anybody for a long time, but to give him the dignity of working with his hands.

You'll also find in the Old Testament that punishment was invariably corporeal. That is, it was physical. It was bodily. It was a matter of whippings, lashing, so that pain came instantaneously, and shame was public, and it was now, and it was over, and you went on with life. You paid for your punishment. You paid with your punishment for your crime, and you went on with life. You commit another crime, you're gonna get it again. And, of course, if the crime was worthy of death, and there were nearly 35different crimes for which death was a prescribe penalty, you died, and you died very fast, obviously. So their punishment system was very simple. For any of the lesser crimes, it was corporeal punishment and restitution. For the greater crimes, it was death. And their objective in punishment was multiple.

First of all, it was a matter of justice. Secondly, it was a deterrent to crime. Thirdly, it was a restraint on criminals. Fourthly, it allowed them rehabilitation. In other words, you paid and it was over with. You didn't go and sit in some cell and learn how to be a better criminal and be raped by a bunch of homosexuals. And there was, obviously, in this kind of immediate judgment and punishment, a prevention of private vengeance. There were no prisons in Old Testament Judaism. And there's nothing in the Old Testament text to indicate that Israelites should ever have had a prison.

There's no command of God in all the commands that are given for Levitical social law, for the life of Israel, for them to establish a prison. They created no prisons. They operated no prisons. They were a part of Roman social order and other Pagan social orders. There's one occasion in Jeremiah37

where they wanted to get rid of Jeremiah. They didn't know what to do with him, so they wanted to incarcerate him. So they made a prison in a home, which indicates to me that they didn't even have one. So prisons are not that which is endorsed biblically.

Instantaneous payment of the criminal was exacted in severe punishment. Lashes and whippings, corporeal punishment, and then the opportunity for restitution, which restored the man's dignity. In early America, you might be also interested to know the Puritans used corporeal physical punishment. You remember seeing some of the pictures in your early American history books of people sitting in stocks with their heads and their hands and their arms stuck through those little holes. And we say, "Oh, how terrible. How painful. I've only been in church an hour and a half and I gotta stand up. I can't imagine being that way for three or four days or a week or whatever it might have been." They used corporeal, physical punishment. They understood that that was indicative of scriptural reflection. And where the crime was very severe, it could be banishment. And the most severe crime, execution.

Frankly, it was the Quakers who came along and introduced the prison system. The first American prison was what was called the Walnut Street Jail. And by 1790, the law had established imprisonment as the proper way to punish criminals. It is a very late thing, even in American history. Today, we have in the United States a half a million prisoners, and the highest crime rate in the western world. And you ask the question, "Does it work?" And we answer, "Of course, it doesn't work." Prisons are breeding grounds for criminals, homosexuals, brutality. They operate crime schools. "The American prison system," says one biblical write, "is unbiblical, inhumane, ineffective, inefficient, and idiotic."

We've punished, by the way, according to the statistics of 1982, 25 out of every 500 serious crime criminals; 475 are unpunished. The 25 that are punished, are punished by being put someplace where they sit for years and years. God has given government the right to punish. And now we hear all the time about advocating the rights of prisoners, don't we? So that prisons are fast becoming country clubs. And some people don't mind being there. They get free meals and they're cared for by the state and so forth. But in the Old Testament economy, the government had swift right to punish. And they punished corporeally, and they punished immediately, and they forced restitution which allowed a person to gain back his dignity and pay his debts. And the restitution process, interestingly enough, was usually conducted by assigning that man to a family. And he lived in that family and was cared for by that family while he worked out his restitution. What a dignified way to restore a man's character.

And so whatever the crime demands, the punishment was to be given swiftly. And you remember, don't you, the reflection of Ecclesiastes, is it Chapter8, Verse11, "Because sentence against and evil work is not executed speedily. Therefore, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." If you don't bring about sentencing speedily, then men will do evil. We've come to that place where it's

anything but speedily done in our society. So any punishment of an evildoer is a God-given right, given to the government. And when a person violates the law, they should expect that they be punished, because God has given the state the right to do that.

So human authority punishes violators. And certainly, you say, "Is this the human authority punishing?" Yes, but it's in a sense, representative of God. The instruments of punishment are human. The laws, the source, is God. now listen, do you see when this all begins to break down, when we forget that government is an institution of God, that the powers that be are ordained of God for whatever His purposes may be, when we begin to allow evil to go unpunished, then the whole instrument of government begins to break down. And I fear, dear friends, that politicizing isn't gonna change that. I think we're watching the collapse of our government. I think we're watching the collapse of our society.

There's only one way to change that, and that's not by political action. That's by the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Right? That's our priority. That's what we must be committed to. So we submit to the government. Why? The government is from God. To rebel, is to rebel against God. And to resist brings punishment. To resist brings punishment.

The fourth one, which I'll just introduce and we'll cover next time, is in the next verse, Verse3, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." And that tells us that we are to submit to the government because government serves to restrain evil. It does. You know that even a communist Chinese government restrains evil? You know that Russian government restrains evil? Any of the iron curtain governments that we look down on, restrain evil. Any government does that.

There's no government on the face of the earth, for example, that will punish you for failure to rape somebody. There's no government in the world that'll punish you for failure to rob somebody. No government will punish you for failure to murder somebody. No. even the worst kind of governments deal rightly with matters of right and wrong. I was talking to someone from Ethiopia not long ago, and Ethiopia is a country in turmoil, unbelievable governmental turmoil.

Revolution is going on in Ethiopia. And we would say that is the worst kind of situation governmentally. We're talking about the fact that what is the crime situation like in Ethiopia, and this person reflected to me that a missionary had said, "Well, three years ago, there was a rape there." Three years ago there was a rape in Adas Ababa, city of I don't know how many million people. And they said, "But there hasn't been one since because the next day, the guy was hanging in the marketplace."

Now you might not like the politics of Adas Ababa. And you might not like the style of government, whatever style it is over there. But that, like any other government, is in the business of at least knowing the difference between right and wrong. Beloved, that came in the fall. If you eat of the tree

of the knowledge of good and evil, you're gonna know good and evil. And even fallen, sinful people know that, and government upholds that.

And I daresay, I hate to say it, I don't like to say it, you're safer on the streets of Iran at night than you are on the streets of Los Angeles. Because if you mess around in Iran, you don't last very long. And they, at least, know what crime is, and they deal with it, even though we certainly wouldn't want to live under that kind of a government. So government is in place to restrain evil. And even those governments which we wouldn't want to identify with or be subject to, do have a modicum of understanding of right and wrong. We're gonna get into that in detail when we go in our study.

Well, I'll stop at this point. I feel somewhat frustrated because there's so much more to say and I feel like I'm giving you half a piece each time of what's in my heart to say. But I'll entrust this to your care and the Holy Spirit's until we can bring it all together our next time, two weeks from tonight. Let's bow in prayer.

Lord, we just know that in our hearts we desire to be what You want us to be. That's our deepest desire. We're not bringing some ulterior motive to this text because there are a lot of things that we don't like and would like to change. And there are a lot of dear brothers and sisters that we love in all the countries around the world that are living under very oppressive and difficult governmental situations. And, Lord, there's so many things we would want to change.

Something in us cries out against injustice and inequity and unfairness. Something cries out against encroaching power against the church. Something in us cries out on behalf of those in our societies around the world who may be oppressed and unfairly treated. And we would desire to see governments change, and their attitudes change. And yet, Lord, we have to hear what You have said to us, that the priority for us is not politics, it is not social structure.

The priority for us is godly living, peaceable living, a quiet life that exalts Jesus Christ within integrity and honesty, and a bold and forthright and loud proclamation of the saving Gospel. Father, help us to be faithful to this, and to know that whatever government there is is there because by Your providence and Your sovereignty, it is reflective of Your purpose for that time and that place and that people, and there is no power in existence that is not there because You have permitted it. And all power is ordained by You.

And help us as Christians to know that if we disobey that power it brings to us a just punishment, for that is to resist You, and causes us to be worthy of the punishment which You have delegated to that government. So, Lord, help us to be model citizens, who, with our well doing will silence the ignorance of foolish men. May the world never see us a politically active group, as a group that takes a certain social view, or a group with a certain kind of philosophy of leadership, a philosophy of ruling. But may they see us as distinctly Christian, reflecting the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, the truth of the

Word of God. and may it be, oh Lord, that when those times come when Your children must go against the government because You have commanded us to do so, may we do so with a gracious spirit, with a spirit that is willing to take whatever punishment is to come, committing ourselves to the care of the one who cares for us, our own God and Heavenly Father.

And may we at all times, show respect to those in authority over us, while being uncompromising in our commitment to obedience. And thus, may we bring great glory and honor to You. And may we prosper even as did Daniel and his friends, for Your praise in glory, in Christ's name, Amen.

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