

Owed Them
Romans 13:1-10
September 6, 2020

Romans 13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Last week, if you were following along with a printed sermon, you probably noticed a reference to the Gospel lesson which was not the lesson that I was talking about. I didn't hear about it from anyone, even I didn't notice it until I was in the pulpit even though I had gone through the sermon a number of times.

This week, as those words were read from the **Epistle** lesson, did you have questions popping up in your minds. One that popped up in my mind was what I had for the teaser for the sermon for today, "How far does a person go in being "subject" to the governing authorities?" Paul was dealing with a government in place that had as it's head, a Caesar, a one person head who one could see as lawfully in control.

I don't know if Paul thought of a nation such as ours where the governing authorities are under not only the authority of God but under a constitution and bill of rights that many think was developed, when they were thinking of God and His will for a people who wanted the citizens to have freedom to seek their own welfare and that of their neighbor who also was created in the image of God.

Why is it that one of America's great tenants is "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal and are endowed, **not** by what their government allows or demands but are endowed by their **Creator** with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.__that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed, etc.

The question is then, did God put the Declaration of Independence and then the Constitution with the Bill of Rights and other amendments in place for the people of this nation to be under its authority as our governing documents?

I know it may be a little hard for us to wrap our minds around Paul's day as he was lead by the Holy Spirit. He was talking about the government of his day and what entailed living as a Christian under that government.

We have this government to live under though. It is different. Our rights aren't derived from the government but from God. God didn't want the Israelites to have a King, He wanted to be their King and Lord. Yet, the people wanted a king so He gave in to their

desires, helping them to see how it was better with Him and yet by wanting a King, they in a sense said, God, we want you to work through a King like all the nations around us.

When this nation was formed, the founders wanted a nation founded on the freedoms that Christians have in Christ. They didn't want a national religion but a society that would allow the free exercise of religion.

That freedom of religion was just that, free to worship God and serve Him in the way they chose. It was not to be restricted by the government otherwise it wouldn't be "free exercise." Note, there is no mention of separation of church and state as a church exercising freely means the government has no business in the business of the church. A church was meant to have free reign in exercising their practice of their God given beliefs.

In the very first amendment, it goes on to say that people have the right to PEACEABLY assemble and the right to petition the Government, those who are under the constitution, to petition them for a redress of grievances. That last little bit of the amendment is where we all have fallen short in our responsibility of being citizens of this nation.

We now have a nation where the those under the constitution **in government** have abridged many rights we have under the constitution. We haven't petitioned, we haven't assembled peaceably as we should have and now, to do so will take even more effort in order to change things. Yes, we and those before us has fallen down on our responsibility as citizens, so that now we are living under an existing government existing that isn't fully living up to the constitution they have pledged to obey.

I know many of you may be thinking, why is this sermon so focused on government and not on Jesus who, because of the government of His day, found Himself before Pilate, where Pilate allowed the people to have their way, and had Jesus scourged and sent to the cross.

That government, under the Caesar was under his rule. He was there because of God. His was a harsh authority but in order to maintain order, He used force to curb evil in his lands and part of that force was nailing law breakers to a cross, a horrible form of death, to have people think twice about doing anything that might bring down judgement of that government on them.

You might say, "But Jesus didn't do anything wrong, did He?" No, even Pilate agreed that there was nothing here to warrant death especially death on a cross. Yet, Jesus was sentenced to death on a cross. Jesus did not resist the authority of His age. He even paid taxes with the coin from the fish's mouth.

If Pilate had honored himself, turning Jesus loose, wanting to do what was right, Jesus could have walked away. Yet, Pilate didn't. He was looking to how, the government over him would react to an unauthorized assembly where grievances were met with swift action and not a time to get together with the government to redress what a person considered wrong.

Paul talks of not owing anyone anything, except to love each other. Even with the government he uses the term "owe" for government. We are to pay what is owed, taxes, revenue, respect and honor. Yes, those who have been elected to serve us should be honored, respected because they have, by their oath of office, pledged to follow the constitution of the nation or state or city where they serve.

Paul closes out this text with a call to love one another and that would include those in authority. Yes, they are to be loved too. If we loved them, then we should show it but then because those in the government are under the authority of the Constitution, then we the people should point out when and where they have gone against their pledge to follow the constitution. The thing is, it requires someone to petition for redress and to know what is in the constitution so we come knowing what we are talking about.

Petitioning isn't complaining, we have the responsibility to make our grievances known to those who we feel have not done as they should have done. In loving others, sometimes it has to be tough love, love that confronts the wrongs, the sins of others. It is a responsibility we have, to point out the sins of the other person. How does Matthew 18 say to do it? **Matt. 18:15** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

I know this text is really talking about a brother when it comes to the church but how much more should we treat even unbelievers with this kind of respect and honor?

Paul finally boils it all down to love for brothers and for neighbors. I know some might question as the lawyer in the Bible talked about when he asked Jesus "who is my neighbor?" Isn't the government official a neighbor in a sense? Yes, I would say so and because we are citizens of the United States, we should use all we have to live under the law and if we feel that law is not right, it is our responsibility to petition, pointing out the perceived wrong.

I know sometimes when we are confronted with our wrongs, it isn't so easy to take. Yes, we might have many excuses but in the end, we should be happy that we haven't been allowed to continue in something that may be wrong.

As Christians, we should be the ones in the lead to show who we are in Christ. We should not resist authorities without doing it in the right way. Yes, we may lose our battle to have a perceived wrong, righted but even in that case, we can be gracious in defeat and suffer the consequences.

Many may not want to say anything, thinking it might only lead to coming under excess scrutiny from the government where as some have said, if the government chooses to use the full power that it has, it can find a law you have broken. We may not want to petition for redress because we are fearful of the authorities, especially authorities who might look for that law and utilize it to come down on us.

Why did Jesus not resist? He knew why He came. He came to die on a cross for our sins. His work for all mankind is the reason the cross is so prominent not only on our churches but around necks and in our speech as we tell of the Good News we have for everyone, especially for those who don't know Jesus as our Savior.

God has had us be citizens of this nation. Along with being a citizen, there is the responsibility to utilize all avenues of dealing legally with the government the Lord has in place for us. We know of getting flies with honey over vinegar, so as we deal with the government, show that love, honor, respect etc. all the while obeying the Ten Commandments that boil down to the two commandments of Jesus who said: **Matt. 22:37-39** And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

We have fallen short of our responsibility as citizens of this great nation and citizens of the kingdom of God. We like to complain but we are to put those things into action and if we don't, we should keep quiet.

Authorities have a responsibility to us and to the governing documents they have vowed to uphold and yes, unto God. They will be judged on their extent of fulfilling their vow.

We wonder how far we should go in being subject to authorities. The Lord has placed us in this nation, so we should live by the laws set in place. If we don't feel the laws are right, then we have a responsibility to point that out, utilizing what God has provided us. We owe that to our neighbor and to those who are elected to serve.

The freedoms we enjoy in this nation are because of God and His providing this nation for us to live and to be a nation that is desirable for many who seek to make this nation their home. Thanks be to God that we have the freedom to live and work in this

nation and to be witnesses for Christ who went to the cross for us and all people under the authorities in all nations throughout the world.