

14. We believe in obedience to civil government.

(Transcript of message preached by Pastor Rick Minett on June 12, 2005 at Grace Community Church)

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed from God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (Romans 13:1-7).

This is a subject that can bring to the surface a myriad of responses from people from every walk of life, as well as a myriad of responses from Christians. There are some Christians that see the government as good, some that see it as evil, and some who think it is a combination of the two. Therefore, the first question that we must answer is this: Is human government ordained by God, and if so, what should be our response? Verse 1 of Romans 13 says, *“For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God”* and verse 4 says, *“For he is God’s minister to you for good...”* Furthermore, I Peter 2:13-14 says, *“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors...”* So knowing that human governments are ordained by God, I want to address human government’s responsibility to us and our responsibility to human government.

Human Government’s Responsibility: Protection

Man barely got his feet wet on planet earth and what happened? He fell from grace. He sinned against His creator, turned over the keys of this universe to the adversary of God, and in the very next generation we have the first recorded murder in history—one brother killing another. Man shows up on the scene in the first chapters of Genesis and already by Genesis 6:5 we read these words, *“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and he was grieved in His heart.”* A few years pass and God is already sorry that he made us! And we so filled the earth with sin that it not only broke the heart of God, it also brought about the necessity of human government to form some kind of rule and restraint in order to protect people from other people.

Can you imagine what man would do to man if there were no legal restraint? Man isn’t “basically good,” as we here people say. Man is innately evil. Man is selfish and would do whatever was necessary to satisfy his selfish desires if there were no restraint. The Bible is resplendent with examples. For instance, what about the story in Acts 21 when Paul returns to Jerusalem? These are his countrymen, fellow Jews, former colleagues... I’m sure he used to have regular lunches and dinners with many of these men. They probably served on councils together, attended the School of Gamaliel together, served on the Sanhedrin together... But what happens? They see Paul in the temple, and verse 27 says, *“Jews from Asia...stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him.”* Verse 30 begins, *“And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to kill him...”* What were they seeking to do? They didn’t want to discuss theology with him; lecture him; debate religion with him—they wanted to kill him! But verse 31 says the word spread to the commander of the Roman garrison that all of Jerusalem was in an uproar, and verse 32 says: *“He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.”* And when you read the rest of the story you discover that the officers of “human government” protected Paul or he would have clearly been beaten to death by his fellow Jews.

Human Government’s Responsibility: Punishment

Paul says this of human government, *“For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”* 1 Peter 2:13 tells us to submit to governmental authorities and verse 14 goes on to say, *“...who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers...”* Scripture says that if we are doing good—we have no need to fear. But if we do evil—it says that we need to be afraid because a police officer is ordained by God to punish evildoers. And that fear of punishment is to be a deterrent to further evil.

Human Government’s Responsibility: Promotion

Human government is to promote the general welfare of the community where its laws are in effect. It’s to make the world a better place for the human race. And of course, some governments strive to do this and some, sadly, do not. Let us remember that there are three institutions that have been ordained by God in this world, and in each of them there are levels of mutual care, authority and submission. First, there’s the family. Secondly, there’s the church. And thirdly, there’s government. And just because they are not perfect, that doesn’t negate what God says about them and what God mandates in His Word.

I don’t know any perfect families, do you? I don’t know any perfect churches, do you? And I don’t know any perfect governments. I believe we have the best government on planet earth, but it’s far from perfect. There are a myriad of things that I

don't agree with and there are lots of things that I simply don't understand. Let me give you an example. A man by the name of Don Genereaux wrote this letter to the Secretary of the Agriculture in Washington D.C. and probably expressed the way that many of us feel. It reads:

"Dear Honorable Secretary of the Agriculture: My friend, Dan Hansen, over at Honey Creek, Iowa, received a check for \$1,000 from the government this year for not raising hogs. So I want to go into the "Not Raising Hogs" business next year. What I want to know is, in your opinion, what is the best kind of farm not to raise hogs on? And what is the best breed of hogs not to raise? I want to be sure that I approach this endeavor in keeping with all government policies. As I see it, the hardest part of the "Not Raising Hogs" program is keeping an accurate inventory of how many hogs I haven't raised. My friend Hansen is very joyful about the future of the business. He has been raising hogs for over 20 years or so, and the best he has ever made on them was \$422 in 1988—until this year when he got your check for \$1,000 for not raising 50 hogs. If I can get \$1,000 for not raising 50 hogs, would I then get \$2,000 for not raising 100 hogs? I plan to operate on a small scale at first, holding myself to about 4,000 hogs not raised the first year, which would bring in about \$80,000—then I can afford an airplane. Now another thing—these hogs that I will not raise will not eat 100,000 bushels of corn. I understand that the government also pays people not to raise corn and wheat. Would I qualify for payments for not raising these crops—not to feed the hogs—I will not be raising? I want to get started as soon as possible as this seems to be a good time of the year for the "Not Raising Hogs" and "Not Planting Crops" business. Also, I am giving serious consideration to the "Not Milking Cows" business and any information you would have on this endeavor would be greatly appreciated. And by the way, in view of the fact that I will be totally unemployed, I will be filing for unemployment and food stamps, and was wondering how long that process takes. Be assured, Mr. Secretary, you will have my vote in the upcoming election. Sincerely, Don Genereaux."

It's my understanding that this is an actual letter that was sent to Washington D.C.—and of course, it's designed to show just how absurd some of our governmental policies truly are. Is our government perfect? It is not even close! But even so, we have a responsibility to it.

Our Responsibility: Live Peaceably

2 Timothy 2:1-3 says, "*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplication, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.*" And one of the ways that we lead a peaceable life is by doing what Paul tells us to do in verse 1 of Romans 13, and that is, "*Let every soul be subject to governing authorities...*" Now that's a pretty amazing thought when one considers the political climate in which these words were written.

Rome was ruled at that time by a crazy man by the name of Nero. He had his own mother, wife, and a host of other family members killed because he was afraid they would try to take his throne. Also, he would literally boil Christians in oil, take the fried remains and as horrific as this sounds, hang them from lampposts and light them for his garden parties because they gave off a greenish glow. And yet, it is to this man and his government that Paul issues the command for allegiance. But please understand that this is not a mandate for blind allegiance to wicked men, but rather willful obedience to the command of God.

Now the question always comes up: "Is civil disobedience ever in order?" And the Bible says, "Yes." It is in order, if and only if, the laws of the state contradict the laws of God. In other words, if the government is trying to force you to violate clear instructions in the God's Word, then God is to be obeyed, regardless of what the state says. Let me give you an example. In the book of Acts, as the early Church was beginning its outreach in Jerusalem, the Jewish authorities began to oppose the preaching of the Gospel. In Acts 5, for instance, we have the record of such a time. On this particular day, Simon Peter and other apostles were brought by the captain of the temple and set before the High Priest and members of the Sanhedrin. The High Priest was very angry and said, "*Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine...*" And Peter's response, in verse 29, was, "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" Were they being disobedient to authority in this instance? Yes! Was it justified? Yes! Governments are to reward good and punish evil, but when a government begins to reward evil and punish the good, it loses its biblical authority and therefore, in those circumstances, there are legitimate reasons for not only civil disobedience, but to also seek the overthrow of an evil or repressive government. A good case in point would be Nazi Germany. Certainly there was nothing wrong with Christians taking a stand against the government. However, most civil authority does punish evil and protect the good—and as it does, we are to be subject to those governing authorities.

Our Responsibility: Pay

Romans 13:6 says, "*For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.*" We pay taxes for the services government provides us: To maintain our armies, provide police and fire protection, keep our roads maintained, so that our garbage is picked up, and for a host of other services. Personally, I feel like most Americans feel. I think we are over-taxed! There's income tax, sales tax, property tax, real estate tax, inheritance tax, and on and on the list goes. Sometimes you have to pray really hard to keep a right attitude about this matter. For instance, over the past few months I purchased three used cars for members of my family and I ended paying nearly \$4,000 in combined taxes. And what bothers me the most is that each one of these cars had already been taxed at least once previously, so it seems unnecessary, unethical, or maybe illegal to tax a commodity that has already been taxed once. Isn't that double taxation? And some cars are bought and sold so many times before they end up on the trash heap; they end up collecting more taxes for the government than their original sales price! That just seems wrong to me.

But do you know what I did when I went to the local court house and applied for my title, I wrote down what I paid for the car. When I purchased a Ford Explorer a few weeks ago, I didn't say I paid \$5,000 for it, I said I paid \$13,000 for it—because that is what I paid. Did it bother me? Absolutely! Did I think it was unfair? Absolutely! Then why did I do it? I did it because God's

Word mandates it and because of what verse 5 or Romans 13 says, “*Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake.*” I want to be able to lay my head down at night and sleep in peace; and most of all, I want to honor God in whatever I do. And one of the ways that I do that is by doing what Jesus said: “*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s*” (Matthew 22:21).

Our Responsibility: Pray

Again, 2 Timothy 2:1-3 says, “*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplication, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence...*” We are prone to grumble and complain about the things that happen in Washington D.C., in Austin, or in downtown Houston, but how often do we fall on our knees and simply pray for those who are in authority? We get so troubled by what is happening in our country, and rightfully so at times, but we also forget what Scripture tells us as believers. For instance, Philippians 4:6-7 says, “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*” And then there’s that wonderful scripture in 2 Chronicles 7:14 that clearly defines our responsibility regarding these issues, and it also clearly tells us what God’s response will be when we act accordingly. It says, “*If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*” So if the Church will walk in humility, pray, seek God’s face and repent; God will hear their prayer, forgive their sin, and heal their land.

Does our land need healing? I believe it does! I think Ruth Graham, Billy’s wife, summed it up best when she said, “If God doesn’t bring judgment on America soon, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.” The only true hope for this nation is through the prayers of God’s people, because the Bible says that the “*effective, fervent prayer of righteous people avails much*” (James 5:16).

Our Responsibility: Participate

As I’ve already said, America is far from perfect, but it is the best place I know of on planet earth. I’m thankful that I was born here, live here, and hope to stay here. But if I want this country to get better, then I have to stand up and be counted! I have to stand for righteousness—I can’t expect the world to. It’s only through His people that God speaks a prophetic word to a nation. And of course, there are many ways to participate such as speaking out on public issues, campaigning for a candidate, helping with voter registration drives, holding a public office, and much more. But perhaps the most basic form of participation is simply voting. Founding father, Samuel Adams, said, “Let each citizen remember at that moment he is offering his vote. . .that he is executing one of the most solemn trusts in human society for which he is accountable to God and his country.”

In 2000, only 53% of eligible Americans voted. In the 2002 midterm elections, only 39% of eligible Americans voted. George Nathan said it well: “Bad politicians are elected by good people who don’t vote.” One of the most basic things that we can do is vote, but moreover we should vote as people informed on the issues and vote our values.

In summary, I want you to remember four basic truths:

1. The reason God mandates that we live in subjection to governing authorities is because there is no authority that exists that God hasn’t allowed to exist.
2. The reason God allows human governments to exist is because of human rebellion, human transgression, and human lawlessness. If there were no human government, I can assure you that the situation in 2005 would be exactly the way it was thousands of years ago in Israel when Judges 21:25 tells us, “*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” Can you imagine what the world would be like if that were the case today? It would be “survival of the fittest.” Lawlessness would run rampant! Evil would dominate and destroy! I think James Madison said it well, when he said: “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. . .in framing a government which is to be administered by men over men the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself.”
3. Let us remember that regardless of who is in power, God is still in control. Psalm 62:11 tells us that “*power belongs to God.*” And then there’s that wonderful sermon in Isaiah 40 where the combined powers of the nations of the world are compared to God and verse 15 gives us the outcome. It says, “*Behold, the nations are as a drop in the bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales.*” And verse 17 says, “*All nations before Him are as nothing. And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.*”
4. Don’t confuse patriotism with Christianity. While we can rejoice that God has given us our government, we must always remember that we are citizens of a higher kingdom and subjects of the Supreme Ruler. And our highest calling is to Him!

Do things in Washington trouble me? At times. Do they overly concern me? Not really, because even though I live in this world, I know I’m not “of it.” This is not my kingdom—I am just a pilgrim on a journey passing through. At no time that I know of did Jesus tell his disciples to petition Rome, instead He told them to petition God. And that principle is just as true today. We believe in obedience to civil government, but our trust does not rest in Washington, it rests in God!