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Romans 13:1-10

Submission to Governing Authorities

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ 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.

Love Fulfills the Law

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet,"^[a] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."^[b] ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Footnotes:

- a. Romans 13:9 Exodus 20:13-15,17; Deut. 5:17-19,21
- b. Romans 13:9 Lev. 19:18

So how about that passage from Romans today? For all that the church talks about things like adultery and the many sex and gender related issues going on in the culture today. For all that we talk about lies and hypocrisy. For all that we condemn false pride, greed, conceit, and all of those other types of sins, this is one problem that often slides under the radar.

Being subject to the governing authorities. I'd say that usually works on a local level when talking about policemen and similarly authorized figures. Disrespecting them can have harsh and immediate consequences. I say usually because even that seems to be on a downward trend in many parts of the country. Lately, police seem to be caught up in all sorts of controversies and are under attack from many different groups. Whether they were actually at fault or not, people's respect for them has greatly diminished.

You can go back to the Rodney King affair a number of years ago, where it seemed police had overstepped their authority. Then, a few years later, O. J. Simpson, who was in the

news again a month or so back, was arrested. Many said right from the start that he was simply the victim of police harassment, regardless of what evidence there may have been. All of that has just been amplified around the country today.

Even those who might respect the police are a lot less likely to afford that same respect to higher authorities. If you are involved in the community you might know some things about your mayor or city council. If you watch a lot of news or are a political junkie you might know a fair bit about our governor and our congressional representatives. You probably know a thing or two about our president. But most of us don't spend so much time reading and listening to these things that we know much about them, what their stance is on major issues, how they've voted, what sort of people they are personally, might not even know many of their names. Do you know who Colerain's mayor is? It's a trick question. Colerain has a board of trustees instead of a mayor.

It's hard to offer any kind of meaningful respect to someone you don't even know. If you can't picture them, if you don't even know who they are, then they just become a thing. They are just Congress, or just the government, just the police. You can label them any way you want. You can insult them. You can protest against them. You can discount anything they say as corrupt, greedy, or just ignorant.

You hear the conversations everywhere. People talking together about the latest evils perpetrated on them by the government. The government wants to keep them poor and destitute. The government wants to take away this or that program they need to survive. The government doesn't care about them at all. The government is completely corrupt or full of greedy and power hungry people who going to destroy us all. Why should anyone respect them?

It's a habit we ourselves often fall into. We mutter against the amorphous cloud of people called, "the government." We have little interest in understanding the details of what they say or why they do what they do, much less get to know them as individuals. It's easier to revile them if we don't know them. We don't have to care about them that way. We don't have to respect something that isn't really a person.

The same mentality actually works on the other end of the spectrum as well. When we know someone really well, or at least think we do, then we can use what we know to demonize them. Someone commits some faux pas, they misspeak or are misinterpreted, the rumor mills start, the media picks up on the easy scandal story and suddenly everyone knows the politician

who did the horrible thing. Everyone knows he's a jerk and isn't worth the air he breathes. Now, instead of hurling insults at the government in general, you have a face you can put to all of the world's ills. Why respect someone who is just sending the world right down the drain?

It's just as easy to dismiss someone whose errors are out there for all to see. Why should you listen to what they say? Why should I do anything they ask? They can't really make me do anything I don't want to do. They aren't really authorities at all. I don't have to listen to them much less respect them.

All of that is bad enough, but there's an even more insidious desecration of authority that has worked its way into society. The most basic authority figures in anyone's life are parents, and yet parents, especially fathers, are the ones who are the most torn down. If you watch many of the major sitcoms or popular cartoons that are on tv, such as the Simpsons, you'll see a family with a father and a mother and a kid or two. Invariably the father is a bumbling moron and the kids pride themselves on not really paying any attention to him. Sometimes the wife does too. Whether the father is intentionally failing at his duties or whether he's just not very good at it, no one else seems to care. He is just there to be comedic relief and not really to be taken seriously. It makes it that much harder for fathers who do care to do their jobs and means kids who grow up without any regard to any kind of authority.

You see both sides going on today. People who are standing up to groups like the police who they think are all out to get them. Others are singling someone out, such as those who loudly proclaim, "Donald Trump is not my president!" As if declaring it suddenly invalidates his authority and gives you any and all rights to ignore whatever he says, law or not.

We ask the question, "Who are they to lord it over us?" The obvious answer is that they're people. Sinful people, certainly, but still people. Sinful people will do sinful things, and sinful authorities may command sinful actions from those they are in charge of. Though we must resist sin and not give in to any sinful commands from anyone, that doesn't mean authorities stop being authorities, much less people. We spend so much time griping over what they say that we forget who they are.

Even pagan rulers who attack the church and revile God's teachings are people. We are called to love our enemies, to pray for them, to care for them as we would anyone else. God has given his authority to some to maintain order in the world. In a world full of sin, where everyone is out only for themselves, God involves himself in the world to ensure it doesn't go too far off

track. Rulers and authorities are meant to be a blessing as they make sure gross injustices are dealt with and that societies are peaceful and prosperous.

Whether they choose to be or not, whether they are good and righteous in their job or not, every authority reflects the ultimate authority of the Creator. The Creator creates his world and brings order to it. How we treat earthly authorities is more than just an attack on his authority, it reflects how we treat him too. We disrespect and dishonor our Creator every day, telling in our words or actions what we think of his policies and commands.

Our attitude ends up being no different than Adam and Eve back in the garden. Though Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent, each was actually blaming God for putting them there and allowing it to happen. So it goes with presidents, congressmen, and especially fathers. We end up complaining to God for giving us rotten authorities and the blame falls on him.

Regardless of how good or bad our authorities are, we aren't exactly model citizens either and don't have a lot of excuses for our own conduct as we sow dissent and grumbling around us. Jesus, however, was the perfect citizen. He always helped others. He always paid his taxes. He always followed the law. Yet he died unjustly, by the order of the authorities.

It sounds like proof of flaws in the system; that the authorities don't work. But it's just the opposite. Jesus is God and God allowed himself to die at the hands of those authorities and he did it for you. Through you are rebellious and angry, though you insult and despise God's work and the authorities he has put in place. Jesus dies for doing what you can't and won't. He dies to take the punishment you deserve for the sins you've committed, all of them. Every time you rebel against God's authority, Jesus to take that to the cross with him. Jesus proves by his death and his resurrection that he has been in charge all along, in spite of everything we see happening around us. God is never without complete power over his creation, the power to carry out every good thing he promises.

God creates and God rules. He brings life and he brings salvation. He sets the perfect order in his creation to ensure peace and prosperity. God sent Jesus into the world to reorder the broken creation and allow us rebels to come home to him, with all of our many sins forgiven. Rebellion is punishable by death in most societies and it is no different with God. But we live in a world that God rules, and because he rules, he can choose to circumvent the law on our behalf by giving the punishment to someone else.

The law demands we die for our disrespect and rebelliousness. He places authorities over

us to care for our needs. Whether they do a good job or not, they are still the ones and they must be respected in their positions and by respecting them, we respect God. By coming to him and asking for his mercy, in his position as Creator and king he has the authority to set aside the law, to allow Jesus' sacrifice to apply to us as well and out of love for us sinners, that's what he does. We look to the cross and see the price paid for our rebellion and the love that our God has for us, despite what we do. God doesn't call on us to follow authorities in to sin, if they should fall victim to the temptations of power, but to see God's love for us in them as he sets them in their positions so they are able to bring order to the world and provide peace for his people.

Whether they are good leaders or not, good presidents, good congressmen, good mayors, good police, good fathers, or not, we pray for them, we encourage them to wise and righteous actions. We support them when they work for the good of the people and discourage them when they don't. We care for them as people who are loved by God, because they, like us, all serve the same God and Creator who rules over us all.