

Romans 13:1-10

Everyone must submit to the governing authorities. For no authority exists except by God, and the authorities that do exist have been established by God. ²Therefore the one who rebels against the authority is opposing God's institution, and those who oppose will bring judgment on themselves.

³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to evil. Would you like to have no fear of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will receive praise from him, ⁴because he is God's servant for your benefit. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because he does not carry the sword without reason. He is God's servant, a punisher to bring wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore it is necessary to submit, not only because of wrath, but also because of conscience.

⁶For this reason you also pay taxes, because the authorities are God's ministers, who are employed to do this very thing. ⁷Pay what you owe to all of them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed.

⁸Do not owe anyone anything except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments—do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet (and if there is any other commandment)—are summed up in this statement: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor, so love is the fulfillment of the law.

Established by God

I.

It had all been easy, really. The ruler ingratiated himself to the masses by doing away with some of his predecessor's excessive and oppressive governing styles. The early years of his reign cemented his place with many of the common people. But it was really just a ruse.

Only a short time after he came to power, his true self came out. He could hardly be called a beneficent ruler. He was not a kindly king. He was corrupt. He was powerful. He took control of *everything*.

He was compulsive and corrupt. He killed his own mother. Many people chafed under his rule. He enacted laws that were cruel and oppressive to certain groups of people. Christians were one of the groups he oppressed and persecuted the most. He extensively tortured and executed them.

His name was Nero. He was the Roman ruler. One could hardly blame any Christian who chafed under his rule.

This evil, wicked, murderous monster—Nero—was the one in charge of the Roman government when Paul wrote: "Everyone must submit to the governing authorities. For no authority exists except by God, and the authorities that do exist have been established by God. ²Therefore the one who rebels against the authority is opposing God's institution, and those who oppose will bring judgment on themselves" (Romans 13:1-2, EHV).

II.

Right now, many people are chafing under government. Several camps are raising their voices.

The first objects to rules dictated from on high which, to them, seem to be completely

arbitrary. Whether the rules might be good or bad is the subject of great debate at this particular moment. But whether good or bad, those objecting insist that these rules are being incorrectly dictated, since the legislative branches of government in the various states have not enacted them into laws; rather, governors of the various states have just mandated them unilaterally.

The second camp insists that these rules are necessary and for the benefit of all the citizens. Some from this camp might agree that the *methods* of instituting these social norms and requirements surrounding a pandemic might leave something to be desired, but the *intention* is good, and even proper, and everyone should behave accordingly.

Yet another camp points to ongoing racial injustice and demands a fix.

Still another camp uses absolutely any event they can find from any of those just mentioned—or any others they can find—and uses it to riot and loot and call for anarchy.

Almost always you can find plenty of people complaining about government. If you didn't find yourself in one of the four camps I mentioned, you have probably complained about other rules or regulations or laws that you have to deal with.

Do you know what? It isn't just the rule of some government that people chafe under. By nature, every human being was once an enemy of *God's* authority. We chafed under *his* rule even more than we chafe under the rule of a government we *believe* might be doing something against our best interest.

III.

It was for this reason that God sent Jesus into the world. Jesus came to take the punishment God's law assigned to us so that we would not be condemned, but saved. Sin demands a life in payment. Jesus gave his life as the payment for all our sins. Then he rose again from the grave; he *gave* us his own righteousness so that we might be seen by God the Father as pure and holy in his sight.

No longer must we chafe at the demands of God's righteous authority. No longer do we sneak off to do things we shouldn't. Forgiven in Christ Jesus, we run to God as children run to a loving father. We stand before the throne of the Righteous Ruler of the Heavenly Father as perfect citizens of his kingdom.

IV.

This love is the reason Paul calls us to obey those in authority.

"He is God's servant for your benefit" (Romans 13:4, EHV). Countless blessings are ours through the local, state, and federal governments—police and fire protection; utilities and roads; management of wildlife and natural resources; public educational systems; military protection; welfare programs for those in need and the Social Security system for the disabled and the elderly; and many, many other blessings, as well.

People can always find something to complain about with lawmakers. But let me just say...*you* picked them; or at least you had a hand in picking them. If you *didn't*, and you are over the age of 18, that means you failed to vote and participate in picking them. Shame on you. In this country, we have elections. We have the privilege of selecting our own government. Government is supposed to be *of*, *by*, and *for* the people. Government in this country almost *requires* your participation.

Generally speaking, if you obey the laws and stay out of trouble, government leaders, including the police, are there to be your friends. If you are a lawbreaker, you will face consequences. "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to evil. Would you like to have no fear of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will receive praise from him,

⁴because he is God's servant for your benefit. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because he does not carry the sword without reason. He is God's servant, a punisher to bring wrath on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13:3-4, EHV).

God has established governments among people so that there might be an orderly society in which we can live. Government has the authority—given to them by God—to punish those who do wrong and to reward those who have “good conduct.”

Obedience to government isn't just to be about a carrot or a stick. “Therefore it is necessary to submit, not only because of wrath, but also because of conscience” (Romans 13:5, EHV). As Christians we obey, not because governments may *demand* obedience, but because we have experienced the freedom loving obedience brings. We obey because Jesus has freed us to see God's purpose in government.

In his First Letter to Timothy Paul says: “First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all those who are in authority, in order that we might live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Timothy 2:1-2, EHV). Notice that frequently the Prayer of the Church has a section in which we pray for those who serve in government, no matter which political party you or I might like and support, and no matter which political party holds any particular office at that moment. God wants us to have blessings through our government, so it is only right to pray for those who serve in those positions of authority among us.

Paul finishes today's reading: “Do not owe anyone anything except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments... are summed up in this statement: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor, so love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8-10, EHV).

Perhaps your personal *feelings* about the current situation have to be suppressed a little so that you can “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

You live as a member of two kingdoms. You are a citizen of God's Kingdom, but you are also a citizen of the United States. The government has been established by God for your benefit, and for the benefit of all the citizens of this country. “Pay what you owe to all of them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed” (Romans 13:7, EHV). We all know and understand taxes and revenue. We can't get away from them. But don't forget to give respect and honor to those who serve in the government established by God. Amen.