

## Treasure God's Authorities – Romans 13:1-7

- 1) Submit to them for your good
- 2) Support them with hand and heart

One great blessing we have in the United States is the separation of church and state. The church is all about preaching God's Word. The state keeps people in line. But when the two get mixed up, it's bad news since people don't get to hear about God's free forgiveness in Jesus. Nowhere do we see this toxic mixture more than in the times of Martin Luther in Germany. Church and state were so mixed up that you couldn't be a good German without being a good Catholic. Regional politics happened as much in the sanctuary as they did in the royal court. In 1523 Martin Luther wrote a 30-some page book called *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* where he lays out the Bible's teaching on God's two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of the Holy Spirit, what we call the church, and the kingdom of the sword, what we call the state. I'll be quoting a little bit this book in my sermon, but I encourage you to read through it online when you get home. Because in it Luther reminds us what Scripture says – to treasure God's authorities by submitting to them and supporting them.

Don't think of God's two kingdoms as independent countries. Rather think of a kingdom as where an authority has its ruling power like when Jesus told Pilate that his **"kingdom is not of this world"** (John 18:36). Jesus' ruling activity takes place up in heaven and in the hearts of all believers through faith. This is the kingdom of the Holy Spirit.

But it's the other kingdom that we're going to focus on today – the kingdom of the sword. In Romans chapter 13, the Apostle Paul gives us some details what this kingdom is all about. **"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. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 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. 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"** (Romans 13:1-4).

What are some differences between the kingdom of the sword and the kingdom of the Holy Spirit? First of all, there's the purpose. The kingdom of the Spirit is all about bringing people to faith. The kingdom of the sword is about carrying out justice. Second are the tools to carry out its purpose. The Spirit's kingdom uses the good news of Jesus in the gospel; the sword's kingdom uses the sword. That's why we call it the kingdom of the sword. If you break

the rules, the state has the right to punish you. Lastly there's the area of influence. The kingdom of the Spirit only involves believers. In order to have God ruling within you, you need to have faith. But the kingdom of the sword? That's everyone who lives in its ruling activity. It could be the laws of a country or the rules for a family's house. Luther sums up the kingdom of the sword this way – **“It is sufficiently clear and certain that it is God's will that the sword and secular law be used for the punishment of the wicked and the protection of the upright”** (*Secular Authority...*).

Yet for all their differences, both kingdoms come from God. And the authorities within them are God's servants working for our good. So we treasure them by submitting to them. As Paul says in the opening verse, **“be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established”** (Romans 13:1).

Do you like submitting to God's authorities? I'm willing to guess you don't when a police officer's lights come on in your rearview mirror. With our A/C bills on the rise, going to the movies is a fun summer activity. But you know that if you want a snack, you're going to have to buy some of the overpriced popcorn and soda because of their rule “no outside food or drink.” Even if you think that rule is only to boost their profit margins, will you submit to their authority?

It's easy to tell others to submit to the authorities. But when it comes to ourselves, it's a different story. Especially when we disagree with God's authorities or find that they aren't carrying out justice. But even when they aren't doing what they should, we are still to submit to them. And if you want an example of this, I point you to Jesus. He submitted to the authorities even when they were committing the greatest injustice of all time. Not only did they put an innocent man to death. They put the Son of God, who never once sinned, to death on false charges! Jesus could have stopped them at any moment. But instead he submitted to their unjust authority. For what reason? To be our Savior.

As a king brings the sword against those who don't submit to his rule, so God ought to bring his sword against those who don't submit to his servants. The Apostle Paul tells us, **“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”** (Romans 13:4). You and I have sinned against God countless times. God's sword of righteous wrath ought to come down on us in punishment. But it won't because it already came down on Jesus. As our Savior hung on the cross, all of our sins were placed on him. God's sword of righteous wrath for our failure to follow the rules came down on Jesus as he breathed his last breath. And that's good news for you and me. Because there is no punishment for we who believe in Jesus. He paid for our sins in full when he died.

Now when we look at God, we do not need to be afraid. For he calls us good and holy by the blood of Jesus which washes our sins away. And he continues to show us his love by placing his authorities over us for our physical good.

So submit to them as you would submit to God himself. Paul gives us two reasons why we should submit to them – **“not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience”** (Romans 13:5). Not only because of the sword, but also because it’s what our conscience tells us. That little voice inside all people giving a general idea of what’s right and wrong. But for the Christian, our conscience is guided all the more by the gospel. God gives us our authorities so we may have stability and justice in this life. So treasure God’s authorities by submitting to their rule.

Treasure them also by supporting them. Watching over us is their full-time job. They do what’s best for the greater good even if it makes them the bad guy. And as long as there is sin in the world, we’ll need people to enforce the kingdom of the sword. This was true in Paul’s time which is why he give us these examples of how we can support God’s authorities. **“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”** (Romans 13:7).

There are the things we give with our hands – taxes and revenues – and the things we give with our heart – respect and honor. Which do you find more difficult to give? Depending on the authority, the answer will change. Some will try to cheat the system to get out of it all. It’s okay to use the deductions our government provides come April 15<sup>th</sup>, but we are not to hide income or misrepresent the blessings God has given us. When politics comes up in conversation, do you support God’s authorities with respect and honor? It’s okay to disagree with our elected officials, but to tear them down and ruin their reputation doesn’t help anyone. Rather treasure God’s authorities by supporting them with your hands and your hearts.

I know this won’t be easy. We will have elected officials who will sign laws that go against Christianity. We will have police officers who will fail to carry out justice for one reason or another. There will always be people sneaking past the written rules. But even when these things happen, support God’s authorities with your hands and hearts. Give them what you owe them. Our Savior did so. When he stood with Pilate before the Jewish crowds, Jesus didn’t denigrate Pilate to protest the injustice that was happening. He gave him the respect and honor he deserved as God’s authority. When the Apostle Paul was going throughout the Mediterranean world, he received all sorts of punishments from the authorities. Yet no matter how unjust or hard it was, Paul never failed to treasure God’s authorities by submitting and supporting them. Because what they do is for the good of society.

Imagine how this world would be if we only supported God's authorities when we wanted to. How long do you think our governmental institutions would last? Maybe I'm a bit of a pessimist, but I don't think it would last be long. If I have the choice between paying my taxes or not, I'm going to keep my money for myself. If I can say whatever I want, I'm not going to give respect or honor to anyone who comes across me wrong. Listen to how Luther describes what he think would happen if we only had the kingdom of the Holy Spirit. **"If anyone attempted to rule the world by the gospel, and put aside all secular law and the secular sword...what would happen? He would loose the bands and chains of the wild and savage beasts, and let them tear and mangle everyone, and at the same time say they were quite tame and gentle creatures; but I would have the proof in my wounds"** (*Secular Authority...*). We need the kingdom of the sword to carry out the work of the Holy Spirit. So support his authorities and give them what we owe them – our revenue and taxes, our respect and honor.

God has placed his authorities over us for our physical and spiritual good. He gives us pastors, teachers, and parents to tell us about our Savior within the kingdom of the Holy Spirit. He gives us the government, law enforcement, and again parents within the kingdom of the sword. Each has their own purpose, tools, and area of influence. Both are needed in this world. And as the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans chapter 13, we are to submit to them as we keep their laws and they punish the evildoer. We are to support them with our hands and hearts for the thankless work they do for us. May the Lord help us to treasure the authorities God has placed over us and serve him by keeping his secular servants in our prayers. Amen.