



## Tax Season

### Gospel Culture #11

Romans 13:1-10

David Sunday

April 15, 2018

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I'm Mike Jacoby, and I have the privilege of serving as an elder here at New Covenant Bible Church. Before I get into some testimony, I'd like to read the passage that David will be preaching from this morning, just to give that some context. From Romans 13:

*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. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup> for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*

Some of you may not know, but I've work in or with government my whole adult life—first as a public school teacher, then as an administrator, a superintendent, and now I lead a state-wide nonprofit, working on public policy issues that impact schools and children here in Illinois. I think it's fair to say that we live in a pretty cynical time regarding politics and government. There's a high level of mistrust of our governmental leaders. As I work in the midst of that world, I personally understand that it's easy to be tempted embrace this mentality and even feel hopeless to have any influence.

That's why I think this passage is so relevant. There's not only a need to be subject to our leaders, but more importantly we need to embrace the reason: "*For there is no authority except*

*from God. Those that exist (speaking of authorities) have been instituted by God.”* So being highly aware of my responsibility—both in supporting what is good for children in our state’s public schools, but also being responsible to represent a strong biblical worldview—there are times when I am being challenged in a hearing, or sitting in negotiations with some of these authorities, so knowing God Himself has placed them in that authority really helps me keep my focus.

It also helps me understand the value of following Paul’s admonition in this passage: to do what is good and to receive the approval of the authorities. For most of you, that may simply mean, “Don’t break the law.” But for me there’s another step. I need to be sure I’m advocating for good things that these leaders could do.

So today and for the past four years I have been working diligently with others to integrate a biblical worldview into one of the largest funding formulas we have in our state government. Nearly a third of all the discretionary funding in the state goes to education. The system in Illinois has been the most regressive in our nation, where basically the quality of one’s education is based upon the children’s zip code. If you happen to live in a community that is healthy economically, then you get good schools. But if you live in a community that is laden with poverty, the quality and opportunity drop off pretty significantly.

We as Christians have a responsibility to the poor. One thing you might not know is that more than 50% of the children who attend public schools in Illinois live in poverty. That’s over one million students that get up every day with very little to eat, very little attention paid to even their simple physical and emotional needs, let alone their educational needs.

One of the good things government can do as “ministers of God”—as stated in this passage—is allow the poor to have access to good educational opportunities. They do that by compensating for the effect that poverty has on these children. They did not ask to be born into poverty, but are daily subjected to its impact which is pretty significant on their young lives.

This past year, God made that funding reform happen. Amen? You can rest assured that, as you pay your state taxes this week, they are going to the most needy in a manner we’ve never seen in Illinois before. It’s such an encouragement to see how God moved the leaders to finally reach that bipartisan solution. It was also somewhat ironic to see how much credit both sides claimed for themselves. But another important aspect of Christian character is to be humble, and for me, that means to allow those who have been placed in authority by God to get the credit for the good things they ultimately do. As a believer I always rest in the fact that all these leaders are being sifted like sand in the hands of our mighty God. No matter what power or influence they think they have, it’s given to them only by God Himself.

For me, I know I will answer to God for how I engage with these leaders, in my job and in my life. I ask you to pray that I would be a strong witness and continue to be a strong advocate for the poor and for children in the years I have left in this profession. Finally, I would also want you to know that I intend to give honor and respect to those whom God has placed in authority over us.

**David:** Thank you, Mike. Let's pray together.

Lord, we're so thankful for Mike, for his service to our state and community, for the biblical vision he brings to his vocation in the world. Lord, thank You for his heart for the poor and the hard work he's done over these past few years, bringing more equity to funding for our public school system. We pray, Lord, that you will continue to encourage him and give him hope in this work, that his labor in You is not in vain. We also pray that You would make him a bright witness for You in Springfield and in the communities around our state. We pray that everywhere he goes, people would see that there's something different about him, that it would point them toward You and toward the hope he has in Christ.

Lord, we thank You for this Scripture that we're studying today. We pray that the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts would be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, if you're new to us, I promise that I didn't pick Romans 13 just for April 15th, tax day. We have two extra days this year because it falls on a Sunday. We've actually been preaching through Romans in different segments over the last couple years, and we're in the last section of Romans now. Before Easter we finished Romans 12 and today we're in Romans 13. What a perfect day, though, to be looking at a passage like this.

In January, Illinois topped the charts as the number one state in the U.S. —that is the number one state people are moving out of and leaving for good. Don't you wonder why? After all, where could you find better weather than this? Well, the article listed economics as the main reason people are leaving Illinois. And closely linked to economics is government. The "Land of Lincoln" does not have a reputation right now as being one of the best governed states in the country. That's why we're thankful for courageous and gifted people like Mike who are working to make a difference for the common good of our citizens.

Let me ask what's worse than bad government? Think about the people of North Korea or Afghanistan who live under a cruel regime. It's hard to imagine anything worse.

Think about a place like Somalia back in 1991-2004 when there was no government.

If you wanted to get into the city of Mogadishu from the airstrip which was about 30 miles away, you had to pass through seven different checkpoints, run by seven different armed militia and pay an entry fee at each checkpoint. None of it was to support health or education or roads. Anyone who could afford to travel anywhere had to proceed with several armed guards just to get them on their way. Kidnapping and disease were rampant. In the absence of any authority, terror training camps multiplied in Somalia. “I just want a government—any government will do,” one Somalian man told the BBC.

What’s worse than bad government? No government. The 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes got this right. “In the absence of a central authority, life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” Just think of The Lord of the Flies that many of us read back in junior high and high school. If you were a Christian living in Rome in the first century, you might have wondered, “How do we now respond to the Roman government? Jesus is our King. He’s returning again. We’re looking forward to His rule and reign over all the earth. So what do we do about this Roman government?” It was a government where there were no elections, where slavery was commonplace, where unwanted infants were left out in the cold to die. Leaders like Caligula and Nero were more perverse sexually than you want to even imagine, and they demanded god-like reverence.

So Christians, in light of the new King Jesus Who was reigning over them, had to grapple through the centuries with how to relate to the government was over them? Should they completely ignore the authority of the state and try to just passively disengage? Should they try to destabilize and undermine un-Christian governments and set up a Christianized state? Should they totally cooperate with the authorities, seeing the Kingdom of God and the government as two separate spheres applying to different areas of life? Or should they cooperate in some things, but maintain their allegiance to Christ in such a way that they become conscientious objectors to the state on some issues?

Those are the kinds of questions Christians have grappled with through the centuries regarding church and state. But if we’re looking for a full-fledged theology of church and state, we’re not going to find it here in Romans 13. If you came to church just wanting a personal blessing—kind of “pick me up” for your soul this week—these verses might be a little disappointing. But if you care about presenting yourself as a living sacrifice to God—living all your life in a way that’s holy, acceptable and pleasing to Him in order to find out what His good and acceptable and perfect will is—this is where Romans 12 started.

Romans 13 is part of the whole application of what it’s like to live as a living sacrifice. If you care about being a disciple of Jesus and what that looks like in society, then Romans 13 is a

vital word from God today, with very important instruction. How you relate to the government is an expression of your worship to God. Your attitude toward authority is an important part of your discipleship. Following Jesus means you care about following the authority He has placed in your life. That includes the U.S. government, state government, teachers in your school, bosses at work, parents in your home. In every aspect of life, you live under authority and need to understand how to live under that authority in a way that reflects your allegiance to Jesus Christ.

So let's not get distracted by all the curiosities we bring to Romans 13, wishing it would answer this question or that question. Instead, let's focus on the main point that these verses are designed to press home to us.

### **Followers of Jesus ought to submit to human authorities.**

Look at Romans 13:1: "*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.*" Paul is speaking directly to Christians here and every person—whether Christian or non-Christian—is to be subject to (to be voluntarily submissive to) the authorities as an expression of our submission to God. The "governing authorities" in this context refers to civil authorities, but it also applies in the home, in school, and at work.

We are to have an attitude of submission to those who are in authority over us—which I know is not a popular concept today, especially in our culture. Submission is a concept that can easily be abused. But it's rooted in the idea that God is a God of order and has established order in the home, in the church and in society, which is for the common good of all, so that we all can flourish.

Biblically speaking, submission does not demean people or degrade their value. In the Bible, we see Jesus submitting to His Father, but that does not mean that Jesus is of less value or any less divine than the Father. When we hear the word "submit," often our natural response is to ask, "Why? Who says I should submit?" Resisting authority is like a badge of honor in our culture. People who buck authority are applauded. It's like a virtue.

*"For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God"* (Romans 13:1). As Christians, we have to remember where the first rebellion against authority started. Where was that? Back in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. We refused to submit to the authority of God and His Word—and look at all the trouble it's gotten us into. Rejection of authority is at the root of sin and that spirit of rebellion is in each of us. It's going to take a lifetime of grace to drive it out of our hearts. The only One Who always and gladly

submitted to the authority of God over His life was our Savior, Jesus Christ. He's the perfectly obedient Son Who willingly took on our disobedience, so that our rebellion could be forgiven.

Jesus can forgive you for your rebellion. The way to be saved is to relinquish your own authority over your life and submit yourself to God, come under the authority of Jesus as your King. When you do that, God takes Christ's obedience and credits it to you. The Spirit of God comes to live in you and He teaches you how to live a life that's no longer characterized by rebellion by going your own way, but instead by a life of obedient submission to God.

This passage is teaching us that if we are submissive to God's authority, we will also be submissive to the governing authorities He has placed over our lives. The passage gives us two reasons why every believer should submit to the governing authorities.

### **We should submit to the authorities because God has put them there.**

We see in Romans 1:1-2 that God has put authorities over us. It says, *"There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed."* Did you hear any exceptions there? "Well, we don't have to submit to this authority or that authority. Paul, do you know what you're talking about? There are evil governments out there." Yes, but there are no exceptions in this passage. Every government.

Yes, Paul knew. He was living in Rome under a government that was not perfect at all and he had read his Old Testament. He knew about the evil reign of Pharaoh. He knew about Nebuchadnezzar and the wicked things he did. He knew about the Persian king Ahasuerus, who wanted to carry out ethnic genocide against the Jews during the time of Esther. And of course, Paul knew about how Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate. He knew what Jesus said to Pilate in John 19:10-11, when Pilate asked, *"Do you not know that I have authority to release You and authority to crucify You?"* Jesus answered Pilate, *"You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above."* Jesus understood that there is no authority except from God.

So Romans 13 says ultimately the One Who gives the authority to rule is not the people who voted or the power brokers who paid the way or the bloodline into which a king or queen was born. No, all authority is delegated by God. If that sounds like bad news to you, consider this: all authority is therefore accountable to God. Every king, every queen, every dictator, every president, every teacher, every principal—all authority will ultimately answer to God for how he used that authority. Even in Revelation 13, you'll see that the beast—the antichrist—was given

authority for a time. God is the One Who is sovereign even over the arch-evil enemy himself. God doesn't become evil in the process, but He's sovereign over everyone who rules.

So does this mean it's never right to disobey authority? The answer to that question is no. We'll get to that later. But first, we need to let the general principle stand. Because for most of us, the pressing issue is not when should we disobey—the pressing issue is why don't we obey more consistently and gladly? Why do we have this rebellion in our hearts? The main lesson we need to take away from this passage is a rebuke of the rebellious attitudes that can lurk in our hearts.

The first reflex of a Christian should not be to disobey authority. It should be to do what the authorities over us say. Our first reflex at work should be to submit to the boss. Our first reflex at school should be to submit to the teacher, not to say, "No, she's mean. She's ugly. I don't want to obey her. I don't want to do what she says." No, it should be a submissive attitude. Our first reflex at home should be, "Yes, Mother. Yes, Father. Gladly I will submit. I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands. Yes."

And our first reflex as citizens of this nation should be to obey the government. For when we are unwilling to submit to authority, we are taking our stand against an institution that God has established. So rebellion against the government is—under most circumstances—rebellion against God. We should confess our sin here, I think. Why don't you just bow with me now and let use these words of confession from a prayer by Ray Ortlund, Jr. Wherever you sense there needs to be some confession in your heart, just be saying, "Yes, Lord" in your heart to Him.

O my God and King, You love order. You have undertaken to establish order, both in the universe and here on earth in human society. But I find in my heart an anarchic impulse, an autonomous conceit, defiant even of legitimate authority. I resent all limitations imposed upon me. My ego cannot endure that there is something superior in this universe to self. I see this most vividly in relation to You, but also in relationship to those lower authorities You have established over me—including human government. I confess my seditious spirit. I confess that You are supreme and I am not. I surrender to the order You have structured for me, in Jesus' name. Amen.

**We should submit to the authorities because God has given them a mandate—and it's in our best interest to obey them.**

We see this second point in Romans 13:2b-4:

*Those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is*

*in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.*

It is not only right to submit because the authorities are established by God, it is also wise. It's in our best interest to submit, because God has given a mandate to the authorities to punish those who do wrong and reward those who do good. The punishment or judgment might come in the form of a traffic ticket, a parking violation, a penalty because you did not renew your license plate on time. Or it could be something with a building permit you didn't therefore you can't build and you have to pay a fine.

Or it might be something more serious, like jail time—or even worse, like death. What does Paul mean when he says the government does not bear the sword in vain? Christians have traditionally seen this as a defense of the government's role in executing death on those who have committed crimes worthy of death. This comes from the time of Noah, where Genesis 9:6 says, *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."*

I think there's room in the 21st century for Christians to debate the legitimacy of capital punishment in our society. I think there have been grievous injustices in how the death penalty has sometimes been administered. Regardless of where you stand on that, this principle must be established and upheld: every human being is created in the image of God, therefore it is a monstrous crime to murder another human being. It's why God's Word, at the time of Noah, called for the death penalty to be executed on those who shed the blood of an innocent human being. It's because of the sanctity of life that Christians have often upheld the legitimacy of capital punishment.

Now for us, the application takes us back to Romans 12. Remember what Paul said there in verse 19. *"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"* So how is God going to repay? How is God going to administer justice? Part of the answer is here in Romans 13. Paul is telling us that one way God pours out His wrath in the present age is through the power He has delegated to human governments.

What that means is that an equitable justice system is at the foundation of any human society. If wrongdoers are not punished, if evil is not restrained, if good is not promoted, chaos and riots will break out. So if you want to go into law as a career and serve with a biblical

worldview to advocate for justice, that's a noble vocation. If you want to become a judge or a police officer, these are noble ways to serve God. An equitable justice system is foundational to the peace of a society, and the government has been entrusted with the task of rewarding good and punishing evil.

I've heard someone put it like this: "A government cannot create heaven on earth, but by God's common grace, a government can prevent hell on earth." Only God can create heaven on earth. He does it by His grace through the proclamation of the gospel. But through God's common grace, He has established governments and given them a mandate to curb evil so that they would prevent hell on earth. We should be grateful for that!

Paul summarizes his point in verse five. Submit to those who are in authority for these two reasons:

- "...not only to avoid God's wrath...—to avoid punishment which is the "it's wise for you" reason
- "...but also for the sake of conscience" —because you know submitting to authorities is the right thing to do because God has put them there.

With that word "conscience" Paul raises a very important issue: the Christian's conscience in relationship to the government.

### **The Christian's conscience and the state**

The principle of conscience basically says two things:

- In general, I must be obedient to the state.
- There are limits to my obedience. I cannot violate my conscience.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it very well: "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state and never its tool."

So the Christian is responsible to evaluate the state and to think about what we're being commanded to do. If we're only motivated by fear of punishment, we could easily go astray. There may be times when obedience to the state would equal disobedience to God. But if we're afraid we're going to be punished, we'll just go along with the state. In those cases—and this is very important—we need to respectfully and peaceably disobey the state. Never by use of force, never through the shedding of blood, never through carnal means. It should always be respectful and peaceful disobedience. When we do that, we need to be ready to submit to whatever punishment the state inflicts. For instance, in the book of Acts, remember when the authorities

told the apostles to stop preaching the name of Jesus? What did they do? They kept preaching. They were thrown in prison. They prayed. God let them out. What did they do? They kept preaching. Why? They said, *“We must obey God rather than man”* (Acts 5:29).

Throughout Christian history, Christians have basically used these two guidelines to determine when civil disobedience is appropriate. If the authorities forbid us from doing what God commands, we must disobey the authorities and do what God commands. Or, if the authorities command us to do what God forbids, we must obey God and disobey the authorities. It’s never right to do immoral things because you are just taking orders. There are times when a Christian conscience demands that you stand up to the authorities. Just like the Hebrew midwives refused to obey Pharaoh’s order when he said, “You need to kill all the male children as they come out from the womb.” They said, “We can’t do that. We must obey God rather than man. We can’t disobey the command of God” (Exodus1; Acts 5:29).

Or when Esther put her life on the line to come before the king without a royal summons. What did she say? “If I perish, I perish. I’m willing to accept the consequences. There’s a greater good at stake here. I have to stand up for God’s people” (Esther 4).

Can you think of a couple situations in our day? How about if you lived in China under the “one child” policy? You’re a Christian couple. You find yourself pregnant with your second child. The authorities come and say, “You must abort that child or you will face stiff penalties.” What does it mean to submit to the authorities in that case? It means you say, “We cannot do that. We cannot kill our child. So we will accept whatever you inflict upon us, but we will not abort our child.”

Let’s get a little closer to home. What about during the time of segregation in the United States? Peaceful resistance to the authorities when they violated the humanity of our African-American brothers and sisters was, I believe, a righteous cause—a righteous cause that far too many Christians in the white majority refused to take up. One of the reasons many of the white Christians didn’t engage is they were more afraid of recrimination by the establishment than of not obeying God and standing up for the dignity of their fellow man.

So a Christian conscience is thinking and saying, “I must be obedient to God. That means I must obey the civil authorities, even when there’s no one to punish me, even when they’re not watching, because it’s the right thing to do.” But it also means, “I cannot just uncritically submit to whatever the state tells me to do, if it is commanding me to do what God forbids, or forbidding me from doing what God commands.” Those are the exceptions to the rule. But the main thrust of Romans 13 is that we should be obedient to the rule of law, because we’re obedient to the Lordship of Christ—and these authorities come from God.

Now, how do we apply this teaching? I have three applications that stem mainly from Romans 13:6-7.

### **We apply this teaching by paying our taxes.**

The first application is kind of obvious: we are to pay our taxes. It's not because we agree with everything the government is doing, or not because we like it. It's because we recognize, as Paul says in verse six: *"For the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing."* The word there for "ministers" is the same word that's used in the Old Testament of the priests in the temple. That's quite a dignified term God applies to the civil authorities. We're to pay to them what we owe them: *"...taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed."*

Now you might say, "I don't like how the government spends my money. I disagree profoundly with some of the ways my tax dollars are being used." We do disagree. But can you imagine that in Rome every single thing the emperor was doing with the taxes was something the Christians would agree with? I doubt it. I'll bet there was a lot of waste going on in the Roman government. But Paul says they're God's servants—they're accountable to God and will answer to Him. Your money belongs to God anyway. It's just money. So pay your taxes.

What did Jesus say? *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Matthew 22:21). Caesar has a right to some of your taxes. God owns your life, your soul, all that you are. So as you mail your tax returns this week (if you haven't done it already), worship God as you do it.

Yesterday I had to go to the post office to mail our tax return. As I put it in the box, I had to apply what I'm preaching this week. It wasn't fun, because I'm not getting money back. I had to write a check and give it to the government. But doing that is part of our worship to God. It's part of our discipleship.

Friends, if you're being dishonest, if you're withholding what is due the government, realize you are standing in direct violation to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Pay your taxes.

### **We apply this teaching by showing respect and honor to those who are in authority.**

We see this at the end of Romans 13:7: *"[Pay] respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."* Now, you might say, "I find it very hard to respect that person in that office in government." Nonetheless, respect the office. Respect the fact that this is an office that has been established by God. The person who holds that office is a person who was created in the image of God. Even if you disagree passionately with what they stand for, treat them with respect

and dignity. This was just as much true with whomever held those offices in 2014 as it is true today in 2018. It's not about the person—it's about respecting the authority God has established.

It never adorns the gospel of Jesus when Christians speak of our leaders in vicious or demeaning ways. That's ungodly. That's un-Christlike. It's unbecoming of the people of God. Think about how Paul stood before the governor Felix and spoke of righteousness, judgment and self-control, calling that governor to repent, but showed such concern for his soul and such respect for him as a person.

Think about Daniel serving under the ungodly king Nebuchadnezzar—how he served with integrity in that king's government and how he wanted the blessing of that king. When he had the dream of judgment coming on that king, he was concerned for the king. He expressed his concern for the king. That's respect.

Remember that whenever you see a police officer, a judge, your child's teacher or principal, the mayor, a member of congress or the President of the United States—they are there at God's appointment. They will answer to God for how they administer the responsibility He has entrusted to them. So show respect. One of the ways we as Christians do that is by praying for those who are in authority. You may not like liturgy or written prayers, but I dare you to do better than The Book of Common Prayer does in this prayer for our leaders Sunday after Sunday:

O Lord, our Governor, Whose glory is in all the world, we commend this nation to Your merciful care, that being guided by Thy providence, we may dwell securely in Your peace. Grant to [Donald Trump], the President of the United States, to [Bruce Rauner], the Governor of this State, and to all in authority wisdom and strength to know and to do Your will. Fill them with the love of truth and righteousness, and make them ever mindful of their calling to serve this nation as stewards of all You have given to us and to Your world, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

Pray for those who are in authority over you.

**We apply this teaching by participating compassionately, gently and wisely in the political process.**

I don't think you can read the teaching of Romans 13 and come away believing that cynical detachment from politics and government is an option for a Christian. I don't think you can read this and think, "I'm just disengaging. I don't care. They're all a bunch of idiots." We can't think that way as Christians. We may agree with Winston Churchill, who said, "Democracy

is the worst possible system of government—apart from the alternatives.” We may agree with that.

We live in a system of government in which the power of our leaders is derived from the people. What is the United States? A government “of the people, by the people, for the people.” That’s our constitutional republic. As Christians, we recognize that behind all of this is the sovereign authority of God. It’s ultimately not us who put people in power—it’s God Who does. So we, of all people, should be the most compassionate, wise, gentle and respectful in the way we engage in our government.

I agree with Richard Mouw, who says that in a democracy, for Christians to simply acquiesce—to just lay back and say, “Well, this is just the way it is,” and not do anything to influence change—that is to fail to respect the governing authorities, because we’re part of the government of our country. We have a role to play in our government.

So Paul’s admonition to be subject to the governing authorities means that we should work for change whenever our government isn’t reflecting the best of what God intends for our society. That’s what Mike was talking about doing in his job. That’s a noble, godly vocation—and we all have a role to play in it.

But at the same time, as we play that role and as we participate in politics, we realize we belong to a Kingdom that’s not of this world. That Kingdom is eternal. It’s not going to be established by fighting or by force. It’s established by the gospel going forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. Actually, what we have in unity with our brother Andre from the Ukraine is far deeper, more eternal, and more binding than what most of us have in unity as fellow citizens of the United State of America. It’s this Kingdom that we’re most concerned about, and we want to reflect this Kingdom in the way we engage in the kingdoms of this world.

So, what do we achieve when we engage in politics while we’re seething with anger and animosity toward those who think differently? Just look at the Christians in Rome. They didn’t have a Bill of Rights. They didn’t have religious liberty. But they kept witnessing for Jesus. They got thrown to the lions. They got martyred. They kept standing up for Jesus—living for Jesus in a pagan society—and the gospel spread like wildfire throughout the empire.

I want to close with a warning from our friend Dr. D.A. Carson about how we should engage in politics. I want you to listen to this very carefully. He says:

When you’re busy hating everybody, denouncing everybody and seeking political solutions to everything, it’s very difficult to evangelize, isn’t it? It’s very hard to be compassionate, to look on the crowds as though they’re sheep without a shepherd. It’s very hard to look on them like that when they’re taking away your

heritage. But at the end of the day, if you can't participate in democracy with compassion and gently leave the doors open for evangelism, boy, you destroy everything.

I think one of the devil's tactics regarding the church today is to make them so hate everybody else that at the end of the day they can't be believed anywhere—not even in the proclamation of the gospel. May that not be said of us. Let's take God's Word seriously. Pay to all what is owed them: honor, respect, love—the debt that can never be fully paid which we'll look more on that next week. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, we pledge allegiance to You, our King of kings, our Lord of lords. Your Kingdom is forever. We thank You that for a short time You've also made us citizens of this present world system here in United States. Lord, we pray that we would engage in our life as citizens here in a way that adorns Your gospel. Let us, through our glad submissive attitudes, show to those who lead us that we are of all people most to be trusted and that we are people who can be counted on to bring blessing to our communities, not harm.

We pray, Lord, that we would look upon all our neighbors with an attitude of love. We pray that we would not identify primarily by our political party or beliefs, but that we would remember always that we belong to You, Jesus. We don't fit comfortably in any political party. But we are here, Lord, to be a blessing in Your name. So in all we do, we seek to honor You. Have mercy on us for our many sins. Cleanse us from ungodly attitudes. Enable us to put a tight rein over our tongues and say only that which is useful and upbuilding to the common good.

Most of all, Lord, we want to be people who live and speak Your gospel in winsome and compelling ways. Send us into the world to proclaim the truths of Who You are, "O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer." We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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