

The Blessing Of Government”

Romans 13:1-10

September 6, 2020

It was late in the football game, the home team was losing by 4 points, and they had the ball at their own 1-yard line (99 yards away from scoring the winning touchdown). On first down the quarterback threw the ball to an open receiver, but he dropped it. The coach called time out and went to talk with his young, inexperienced quarterback. He said, “Hand the ball off to Anderson on the next two plays and then punt the ball on the next play so our defense can stop them and maybe we can get the ball back.” The quarterback was eager to follow the coach’s instructions, so he ran back to the huddle and told the offense the plan. On the first play the quarterback handed the ball to Anderson, who broke a few tackles and ran 50 yards. On the next play the quarterback gave the ball to Anderson again and to the coach’s surprise he ran for 45 yards, down to the 4-yard line. The fans were going wild, feeling like the next play their team would score a touchdown and they would win the game. But the coach could hardly believe his eyes when on the next play he saw the young quarterback follow his instructions by punting the ball away out of the end zone, which resulted in the ball being given to the visiting team on the 20-yard line. The coach was furious as the young quarterback came off the field and he asked, “What in the world were you thinking by punting the ball?” The quarterback said, “I was thinking that our coach is not very smart as I followed your instructions.”

It is an election year, we are in a pandemic, so we hear a lot about our government authorities, but many times we may think that the authorities in our government are not very smart as we try to follow their instructions. However, Paul tells us in our second lesson for today that they are appointed by God to be a blessing to us so we must obey them. Now I realize that may be hard to believe – government a blessing? Really? How could a government that takes plenty of my money in taxes be a blessing? Well, let’s take a moment to think about what the government does for us. We have state and federal highways. The government provides libraries, schools, and universities. Those in authority provide law and order through police departments and the justice system. We have fire protection. We have the freedom to worship and practice our religion. And those in authority maintain a military to protect our borders from invasion. No, the government doesn’t do these things perfectly, but we submit to the governing authorities, from our President down to the road construction workers, because God blesses us through them.

But what about bad government? We certainly don’t need to give them our respect do we? Yes, we do, because our second lesson for today tells us, “The authorities that exist have been established by God.” Does this mean that God was responsible for the power of the communists who tried to silence the spread of the Gospel? What about Adolf Hitler or Saddam Hussein or others? Yes, God established the authority of those leaders, including Emperor Nero who was in charge of Rome at the time Paul wrote this text. Nero had his own mother killed and he was known to burn Christians alive. But Paul says that even such bad authorities are to be obeyed and given respect. Of course, if these governments should tell us to do something that is sinful, then we must disobey as it says in the book of Acts.

However, it is not right for us to disobey or even disrespect a governing official because we think he or she is not very smart. To think that way is to say that God didn’t know what He was doing when He allowed those people to take power. Granted, I’m not saying that Hitler, Saddam Hussein, or Nero ruled the way God wanted them to rule. They clearly did things that were sinful and took advantage of their power. And God will judge them for that, but we still owe all governing authorities our respect and obedience.

Even knowing that God has placed all authority in power doesn’t mean it is easy to obey and respect them, especially since a national pastime seems to be complaining about our government or making fun of our leaders and insisting that life would be so much better with different people in charge. So instead of complaining about our government, why not do something to help improve it? Why not pray for our government officials and all those in authority? It doesn’t matter if we like them, we pray that the Lord would bless them and move them to act wisely. Paul tells us this in 1 Timothy 2 saying, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness.” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Why not willingly pay all of our taxes, so that the government can provide the services it has promised? I’m not debating whether or not taxes are too high or unfair. We certainly have the right to vote to change the tax system. Why not obey all laws, including traffic laws, no

matter how ridiculous we may think they are at times? Wouldn't these things make it easier for our governing authorities to serve us? I think it would and that's why Paul tells us to do these things in verse 7: "Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, . . . respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."

While Paul says we should pay our debts, like taxes, he then goes on to say that there is one debt we should never say that we have paid in full – and that is the debt of love. In verse 8 he says, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another." In other words, we should never wake up one day and think, "You know what? I've been kind to the people down the street long enough and they haven't been kind in return. Well from now on it's no more Mr. Nice Guy." God wants us to know that is the way the world deals with neighbors, that is not God's way. His way is to continue to show love to others even when we don't receive love in return. God's love and mercy for us are new morning, and they will never fail. So whenever we wake up in the morning God will never say to us, "You better be careful today, because you used up half of my patience yesterday and my love for you is waning. So you better do something good today to replenish my love for you." While that's the way we often treat one another, it's not the way God treats us. Thank God that He deals with us in grace so that whenever we wake up, His love for us shines as brightly as it did when He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay for our sins.

But it's hard to show that kind of patient love to our neighbors, or to those who hurt us, or even to our family members. And it's not easy showing respect to all those in authority. In fact, it's impossible for us to show that kind of perfect love, but Jesus did on our behalf. Just think of how Jesus endured ridicule and beatings at the hands of imperfect rulers like Pontius Pilate. Yet Jesus showed him respect and honor, because He knew that His heavenly Father had placed Pilate in that position of authority. Think also of how Jesus showed unending love for those around Him. Even though many people mocked and rejected Him while He hung in agony on the cross, Jesus prayed to His Heavenly Father to forgive them. Jesus' perfect love and His obedience to His Father's will that He die on the cross for our sins, opens the door to heaven for us by washing us clean of our sins. So it should also motivate us to show love to all in our community, including those in positions of authority.

So whether a government is good or bad, whether or not our candidate is elected, whether we agree with the government or not, we submit to the governing authorities, because the words of Paul in Romans 13 brings our thinking about the government in line with God's will. Paul's words let us see that our governing authorities are established by God to bring blessings to us. And that reality then should lead us to meet our obligations to the government. So may these commands of God move us to honor all in authority, to actively seek to help our government be the good government God created it to be, and to love all those in our community, just as Jesus loves us.