

A government surveyor brought his surveying equipment to a farm to do some work for the state and county by which he was employed. He knocked on the farmhouse door and asked the farmer for permission to go into one of his fields and take some readings. The farmer had no hospitality for any state or county officials so he refused to give the man permission to work in any of his fields. He thought that maybe the government was going to take some of his land for a public project. "I will not give you permission to go onto my land!" said the farmer. The surveyor then produced an official government document that authorized him to do the survey. "I have the authority," he said, "to enter any field in the entire country to do my work." Faced with the authority of the county, state, and federal government the farmer unwillingly opened the gate and allowed the surveyor to enter one of his fields. The farmer then went to the far end of the field and opened another gate, through which one of his fiercest bulls came charging. Seeing the bull, the surveyor dropped his equipment and began to run for his life. The farmer shouted after him, "Show him that paper, show him your authority."

I didn't tell you that story just to get a laugh. I want you to consider your attitude toward the government. Don't we have a lot of that farmer in us? I have to make a confession. I am really ticked at our government. I run a family budget where I am only allowed \$20.00 every two weeks for pop, atomic fireballs, and red liquorice. Yet my government in the past couple of years has racked up more than 3 trillion dollars in additional deficit spending. They are spendaholics. I would like to take these politicians into my office and force them into a 13 week Financial Peace University class where you learn to live within a budget. My attitude toward government is not good. In the word of God for our sermon this morning the Apostle Paul tells me to change my attitude. Instead of being ticked and upset he tells me to submit willingly. To be thankful, to be more positive about the United States government. This morning the Holy Spirit is going to work a change of attitude and action in me and you through these words. The good news from God, full and free salvation in Jesus Christ, supplies us with the motivation to: **SUBMIT TO THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES WILLINGLY!**

In the chapter before these verses the Apostle encouraged his readers to offer themselves as "living sacrifices to God." God had chosen them to receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He brought them to faith through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Word and sacraments. God's grace was now their motivation for living a new life of service to God and others.

Even in light of those wonderful facts these words must have come as a shock to the Christians in Rome. They were living in the capital city of one of the most wicked and cruel empires ever to rule a large part of the world. The emperor at that time was Nero. He took pleasure in killing Christians. In fact, historians say that he burned many Christians as torches to light up his garden parties. Yet, in spite of its cruelty, immorality, and persecution of Christians, Paul said to submit to the government in Rome. I wonder if Paul would have said the same to the people of Egypt with Mubarak as President or the people of Libya with Kaddafi as president.

Sometimes I think that we feel in the United States, that the best form of government is a democracy. But nowhere in the Bible does it say that a democracy is the way to go. As far as God is concerned, a government could be a monarchy, republic, dictatorship, democracy, etc. Every one of these forms of government, whether they realize it or not, is a servant of God. They were established by God.

But what about the wicked governments? Was God responsible for the power of the communists who tried to stamp out the gospel? What about Adolf Hitler? What about Saddam Hussein and others? Yes, God established the authority of those leaders. The fact that they as sinful humans took that power and authority and abused it is their responsibility. It is not God's fault. Or how about those immoral, corrupt, and crooked politicians that are at times found in our own government? Is God responsible for their power? Yes, God gives the authority to them also. So whether a government is good or bad, whether our candidate is elected or not, whether we agree with the government or not, we submit to the governing authorities because they have been established by God.

When Jesus was on trial before Pontius Pilate he corrected Pilate's false understanding of

government authority. Remember that Pilate said, “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus responded, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” (John 19:11) One of the biggest hurdles for us to cross in order to have the attitude that Paul described in these verses from Romans chapter 13 is to first see the governing authorities as being established by God. When the Holy Spirit works that conviction in us through the law and the gospel then we will want to submit to the governing authorities.

In verse three of chapter 13 Paul goes on to give us an additional reason for obeying the government under which we live. Not only is all authority established by God but the governing authorities are meant to bring blessings from God, “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good.” Paul takes us another step with these verses. Those in authority are God’s servants to do us good. They bring us blessings from God. I think I can guess your initial reaction to that thought. “Blessings? What do you mean by blessings? The government just takes my money and doesn’t do a thing for me!” But take a moment and think about what the government does for us. We have state and federal highways. It is the government that 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 freedom to worship and practice our religion. The government ensures free trade and fair business practices. Those in authority maintain an army to protect our borders from invasion. Consider what life would be like without government. Who would fix our roads? Who would ensure that our trash was collected on time? Who would make sure hospitals were running up to code? Who would keep the bad guys off our streets? These are all things the government takes care of. No, the government doesn’t do these things perfectly but at least it’s doing something to give us order and stability.

Although we may not like everything the government does the fact remains that God uses the authorities he establishes to bless us. Further, it says in our lesson that “the government has been given the power of the sword to punish the wrong doer”. That means the government can exercise capital punishment. If they find a criminal guilty of death, they have the right by God to execute that criminal. Likewise, the power of the sword means that they have been given the directive by God to wage just wars. The Lord uses the authority of the government to maintain peace and foster prosperity. Even if a government persecutes Christians God will still use their authority to bless believers.

After setting out reasons for submitting to the governing authorities Paul goes on to tell us how to submit to those authorities, “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.” The attitude Paul sets out here is much different from that of the farmer who sent his bull after the surveyor. This attitude toward the governing authorities and these God pleasing actions toward the governing authorities can only be produced in us through the work of the Holy Spirit. With a Christ-like attitude we will meet our obligations to the governing authorities.

What each of us owes the government from the list that Paul gives in these verses will vary from person to person. Some may owe very little. Others may owe a great deal in taxes or service, or revenue. The first thing that God asks us to do for the governing authorities is to pray for them. Again it doesn’t matter if we like the president, or the governor, or the mayor of our city. We pray that the Lord would bless them and move them to act wisely. From there the most obvious thing we Americans owe to our government is taxes. We may owe federal and state income taxes, property tax, sales tax, and many other fees. I want to make it clear that I am not debating whether or not taxes are too high or unfair. We have the right to vote to change the tax system. But we are reminded that what the law says we owe the government in taxes is what we owe. We are not to “cook the books” or “fudge” the numbers. For those who are self-employed or own their own business there is always the temptation to do “cash” sales. Then the person can pocket the money with no record of the transaction for the IRS to find. When we file our income

taxes there are many places where we may be tempted to stretch the laws. As followers of Christ we want to submit to the governing authorities by paying what we owe. We pray for the conviction and strength to do what is right in this area.

The other area where we may struggle to give what we owe to the government is in the area of respect. I know I am as guilty as anyone in speaking negatively about the policies of our government. I was actually cheering in my mind, that Congressman Weiner be thrown out of office for his Twitter explicit pictures. But I am called by God to respect these government officials as I would respect the One from whom they receive their authority. "Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."

Today you and I can find many policies in Washington that make us sick. However, instead of complaining about our government, why not do something to help improve it? Why not pray for our officials as Paul urges us to do in 1 Timothy 2? Why not willingly pay all of our taxes and duties so that the government can provide the services it has promised? Why not obey all laws, including traffic laws, no matter how dumb we think they are? Why not quit being apathetic, and get out there and vote for candidates who are pro-life, pro marriage between husband and wife, and pro balanced budget? ON this 4th of July weekend, we have a lot to be thankful for. No Christian is forced to worship idols by the government as in Daniel's day. No Christian doctor is under law that he must commit abortions. No Christian is forced to go up to a gay-lesbian person and say, "You have my support for same sex marriages. In addition, our government has done a great job in keeping the peace in our country and protecting us from aggressive nations in the world. Our grateful response. Let's pay those taxes. If cutbacks to entitlements need to be made, let's accept them, rather than riot in the streets like the Greek people are doing. Thank you God for establishing government. It's not too late for the United States. But it means, we need to get our nation back to one nation under God. You want healing and change in the United states. Then listen to God's advice in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land". Heal our United States, O Jesus. Please God bless America, the land that I love, stand beside her Lord and guide her. Amen...