

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. <sup>2</sup> Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup> 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 you will be commended. <sup>4</sup> For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. <sup>6</sup> This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. <sup>7</sup> Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Dear fellow children of God:

If you list all of the blessings that God has showered upon you, what would that list look like? My Savior, my family, my church, my friends, my career, my country. That would probably be my top 6. Your top 5-6 might be similar. What would round out your top 10? How about "government"? Where "government" lands on your list of blessings is a matter of opinion. But God says, "Here's what's not a matter of opinion. Government is meant to be a blessing." Government was not man's original idea, it was and is God's idea. Our theme today is:

**Give thanks for what God has established:**

1. **Recognize the necessity of government**
2. **Rejoice in the blessings of governments**
3. **Respect the offices of the government**

**1. Recognize the necessity of government.** Whether your political views tilt left or right, government is necessary. The reason is simple...the reason is sin. If Adam & Eve wouldn't have sinned, then common sense really would have been common, and no one would be motivated by greed, lust, racism or selfishness. But today a country, a state, a city without any government would be a country, state or city in chaos. Common sense would not prevail, sin would prevail. In August of 2020 it isn't difficult to find examples of what happens when the rule of law is ignored and anarchy rules. For that reason, God established the authority of governments **Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.**

1: Who must submit to the government? Paul says, "**Everyone**". Not "everyone of the same political party." Not "all who agree." It's all inclusive, no exceptions. And Paul says, "Everyone **must** submit." Not "everyone should consider submitting." Or, "Everyone should submit as long as the government is reasonable." Just "**Everyone must submit.**" What is God's reasoning? Paul says, "**...for this is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.**"

Every governing authority has been established by God. **#NOT MY PRESIDENT** or **#NOT MY GOVERNOR** isn't part of our text or anywhere else in God's Word.

Whether a dictatorship or a democracy, whether a monarchy, a military government or a republic. And no matter whether it's King George III or George Washington, Adolf Hitler or FDR, Barak Obama or Donald Trump or Joe Biden. Whether Scott Walker or Tony Evers. Paul says, And then Paul adds this: <sup>2</sup> **Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.**

Those are strong words. Professor John Brug, a retired seminary prof says: **The man who rebels against secular authority is on a collision course with God himself.** Ask yourself, "Who needs that reminder?" How

about the rioters and vandals and looters in Kenosha or Portland? How about the drunk driver who has been charged with his 8<sup>th</sup> offense? How about the husband or ex-husband or boyfriend that is charged with domestic abuse? They are not just on a collision course with the law, but also on a collision course with God. And the Pharisee in many of us says, “I hope they get what’s coming to them.”

What’s more difficult is each of us remembering our own need for government authority. Perhaps our struggle isn’t with laws against drunk driving, but laws against texting and driving, or laws that require us to report all of our income, or with hunting regulations or daily limits on fish, or mask mandates. All of us need a set of government-enforced laws, because all of us have a sinful nature that so stubbornly believes we know best.

**2. Recognize the necessity of government and then rejoice in the blessings of government.** In verse 4 Paul says, **For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.** God’s servant for my good? How many times have you said, **“Our government sure is good.”** I’m not sure how many times I have said it, but here’s what I know is good. It’s good that a couple of winters ago when we had 20+ inches of snow, snowplows cleared the streets. It’s good that every Wednesday morning my full dumpster of garbage is hauled away. I know that it’s good that the water that comes out of my faucet is safe to drink. I know that it’s good that many of the people with whom I come in contact in health care, business, finance and service industry received a very solid education in a public school system, a branch of our local government. Has anyone every driven the Road to the Sun in Glacier National Park, or watched a herd of bison trot along a road in Yellowstone, or watch the sunset over Mount Ranier and said, “What an awful government...supporting national parks.”

And God, as only God can do, is able to use pagan governments to accomplish good. Think of how God led the Egyptian government to preserve not just the nation of Israel but the line of the Savior—our Savior—through a devastating famine. God did that for them, and God did that for you and me. Think of how God used the Babylonian empire not just to discipline his people, but also to preserve a remnant of faithful believers. Think of how 2000 years ago, Caesar Augustus ordered a census so that he could establish a tax base for his empire. God used that census to get a woman 9 months pregnant to make a 3 day journey to Bethlehem so that a Savior could be born according to OT prophecy. God led a pagan governor to sentence an innocent man to a horrific death so that Scripture might be fulfilled, and you and I could be saved. God used the Roman Empire to establish the “Pax Romana”—the peace of Rome, which allowed the development of trade routes, common languages, good road systems and safe travel by sea. This allowed the rapid spread of the gospel from Jerusalem throughout the Mediterranean.

When we realize that the government is *God’s servant to do you good*, and that the success of a country is inevitably tied to the success of its government, then it’s no wonder that God’s Word encourages us to pray for the success of our government leaders. Consider the words of the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Judah when they were led into captivity: **Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. Jeremiah 29:7.** Remember that Jeremiah was speaking to a people removed from their homes and their homeland at the point of a sword, a people forced to move over a 1000 miles away, yet Jeremiah didn’t tell his people to pray for the demise of Babylon, he told them to pray for her success.

How about us living in America? When I pray for my country and for my government, how do I prioritize my list of prayers? Whether we were praying in November of 2019 when COVID wasn’t part of our vocabulary and a contentious election was still a year away, or in March when we began months of relative isolation, or in June after the death of George Floyd, or this past week violence and looting came home to Wisconsin, that no matter what, no matter when, when we kneel and pray for our country, might we not kneel first on a prayer mat of thanksgiving? Would you agree that we are unbelievably blessed living in a land where we enjoy freedom of speech and freedom of religion, a country where our median income ranks in the top 10 worldwide? Do I recognize that my greatest privilege isn’t that in America I’m allowed to share my political opinions on Facebook, but rather that I’m allowed to share Jesus on social media, across the fence, across the political

spectrum, with all who need to hear of a Savior who offers them blessings far more important than voting for the “right” candidate.

**Today as we gave thanks for what God has established,**

- 1. We recognize the necessity of government**
- 2. We rejoice in the blessings of government**
- 3. And finally, we respect the offices of government.**

**3. Paul says: Submit to the governing authorities...**

**Submit.** Paul doesn’t say, “Submit to the governing authorities if you voted for them. He doesn’t say “The authorities that exist have been established by God unless you don’t agree with them, or unless you didn’t vote for them, or unless they aren’t reasonable, or unless that aren’t good, honest leaders; or unless they’re from the political party that I don’t like.” God simply tells us to submit.

And submit isn’t the only verb Paul used. The Holy Spirit also inspired Paul to pen these words: <sup>7</sup> **Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.**

**“Pay taxes.”** I’m not sure any of us enjoy the weeks that lead up to April 15. I’m not sure you wait by the mailbox with eager anticipation each December for your property tax bill. I doubt that you high-five the car salesman when you sign the purchase for a \$20,000 vehicle and see an added \$1000 on the bill. But not only does Paul in our text say, “Pay taxes,” we also have the words of Jesus himself in our gospel lesson for today. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” Pay taxes. Even if some of the tax dollars that Jesus and his disciples paid ended up paying for Jesus’ crucifixion. Paul says, “Pay taxes,” even if that money would paid the salaries of his jailors or end up in the pocket of Emperor Nero.

Of Emperor Nero. We would be remiss today if we didn’t remember that when the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to pen the words of Romans 13 Paul wasn’t living in a democracy. Paul wasn’t living under a government that guaranteed him the freedoms we enjoy in America. Paul was living under Emperor Nero, a madman who historians say impaled Christians on stakes, smear tar on them and use them as living torches. Yet Paul says offer your rulers your taxes and your respect. Isn’t there a rather loud message here for Christians in America during an election year? No matter how you would rank the 45 presidents in the history of our country from best to worst; no matter who you put in last place, he wouldn’t be as cruelly violent or oppressive as Nero. In 1 Timothy Paul says: ***I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.<sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Savior...***

In the next two months, pray that the candidate you believe would best lead our country in a God-pleasing way wins the election. But if your candidate doesn’t win, what would God ask you to do? Pray for the man who does win. Pray for his success. God would remind us that the respect we give to the officials of government has to do with their office, not their person. And pray that no Christian on either side of the political fence says or posts this: No one can call himself a Christian and vote for \_\_\_.

**Paul asks that “prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people —<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority.** Many of the same people on social media who post “Respect President Trump” 5 or 6 years ago had posts that showed anything but respect for President Obama. And some of the people who were upset by the lack of respect for President Obama now post: ***#Not my president.*** God doesn’t tell Christian Democrats, “Pray for Governor Evers and hate President Trump.” And God doesn’t tell Christian Republicans “Pray for President Trump and mock Governor Evers.” Doing so will only place a stumbling block between the gospel and those who need to hear it.

What a comfort that we have a Savior who transcends politics. A Savior who does not tell us how to vote, a Savior who was not a Republican or a Democrat, a Savior who does not bind the conscience of Christian voters, but a Savior who lived in perfect submission and obedience under the law of the land. May God continue to bless our government leaders, no matter their politics, so as his children we may continue to share the good news of the Savior with a world who so desperately needs him. Amen.