

The Christian Perspective on Government

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I invite you to turn to Titus chapter 3 as we start this week and next to consider the first two verses that are given for us. One of the things that I love about verse-by-verse preaching is that you simply deal with the text as it comes, and you just trust the Lord that this is the passage that He has for us at any given time. It's not driven by the whims of the preacher. It's not driven by his personal preferences. We just take the text systematically and let God work in our lives through His Word that way, and that's what we've come to here in Titus chapter 3 in the first 2 verses this morning. Look at them with me as I read them to begin our message. The Apostle Paul says, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit to Titus, says

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, 2 to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

You have in those two verses an overview of how Scripture tells us to live in the midst of an unsaved and a pagan world, an unbelieving world. In verse 1 it says how to respond to the government authorities that have authority over us, and in verse 2 you see, more broadly speaking, how it is that we are to conduct ourselves as we live in a fallen and a lost world that is hostile and antagonistic to the very things that we hold most dear in life.

This is an important passage. This is a defining passage especially for Christians living in America. We need to heed what the Scriptures say to us at this point, and I want to tell you this. I've thought a lot about how to approach this material. It is a gracious providence from God. It is a very gracious providence from God. It is a blessing from God to this body of believers that this passage comes to us outside of an election cycle. We're considering this in early November in an off year for elections. And so, we should be able together to receive what the Word of God says without a built-in resistance to the fact that it has implications for a vote that we might be ready to make in just a couple of days. That's not the case. And so, we should have and you need to take the perspective and the responsibility to set aside your personal political preferences and just open your heart and say, "What does the Lord say in his Word?" What does God have to say to us about responding to civil authorities? Because there is no immediate national pressure on us to consider the implications, we can simply take God's Word for what it says, receive it, and start to filter it through our thinking. I'm so grateful to the Lord that He did that in

the life of our church, because it is difficult for us to think biblically about our response to government when we're being bombarded with political attack ads and mail is being filled with fliers promoting the views of candidates and all of that, as always happens when campaigns are in full swing. And so, beloved, especially those of you that pay close attention to what goes on in the political world around you, I urge you, I exhort you according to the Word of God that we all need to take advantage of this opportunity to develop long-term biblical thinking and long-term biblical attitudes in our hearts. This is a providence from God that we should take full advantage of.

Now, the Apostle Paul, let me just remind you of what was going up into this. I think the context of these verses is just utterly fascinating. Paul had just been describing the reality of redemption in the life of believers. As you look at verse 11, for example, he says, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness," verse 12, "looking for the blessed hope in the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior," verse 13. Verse 14, a great statement, a great verse about the reality of redemption. "Christ gave Himself to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." These are some of the loftiest verses about the reality of redemption in all of the Scriptures. This is a remarkable passage that we just looked at last week and the week before that.

Now, what's fascinating to me is that Paul launches into, from that position of theological strength, he launches into the reality of living in a fallen ungodly world and tells us this is what the implications of your redemption are. This is the implications. This is what you are to draw out of the fact that you are a believer in Christ in a fallen world. Here is what you are to do. Paul is speaking to Titus in the second person singular speaking to Titus in these two verses saying, "Titus, here is what you are to be teaching them and reminding them of in the midst of these considerations of our great redemption." What does he do? Where does he go from that place of the theological heights? What does he look out and command us to consider? This is what the Bible has for us. It's what God has for us. Paul tells Titus, in no uncertain terms, he says, "Remind the Christians to submit to their rulers and to their authorities." Submission. Submission in the midst of a hostile world is to be a defining mark of the way that we respond to the authorities that are over us. This couldn't be any clearer, not only in this passage, but in what we're going to see later on. Paul tells Titus, "You tell those Christians, I'm putting you under apostolic admonition to tell Christians that this is the way they are to live." The verb tense here, where it says, "Remind them," it's a verb tense that indicates that this instruction was to be a regular part of Titus' teaching. It's to be a regular part of instruction in the Christian church to remind us of exactly this point. And so, if it's supposed to be a regular part, and this is something that we haven't addressed here from the pulpit of Truth Community yet, our church is still young, then there needs to be a breadth to this instruction, not a hurried passing reference to it. This is something that God intends to be continually, repeatedly brought to our minds. And so, we will honor that today and next week.

Now, with that said, Paul says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers." Think with me here for just a moment. If Paul says, "Remind them," that means that they had received prior instruction on this very point. They had been taught this, and now, at a later point,

Paul comes back to Titus and says, "I want you to remind them. Call to their mind the things that they have been instructed about already." And so, there's this reminding aspect. There is this recovery of things that have previously been taught that is the context of this command. Now, for those of us here today in the 21st century, we don't have that prior oral instruction that they had 2,000 years ago to look at. That context isn't given here, but we do have scripture to inform our context. We do have the totality of the teaching of the Word of God to give us a perspective on why it is that we should be subject to rulers and to authorities and to be obedient as a defining mark of the way that we walk under the authority of civil leaders. And so, we need Scripture to help us this morning. Beloved, you and I both need Scripture to help us overcome our political prejudices, so that we can respond to the Word of God in a proper way.

Now, speaking very broadly, I've been in a lot of places over the years with a lot of different Christians. I'm not speaking about anyone in the room here today in what I'm about to say. I am simply making a general observation. It is obvious to anyone who looks at this with any degree of detachment and objectivity that many Christians are either very angry or very fearful in their response to what goes on in government around them. They are hardly models of the settled tranquility described in verse 2. Look at verse 2 with me again where it says, "Malign no one. Be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Now, there is a sense in which I'm very sympathetic with the realities of that. If you are plugged into the culture of talk radio, of Internet news, and all of that, it is going to stir you up and agitate you. That is the whole design of that entire medium is to stir you up and agitate you and get you upset. What we have to do as believers is to step back and say, "Okay, what does God's Word say about this?" without any political agenda left or right, nothing like that. We simply need to realize that our primary defining purpose in life is to be the people that God has called us to be. It is for us to be the people that Christ died and purchased us to be.

Let me remind you. Go back to verse 14, because this context is so very important. Look at verse 14 with me. Jesus Christ gave Himself for us "to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Here in Titus 3, we are getting an aspect of what Christ purchased us to do. What He purchased us to be. This is part of being a person that belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not have the liberty to separate this instruction out as something that we find unacceptable. We take all of the Scripture as a whole cloth, and we say, "Put all of this robe of Christian character and Christian conduct over me, Lord. I want to be the man, the woman, the boy, the girl that You spilled Your blood in order to make me be." We must view everything in light of the cross. We must view even our response to civil authority in light of the cross, in light of the character and power of God, in light of what Scripture says for us to be. And, beloved, I say this entirely constructively, sympathetically and with the desire that God would accomplish the fullness of the work that He intends in your soul: God did not save us to be angry people about the government around us. He did not save us so that we would be fearful about what the future holds. We must take that to heart and find our way out of the trap that secular media sets for us. We've got to get out of that trap and examine what the Bible says about the Christian perspective on government. And see, we're going to start here with this

basic premise: you and I cannot begin to think properly about the people who have civil authority over us unless we biblically understand how they got there. How is it that these men and women have authority over our lives? How is it that they have authority to set laws and to regulate things in a way that impact our personal life? Well, you must think beyond the political process that is visible to us. We must think beyond the layers of government and things that we learned in government civics classes over the years and things like that. We, as Christians, have the blessed privilege and the important responsibility to look beyond that to see what Scripture says about the nature of civil authority and how it is that they got there, because if you are mindful of how they got there, biblically speaking, it will totally transform your perspective on the way that you want to respond to them.

So, we're going to break this down in two steps here this morning. How has it ever been throughout the course of time that anyone had authority over other people? Well, point number one, here this morning, if you're taking notes. You must start from this premise: God rules over rulers. God rules over rulers. Jesus Christ is the King of kings. He is the King over every other king. He is the Lord over every other lord, small "I" there at the end. And so, we have to start at this biblical principle that is taught, is a prominent thread, throughout all of Scripture. God rules over earthly rulers. What is it that gives us the perspective to submit to authorities with whom we disagree? What is it that gives us the perspective to defer to people who in their own human lives may not be worthy of that kind of respect and deference? What is it that defines our ability to honor this command to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient? Where do we get the perspective that lets us do that with joy and without fear, to do it gladly without anger, to do it in trust, and not in disobedience? Well, it helps to realize that at any given time in your life, at any given time in any human society, the rulers that have authority have that authority because God has given it to them. That is the clear teaching and the unavoidable teaching of Scripture. We divorce our consideration of this point from any considerations of policy. We divorce it from any consideration of good and evil. We divorce it from any sense of conservative versus liberal. We just want to see, beloved, all we want to see right now is what does Scripture say? What does the Bible say about how human authorities got into the position that they have? That's all we care about right now, because that's going to be the defining perspective from which we respond.

Now, here's something that I like to do. Don't get to do it as often as I would like, but I like to talk about the way that we think. We need to know how to think. We need to know how to approach an issue, so that we will come to the right conclusion. Here in this issue, and in any manner of thinking really, you start from the broadest, biggest, biblical principles, the most overarching ones, and then you establish that, and then you establish a framework, and then you work into progressively smaller principles that all flow from that one great principle, and it drives you to conclusions that are unavoidable. If we simply started about trying to decide whether we like this law or that, we're going to go badly astray, because your desires and your thinking about that particular issue or that particular leader is going to define the way that you want to respond. You have to step away from all of that, beloved, and think about biblical principles that establish the context through which you interpret everything else. So, that's what we're going to try to

do here. Start broad. Start working our way in, so that we understand the reason that we honor this command from Titus 3.

God rules over rulers. I'm going to give you three sub points here to shape our thinking, so that we can respond to God's Word properly here. God rules over rulers. Broadest principle of all is the sub point of that. Point number 1.1: God is sovereign over all. God rules over everything. There is not a molecule in the universe that is outside His sovereignty. He rules over all, and that has implications for us. Human history unfolds according to the plan of God. He works everything that happens to accomplish His will. We're talking in the broadest possible sense. Turn to Psalm 103. We're just going to touch a couple of verses on all of these points. Psalm 103 verse 19. We're just going to touch some of the points to give us the perspective that we need. As you read through the Old Testament you see again and again statements about how God raised up rulers and cast them down. He raised up Assyria to judge the northern kingdom of Israel. He raised up Babylon to judge the southern kingdom of Judah. Whole seasons of world history were just operating at the command of God. And that's because He's sovereign over all. Look at Psalm 103 verse 19. "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all." And so, we respond to that in verse 20. "Bless the Lord, you His angels mighty in strength, who perform His Word, obeying the voice of His Word. Bless the Lord, all you hosts, you who serve Him doing His will. Bless the Lord, all you works of His in all places of His dominion." And everywhere is the realm of His dominion, because His sovereignty rules over all. "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" And so, when we say that God rules over rulers, we're simply making an application of the fact that God rules over everything without exception. That the holy, righteous, gracious God of the Bible is the God who is sovereign over all and nothing happens outside of the will that He intended. Nothing happens outside of what He prescribed the course of human history to be like. And His sovereignty is so great, it is so vast, it is so unlimited that it even transcends the fact that men disobey His moral commands. He covers it all. He directs it all. Joseph said in Genesis 50:20. "You meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good." And so, we must have, if we are going to be Christians at all with a biblical mindset at all, we must have this vast respect, this vast deference that without qualification affirms that God is over all. He is sovereign over everything.

Turn to the book of Ephesians in the New Testament. Ephesians chapter 1. And don't let the little three letter words escape your attention. We must view the world from the perspective of Scripture, not according to the limited slice that we see in time and space of our own lives. Look at verse 11. Paul says "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who," describing this great God of the Bible, "according to His purpose who," Who what? What does he do? "He works all things after the counsel of His will." God is working through everything that happens. He is working in everything that happens. He says, "I know the end from the beginning." And the way that He can know the end from the beginning is because He's directing everything in between to accomplish His purpose.

Beloved, we must have an exalted view of the sovereignty of God if we're going to begin to understand how we should live life here in this world. That's the broadest perspective.

God is sovereign over all. Well, okay, that means we can probably make some applications of that to what we see going on around us. We can. Scripture teaches us, secondly, that God is sovereign over the rise of leaders. God is sovereign over all. Secondly, God is sovereign over the rise of leaders. Of course He is. If he's sovereign over all, then He is going to be sovereign under a smaller domain about who has authority in human government. Look at the book of Daniel chapter 2. It could not be more clear. Daniel in the Old Testament just after the book of Ezekiel. We saw that the Psalmist responded to the statement of the sovereignty of God over all, "Bless the Lord." This is what the sovereignty of God does, it drives you to worship. It drives you to honor Him. It drives you to fear Him, because when we contemplate the sovereignty of God we're mindful of the fact that we're in the presence of a God who has power that transcends the wildest things that our imagination could ever design. Even as we meet in this particular facility, we remember that, week by week, we remember that He created the worlds out of nothing by the power of His spoken word. That's power! That's sovereignty! That's absolute control! We honor that. We remember that in the way that we respond to life.

And so, we say God is sovereign over the rise of leaders, verse 20 of Daniel chapter 2. Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed for ever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs. He removes kings, and He establishes Kings. He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding." There it is, beloved. "He removes kings, and He establishes them." He may not always put into power the people that we would personally choose, but to the Christian that is irrelevant. That doesn't matter, because it is a subset of the greater reality that God is over all, because He is sovereign, because the universe belongs to Him. The world is His and all that it contains. It is His prerogative to establish in authority those that He chooses to put there. And whether it's by genealogical succession in some countries, whether it's by democratic elections in other places of the world, God is using those various means to establish precisely the authority that He wants over a given round at a given time. He establishes rulers. He removes kings, and He establishes kings.

Now, beloved, step back with me. I've preached in places where there was an open baptistery right behind the pulpit, and so I always had to be careful, and I still think of it from time to time, step back with me. I can only step back a little bit, and then, you know, disaster was just inches away. So, I like to just physically step back, give us a little bit of a breather, so that we're able to process what God's Word is saying to us. God is sovereign over all. He's in control. He determines what happens. God is sovereign over the rise of human leaders, whatever level of authority you want to think about, the highest level, the most local municipal level. That means something for us as we think about it, as we look at the world around us, as we look at policies and politics and all of that. We must have this crucial thought in our mind: no one has obtained a position of human authority anywhere in the universe during the course of history, nor will they ever, no one has obtained a position of power apart from the guiding hand of the God of the Bible. And once they get there it brings us to a third point: God is sovereign over the hearts of leaders. Scripture is so clear on this. God is sovereign over the hearts of leaders. And notice what we're shaping up here. Notice the way the context informs us. God is

sovereign over all. God is sovereign over the rise of leaders. Once they get there, once God establishes them, He doesn't surrender His authority, He doesn't surrender His dominion over them. Their hearts belong to Him, and He is able to direct them according to what He wants. Look at Proverbs chapter 21. When I say their hearts belong to Him, I'm not talking about in the sense that the hearts of Christians belong to Him out of loyalty and redemption. They belong to Him in the sense that He is sovereign over them. He directs their hearts to accomplish His purposes. Proverbs chapter 21 verse 1. Turn there with me. Proverbs 21 verse 1. "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever He wishes." You turn on a faucet, you put your hand under it, you direct the water one way. You put your hand the other direction, it sends it the other way. That is exactly like the way that God directs the hearts of human leaders to achieve His purposes. They cannot operate outside of His sovereign work in their situation.

Now, this has been a very modest survey without much detail. I understand that. But God is sovereign over all. He's sovereign over the rise of human leaders. He's sovereign over the direction of their hearts, even. Sometimes, as with Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, He allows them to pursue a course of sin for the purpose of displaying His greater glory down the road. He lets hardened leaders oppose Him, only so that as they rise to the greatness of power, ultimately, He displays His even greater power when He brings them down. We simply have to think about the course of world events from this great perspective. God allows sin to go on for a time, because it is going to achieve a greater purpose that will be displayed yet to come. He allows rulers who are unrighteous to have their position, sometimes simply because He's going to achieve greater things down the road. The end of history will show conclusively that at the final analysis God reigned over all of it. We get to deal in time with some of the ups and downs, the vicissitudes of that, but don't ever doubt, don't ever question that the God of the Bible, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, is sovereign over all of it.

Now, that's kind of the theological biblical statement of it all. Let's bring it to today. Let's bring it to here and now in terms of the way that we think about the world around us. Somehow, you and I have to grasp the fact, we have to embrace the fact that God has appointed our existing leaders for this time in our lives. That's the only conclusion that you can draw from it. God establishes rulers according to His will. He directs the course of events. All things, He's working it all to accomplish His predetermined ends. Let's take a little bit different approach here, He formed you in your mother's womb at just precisely the time that He did. That means that He appointed you to live in this particular time during this course of your human life, during this course, roughly speaking, of your 70 years, give or take. Okay! Now, look! This is all undeniable Scripture. This is just the plain surface teaching of the Word of God. Now, put these two things together. God is sovereign over the realm of human authority. He is sovereign over the days of your life, and He had enough capacity in His mind and power to put those two things together to intersect your life now with the human leaders that He appointed for this particular time and place. You know what that means? That means that He's appointed exactly these leaders for exactly us at exactly this time. Whether you want to think about that at a local,

state, national, or world level, it doesn't matter. That's not even what I'm talking about. We're simply talking about the reality that God rules over rulers.

Listen, that is sobering. That is mysterious in the sense it is totally beyond our comprehension to understand how He does that, and it is encouraging all at the same time. We are walking in the midst of such profound, transcendent truths that it should humble us and quiet us. And rather than immediately voicing objections about what about this man or that, forget the human rulers! Do you see the greatness of the God that is on display before you here this morning? That's what matters! The human leaders are going to pass away. Can any of you name the 16th president of the United States just like that? Or the 10th or the 23rd? We forget them. They go from the heights of power to the grave, just like the rest of us. I'm not going to turn there. I probably should, but if you want to read something interesting about the ultimate destination and the ultimate humiliation of human leaders, read Isaiah 14. And it pictures them going down into the realm of the dead and being welcomed by prior leaders who are there saying, "Oh, now you're with us too." Sobering. Mysterious. Encouraging. Because this means that we are not the helpless subjects of hostile forces. The same God who sent Jesus Christ to pay the redemption price of your soul, who knew you before time began, who secured your salvation, who will one day bring you to heaven and allow you to experience the fullness of the blessed appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, that same God is the one who is ruling over the political affairs of life. When you view it from that perspective, beloved, whether you're clasping in fear or clasping in anger because you don't like things that are happening, the force of what Scripture does, and it has had this impact on my life. I have a political background that most of you don't know anything about. The force of this biblical truth forces us to gladly loosen up the grip that we have on it, to not be so angry, to not be so fearful that we feel like we have to run and hide in bunkers someplace because of what we think the future is going to be. No, no, no! That is not worthy of the God of the Bible. That is not worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ to think in either of those extremes. Our God reigns! Why are we afraid? Why are we angry? We're not looking at things rightly when that's our response. You see, beloved, God is accomplishing His purposes without fail in every detail, even if it appears that evil is prevailing at the moment.

Now, that has ramifications for us today. That has ramifications for the way that we live that the Bible spells out for us. We said that God rules over rulers. Here comes our second major point this morning: God rules over us. God rules over us as Christians. Now, what we're about to discuss, I want you to pick up on this, especially those of you that have done any theological reading, the way that God rules over rulers and the way that He rules over us, there is a slightly different aspect that we're going to emphasize here. God rules over rulers according to His secret will. He hasn't disclosed to us, He hasn't revealed to us what He's going to do with individual leaders, who's going to rise and fall. That's something known to Him. It's one of the secret things that belongs to the Lord. Deuteronomy 29 verse 29. We don't know that. And He rules over our lives in that same way. But, as believers there's another dimension of His will, another dimension of His sovereignty that we need to think about, and what we're looking at now is not the secret will of God in the course of human history, but what we're about to see is His

revealed law, His revealed commands for the moral capacity, the moral conduct of His people. His secret will over world rulers, His moral will ruling over His people, that's what we have coming up. God rules over rulers according to His sovereign providence. Now, we are going to see that He rules over us and commands us and instructs us on how we are to live and behave and think. And those of us that have had the blessed privilege of being led by the Spirit of God to come to saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, those of us that have had the privilege of God working through His Word, imparting new life to our souls and causing us to repent of sin and to lay down our lives before the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the blessed privilege of saying in response to that kind of grace, "O God, how now show I live?" Well, this is part of what He's giving us here in Titus chapter 3. God rules over us, and what does He say to us in the context of civil authority, in the context of our world leaders? Go back to Titus chapter 3. From this great perspective of sovereignty over all, this great perspective of redemption of individual souls who belong to Christ, from this perspective of speaking through the Apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, giving commands to Titus that are to carry on throughout the ages of the church, he says this, "Remind them," Titus chapter 3 verse 1. "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, and to be obedient, ready for every good deed." Wow. Wow. God established civil authority, and then, as part of His design for the world, He calls His people to honor that authority, even if the rulers are not worthy of the deference in and of themselves.

Since we're in the neighborhood turn to the right in your Bibles or scroll down on your iPads to 1 Peter chapter 2. I want to bring this up, and then we'll spend a little bit more time in the passage in Romans. These are cross-references simply showing us that this is the uniform testimony of Scripture. Notice how broad the statements are. 1 Peter 2 verse 13 "Submit yourselves." Okay, God rules over us. The first point here, in case I didn't make it explicit, is He commands us to obey. He commands us to obey. This is how He rules over us in the realm of civil authority. He commands us to obey it. Okay, we saw that in Titus. Now, we are looking at 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 13. "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake." There it is. For the Lord's sake, for the sake of this One who is sovereign over all, for the sake of the One who redeemed your soul at the cost of His own precious blood, for His sake, from the perspective of vertical compliance with Him, vertical loyalty to Christ, for His sake, "submit yourselves to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God." This is the will of God on your life, beloved. Don't miss it. Don't let it be confused by the latest things you've heard on talk radio. Those things don't matter compared to the authority of God and the authority of Scripture. Listen instead to what the Word says. This is the will of God for you that "by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men. Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond slaves of God." Look at verse 17. "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." Honor the king. Give deference to him. Submit to the leadership, the authority of civil authorities. Honor them for the Lord's sake. Why is it that we can do that? How is it that we can let go of our claspings things in our hands? How is it that we can let go of that and gladly receive this Word and say, "I'll do that in response to Christ." How is it that we can do that? It's because it's what the Lord wants us to do, and

we are so grateful that someone intervened and saved our sinful soul from eternal destruction that, for a period of time on earth, to obey in response to our Savior's command seems like a very small thing to be able to do as a grateful response to the glories of salvation. It's a small thing to do in light of the greater thing that Christ did at the cost of His life.

Turn over to Romans 13 and see the command for the call to subjection, to obedience. It's the same word group that's used to describe a soldier's obedience to his superior in military authority. Romans 13 verse 1. "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." And here's what we were saying in our first point that God rules over the rulers, "for there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore," verse 2. "whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." Here's how you've got to think about it, beloved. You may not like the human instrument too much, but God put him there. Your submission to God, therefore, informs your response to civil authority.

Now, in the totality of the teaching of Scripture, there is a limited exception to that call to submission to civil authority, and you see it in Acts 5 where they said, "We must obey God rather than men," in the context of civil authorities commanding them to stop preaching the Gospel. You say, "I can't do that! I can't do that! God tells us to go. Christ commanded us to go. I have to preach the Gospel. That is not subject, that is outside the realm of civil authority to forbid. Civil authority does not have the authority to command us to sin against our God." But, beloved, don't even go there in your thinking until you have let it deeply settle in your mind that God established civil authority, and He calls us to obey it. Don't be looking for the exception to apply so broadly that it swallows up and eviscerates the primary command which is stated repeatedly in Scripture. Government may allow others to sin in ways that we don't like. That does not give us the right to rebel against government when it's not commanding us to sin in the same way. And listen, our response to sin that in the moral collapse of society is not political legislation. That's not going to do any good. Our response and our greater power is the proclamation of the Word of God. The proclamation of the Gospel which Paul said in Romans 1 he was eager to preach, because it's the power of God unto salvation. You can't legislate sinners to stop sinning. We're just thinking about it all wrong when we go that way in our minds.

If you look at those passages in Acts, you'll see that the apostles were still, even as they disregarded that command, they were still in submission to the authorities. When the authorities punished them, they accepted it. They rejoiced to be called worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. You submit to the authority. If you're disobeying on that narrow ground, you say, "Okay, I can't obey, but if you punish me for it, I understand, and I'll receive the punishment." And you're not angry and bitter about it. You just say, "This is how I live out submission in this realm, because God commands us to obey." He commands us. Titus 3. 1 Peter 2. Romans 13. And we don't raise up our hand against the government. Think about the way that David refused to raise his hand against King Saul, even when he had been anointed as the next king. He refused to raise hand against his king. So God commands us to obey. That settles the issue for the Christian.

Now, secondly, He not only commands us to obey, He commands us to pray. He commands us to pray. Look at 1 Timothy chapter 2. And if there is any passage that would be more inclined to bring shame on the existing church today, this would be one of those at the top of the list. When I think about some of the things that come out of the mouths of Christians about civil authority, this passage should humble us before our God and call us to repentance. 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 1. "First of all then," Paul says, "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all men, for kings, and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." He commands us to pray for them. These people that we so easily speak evil of God says, "You know what I really want you to do is pray for them," for kings, for all those who are in authority, realizing that God has established them. And we pray and ask God to so work through them that we might be able to have a tranquil life that allows us the room and space to teach the Gospel, even if it's economically inconvenient, and with an attitude of grace and submission.

Look at verse 8. 1 Timothy 2 verse 8. "Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without wrath and dissension." Beloved, it would hardly do for us to pray for these leaders on our knees and then get up and curse them while we're on our feet. God won't tolerate that level of inconsistency and hypocrisy in our lives. It's not right for us to be that way, and we need to repent if that's been the way that we've operated. If they're wicked, we pray for God to restrain their wickedness. And, "O God, by the way as you're restraining them in the public sphere, would you be so kind as to bring them to saving faith in Christ? Would you convert their souls, Father, for they need Christ just as much as I did." And we view these things through the prism of Scripture, through the lens of the Bible, rather than letting political commentators who are unsaved and ungodly in their own right, define our worldview for us.

Thirdly, God commands us to obey. He commands us to pray. Thirdly, He commands us to pay. He commands us to pay. Go back to Romans 13. I should've flipped to these points in retrospect, but that's okay. Next time I will. Perhaps nothing is so universally resented across the ages, across cultures, as the government's taxing authority. We want to keep our money for ourselves. I get that. I do too, as much as possible. But we pay taxes in obedience to God. Look at Romans 13 verse 6. "For because of this," because God establishes rulers in authority, because we are to be in submission to them, verse 6, for because of this, "you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them, tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." He commands us to pay. It's a shorthand reference, in some ways, of our overall obligation to submit to the authorities that are over us. We pay taxes. It's a Christian duty. When we pay our taxes on time and without cheating, we're honoring God with our lives, because that's what He's called us to do.

Now, fourthly and finally, I'm almost done here. God rules over us, and He commands us in the sphere of civil authority, commands us to obey, commands us to pray, commands us to pay, and, fourthly, we could put it this way: He commands the way. He commands

the way in which we are to do this. Go back to Titus. We'll come back to Titus and deal with the details of the text next week. For now, I wanted to set this overall broad perspective for us. He commands the way you and I are to be peaceable citizens as we submit to civil authority. Chapter 3 verse 1 of Titus. "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed." Notice how it spills over in verse 2 and the way in which this governs even what comes out of our mouths. "To malign no one, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Beloved, I'll leave it to your judgment, your assessment of the world around you, specifically, the Christian world around you, whether this is what Christians in America are known for today or not. When it is a recognized political calculation to deal with the evangelical vote and to have to account for that, both for those with whom they would support and those who would be trying to overcome that support, is that what we're known for, or are we known for our political agenda? Are we known for our character or for what the policies that we espouse? Scripture makes it clear. And any tenderhearted Christian who looks at this needs to ask Himself, "Is this what marks me? Is this what marks the Christians around me?" Not for the sake of trying to sort them out, but just for us to get a sense is this the testimony of the church in the world today or not? I'll leave it to you to answer that question. I don't need to.

Beloved, our duty as Christians to civil authority is independent of the man who holds the office. We honor them because we more importantly want to honor our God who commands us to be this way, and we do it gladly, not reluctantly. We do it joyfully, not with bitterness and resentment, because we see the world from a biblical perspective. We see the world unfolding God's eternal plan for the ages. We see our own sinful souls, our own rebellious selves before Christ and say, "Oh, God has been gracious to me, and I'm living for the world to come, not this world." And so, that changes my perspective. It changes my demeanor. "God, of course! This is what You want from me? You're not telling me to try to bring in political change through political means, but You want me to be a godly man living a godly life in the midst of an ungodly world, and this is how you define it for me? Submission, and peaceable, and gentle, keeping my mouth restrained from speaking evilly of others? That's what you want from me? God, You've got it. The only thing I want to do, Father, is I want to please you, because I am so eternally grateful for the fact that Christ redeemed me to be His own possession. You've made it clear that this is the way that You want me to be. Father, You have it. The government's going to take everything I ever owned? Okay, Father. That's what you want? Maybe that will just make me a little bit more anticipatory of the life to come. Maybe it will loosen my love for this world just a little bit more and look forward to what You've commanded me to look forward to, the blessed return of Jesus Christ." God intends all of this for our spiritual up-building. God intends all of this to be a blessing to us, and He intends it to be the way that we are salt and light in the world. We make our stand for righteousness, not through political rebellion, but in Christian teaching, living, and praying. This world isn't our home. We shouldn't act like it is. We trust God's wisdom in the establishment of authority. We look for the coming of Christ rather than favorable government as our hope. We honor leaders now, even if they're personally unworthy, and trust God for the outcome, because we are completely persuaded that He will care for His own. And so, we trust Him, forever, in everything. And that, beloved, is a good place to be.

Bow with me in prayer.

Father, we see the vastness of Your power, the comprehensive nature of Your reign over all things and, Lord, we fear because we're in the presence of such great power. And yet, we rest, because we know that if Your eye is on the sparrow, if You design a lily in the field to display Your glory, then surely, those of us that Christ died for You're going to even more greatly have Your eye and care upon. We don't understand, Father, why You allow some men to ascend into power. We just know that Your Word says that they do, and when they do, You tell us to be in subjection to them. Father, help us to let go of the fear and anger that that sometimes produces in us. Let us rejoice in Your sovereign care over all things, Your sovereign rule over everything, and respond with glad hearted trusting submission to You that plays itself out in the way that we live before civil authority. Lord, we love You, and these words are challenging to our hearts and lives. This has real impact on day-to-day life for us. Father, as we pray to You, we know that You knew that in advance. You've known that all along. And so, we commit the consequences of civil authority to You and look to You to shape in us, the people, the character that You want us to have. And we pray that You would help us to that end. In Jesus name, amen.

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