

Our Response to Government
Romans 13:1-8

We stand here today in the wake of a post-election week. Tensions are high and emotions are exhausted. What a week it has been. Many decided as I did to wait for the morning news to discover who had been elected the next president of the United States. For most Americans I think the words that best describe their feelings are surprised, stunned, shocked, speechless, dumbfounded. Analysts, pollsters, politicians and historians will for years to come try to analyze the results and will still come away scratching their heads in bewilderment as to how a political outsider would rewrite the election playbook and in a stunning upset defeat the establishment insider.

Most of the analysts will ignore the reality of how such an historic event could happen because they refuse to understand the truth of our passage that we will consider this morning. Half of America feels as though they have been betrayed, that our nation has now been sold up the proverbial river, losers in a system that for them means the new administration will set the clock backwards in cultural advancements, a return to the dark ages. They fear the unknown. And yet if they were honest with themselves if the shoe was on the other foot and their candidate had won, there would be the same feeling of fear and uncertainty on the part of the other half. The feelings would be similar.

On the other hand, the other half of voters whose candidate won are casting a collective sigh of relief. They feel like there has been a temporary reprieve or stay of execution fearing what may have occurred under another administration. There was great concern about what they considered would have escalated the demise of our country a stripping away fundamental rights. They may be basking in the glory of an unexpected, but long awaited victory, something that seemed longer in coming than a Chicago Cubs World Series victory.

Regardless of who you voted for I want you to understand that whether your candidate won or lost, you are the real winner. You are the real winner because if you voted you are part of an incredible country that allows you the opportunity to cast a ballot on behalf of the person you believe to be best suited for bearing the tremendous weight of responsibility that is the role of President of the United States – arguably the greatest nation in the history of the world.

Now is not the time to gloat or the time to fear. It is time to come together under the same flag. Yet how utterly appalled and troubled I was to watch the news where Americans were burning the flag in protest of the election outcome. How utterly appalled I was to watch protestors taking to the streets in demonstration. One woman being interviewed said that there will be casualties on both sides and that for progress to be made in the world, some will have to die.

Whether your candidate won or lost, it is not a time to display anger it is a time to be gracious. Whatever you think of President Obama, the words he spoke in the Rose Garden on Wednesday were gracious, words he hoped would result in a path to unity in the nation.

Now, all of that said, and I could say a lot more, I do want to say that the message today is certainly different than the one I was preparing to give earlier in the week. I was really expecting a different outcome. The passage is the same but the tone will be slightly different, but with the same application.

Last week our passage directed us to pray for our leaders and now that we know who they are we can fill in the blanks of our prayer list. As a reminder let me encourage you to be praying for local, State and Federal officials whether you agree with their policies or not, whether they are the same political party as you or not. We are to pray for them and we are especially called to pray for their salvation.

When Edward Everett Hale was Chaplain of the Senate, someone asked him if he prayed for the senators. His reply was that he looked at the senators and prayed for the nation.

Readers Digest had a story some time ago in which a wealthy man lay dying. His doctor said there was an experimental brain transplant procedure that could save his life but it was very expensive. The patient said money was no object and asked if the doctor had any available brains. The doctor said he had three.

The first was the brain of a university professor, which would cost \$10,000.

The wealthy man said that wasn't a problem but wondered about the second option.

The doctor said that the second was from a rocket scientist but would cost \$100,000.

Again the patient said he had the money and then asked about the third option.

The doctor said that the third brain was from a politician, but that one cost \$1 million.

The wealthy man was stunned that a brain would cost so much and asked the doctor why it was so expensive to which the doctor said that it had never been used.

Well, all politician jokes aside, they carry a tremendous amount of responsibility as they serve our local, State, or Federal government. Let's look then at what our response is to be toward elected and appointed officials and why. We'll find it in our text found in Romans 13:1-8.

As we look at this passage, let's keep one very important truth in mind. It comes from the pen of Dr. Tony Evans in his book *Kingdom Citizens*. He writes: "The solution is not out *there* where it becomes so easy to point our fingers and cast blame. The solution is in *here* – in each one of us as kingdom citizens. We have the ability to do justice, seek truth, and stand in the gap of our land...The question becomes, then, are we willing?"

He continues "...whenever you put God first and align yourself under His kingdom rule, it doesn't take long to fix anything. We can change the face of our nation. We *can* avert the disastrous course of demise our country seems determined to follow. But doing so will require two things, revealed to us by a man named Nehemiah. It will require both devotion and dedication in the midst of difficulties...When a man or woman becomes totally available to God, things happen."

In your Bibles we are at Romans 13:1-8. Here's our first response.

I. GOVERNMENT IS ESTABLISHED BY GOD – v. 1

A. Our Submission To Government – v. 1a

We begin with a military term that means to be held in rank or arrange under. It is the word "subject" or "submit". Literally the injunction here says "Let every soul place himself habitually in subjection to higher powers."

Titus 3:1-2

Exodus 22:28

The tense in which it used is called passive imperative which means that first it is a directive.

1. Submission is a directive

Submission to government is a command, it is our duty as citizens. They establish laws some of which we may not necessarily like but we are to obey them because we are to obey the government.

We'll get to it in a moment, but we may not like paying taxes. There is always a bit of anxiousness when we send our tax stuff to the guy who prepares them for us because quite frankly we just don't know if we're going to have to pay more taxes and if so how much. But pay them we must because it is the law. Stop for a while and see what happens. The law says we must pay taxes.

The law says don't steal.
 The law says don't murder.
 The law says there is a speed limit.
 You can find yourself in real trouble if you lie, say in court when you are under oath or during an investigation.
 This week begins deer season with a firearm. The law says you must have a license.
 Laws aren't established to limit us but to protect us. They provide order. If we didn't have order there would be chaos.

When we look at God's creation throughout the universe we see order in the natural laws that sustain it. If there was no order to the laws of nature that govern the universe, only randomness in those laws that hold the universe together, then nothing would be certain. If the law of gravity wasn't constant because there wasn't order we might find ourselves waking up floating out into space. Planets that rotate around the sun in a fixed orbit would instead crash into each other. Order is necessary and that we see order in nature shows us that order in government is necessary.

God is a God of order and even in government He established it to continue that order, to establish laws for the common good of its people. Now, that order is different from country to country. For example to my knowledge when you drive anywhere in the U.S. it is always on the right side of the road. It's going to be the same whether you are driving in Boston or Tallahassee or Chicago or Des Moines. The law doesn't change when you leave Brighton and enter Hartland. But travel to London and you'll find out quickly that driving on the right hand side of the road is dangerous because their law is different, you drive on the left side of the road. Just remember that when it comes to the side of the road we drive on in the U.S. we're always right.

We are to submit to the governing authorities. That even means that when you travel abroad outside our country, you are bound to obey their laws. So the

first thing we need to understand is that the word "submit" is a command. The second thing we see from the word tense is that it is a desire. That's the passive tense of its meaning.

2. Submission is desire

Submission is to be done willingly, which seems to contradict the word being a command. Doing it willingly makes it sound like I have a choice. But that's not the case. It used to be that the law was the law, it was absolute and if you broke the law you were held personally responsible. There are those now who believe that law in some cases is relative, that you can ignore it if you want to. It diminishes personal responsibility. But the choice isn't in whether or not I have to do obey the law, the choice is in the attitude with which I obey the law.

Let me see if I can illustrate it from one of Jesus' teachings. Matthew 5:41 "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."

The law was this. Any soldier could command you to carry his pack one mile out of town. To disobey brought severe consequences. One mile outside of town there was a marker. When you reached that marker your obligation was completed. Jesus said if you are commanded to go one mile go ahead and carry it a second mile instead. That's an example of obeying or submitting to a command willingly.

We are to submit to government both as a directive and out of desire. We notice the reason in the next part of the verse.

B. God's Sovereignty Over Government – v. 1b

It is easy to submit to government when we are in agreement with them, its leaders and their laws. It becomes more difficult when our ideologies or faith collide with government and the laws they establish.

The fundamental truth that we cannot lose sight of here is that God is sovereign. That simply means He is in control of all the kingdoms of the world.

He is just as much in control with Mr. Trump becoming the president-elect as He is had Secretary Clinton been nominated. While we are under the control of authorities no matter which country we may live in, they are under God's control. Don't ever forget that because when someone gets into office we may not like, God put them there. Take comfort and courage in that fact. He has a plan and a purpose for it.

As Pilate was questioning Jesus during His trial he told Jesus that he had the power to set Him free, to which Jesus responded that Pilate had no power except what was given from above, referring to God. (John 19:11)

After King Nebuchadnezzar spent a year living among the animals like an animal himself, he issued a statement. I'm sure if he had it available it would have been sent out by Twitter, Facebook, and every other social media, but here it is recorded in Scripture: "so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men." (Dan. 4:17)

In Psalm 103:19 the Psalmist says that God's kingdom rules over all.

From the pen of the Psalmist in Psalm 115:3 and in Isaiah 46:10 we read that God does whatever He pleases. He is in control.

And neither is the New Testament silent on the matter. In Ephesians 1:11 we read that God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will."

The sovereignty of God means that He is in control with the power and right to govern all things, and no power in heaven or on earth will be able to thwart His plans or usurp His authority. God would be in just as much control if Mrs. Clinton had won.

God sets up the rulers who govern our land. So no

matter who was elected we need to keep that in mind. He has a purpose for it.

The Christians in Rome were under the authority of Nero and the Roman Empire. We learned last week just how cruel he was.

God is the one who placed Herod the Great on the throne who would murder infants in Bethlehem around the time of Jesus' birth.

After the fall of Israel by Nebuchadnezzar, God put in place Antiochus Epiphanes who ransacked Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple.

The same God who put Washington and Raegan in office also placed Hitler and Lennon in power.

God knows what He is doing. He was in control then and He is still in control today, even in our election process and its outcome from local officials to national leaders. He sets up and takes down rulers for His purpose.

Remembering He is sovereign is so important. But there's something else to keep in mind, this nation, the United States of America is temporary. It isn't going to last forever, but the kingdom of God, that kingdom is eternal. We are merely passing through the shores of this nation headed to our final destination which is eternal in scope.

Because all governments are established by God we must obey them because He has sovereignly put them in place. Live as responsible citizens.

II. OBEDIENCE IS EXPECTED BY GOD – vs. 2-7

We already touched on this a bit, but let's unwrap it here from these verses. Notice in verses 2-5 that rebellion must be avoided.

A. Rebellion Must Be Avoided – vs. 2-5

The word "resist" or "rebel" is another military term Paul uses and means to arrange in battle against. This is the fine line between revolution and

rebellion. Some theologians would argue that the founding fathers were wrong to revolt against the British government based on this verse.

Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest writes “To obtain, by lawful means, the removal or alteration of an unjust or unreasonable law, is another part of this duty: for all powers among men must be in accord with the highest power, the moral sense. But even where law is hard and unreasonable, not disobedience, but legitimate protest, is the duty of the Christian.”

Others believe that a revolution is the right of the people when tyranny and corruption abound. That was the view held by the founders on July 4 when they signed the Declaration of Independence.

In CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they 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 just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments

long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

They had tried legitimate means to get the King's attention but all efforts had failed. If they could have avoided war, they certainly would have, but it did come to that and so they fought for the freedom to be a sovereign nation separate from the tyrannical reign of King George.

Unfortunately this week since the election we have seen rebellion and destruction. People who have the right to demonstrate peacefully are instead inciting riots and anarchy instead of a calm resolve in demonstrating peacefully. Their anger has turned to violence against property and people. Of all people Christians are called on by a higher power, the God we serve, to galvanize not polarize, to be compassionate not condescending or confrontational, to seek to obey the law where it does not violate our moral or Biblical beliefs.

Civil disobedience comes when the law of the land conflicts with the law of God. For example, the law of the land says that abortion is legal; however, a physician can out of conscience and because of his

belief in the sanctity of life outlined in Scripture refuse to practice the taking of a life he has sworn to protect.

There may come a time when the law mandates that all clergy must perform same-sex marriages or risk fines, loss of tax-exempt status for the church, even imprisonment. I would rather suffer those even give up my ordination than violate my Biblical view.

But there are other laws which we should not violate. For example, building codes come to mind or during an election not endorsing a candidate from the pulpit. The church should not think that it is above the law. Be good citizens. Historians say that the Jews were not good citizens of the Roman Empire.

Rebellion must be avoided and we see two good reasons outlined for us.

1. Judgment will come from government
2. Judgment will come from God

When we obey the government there isn't anything to fear. But perhaps even more importantly is that when we rebel against government we are also rebelling against God who put those leaders in office. But if you rebel be afraid of that authority because he does not bear the sword for nothing.

It is said that during parades in the Roman Empire a sword was carried before the governor or local authority symbolizing his right to judge even administer capital punishment for violating the law.

We will be judged for our rebellion.

The first area of obedience expected is that rebellion must be avoided.

The second area of obedience expected is that revenue must be paid.

B. Revenue Must Be Paid – vs. 6-7

1. Pay taxes

Paying taxes recognizes the authority of the government over us.

We pay property taxes to the local government.

We pay income tax on our wages to both the state and federal governments and if you happen to live or work in some cities, you also pay city tax on your income.

We pay social security tax.

We pay an inheritance tax and property tax.

Those are just some of the taxes paid.

The bottom line is we are to pay our taxes.

One day Jesus was met with a question about allegiance. Should you pay taxes to Caesar? If you do, then you are giving allegiance to a government that was pagan vs. allegiance to God.

Jesus was smart enough to see that it was a trick so he asked for someone to give Him a Roman coin. One of the Pharisees handed him a coin. Just a little sidebar here: Don't you find it interesting that they were bringing into question allegiance to a pagan government by paying taxes when one of them had a coin from that pagan government? Jesus took the coin and simply said that we should give to Caesar what belonged to him and give to God what belonged to Him. In essence – pay your taxes.

Yes, taxes may be used for things we may not like: bridges to nowhere, lavish Presidential vacations and golf trips, welfare for those who scam the system. But we are obligated to pay our taxes. They also go for education, social security, military, police and fire, libraries, our infrastructure and so much more. A lot of good things come from them.

2. Pay Respect

Respect is to hold someone in high regard or to respect their position. You call me Pastor out of respect.

When the judge enters the court room, everyone stands out of respect.

When the President enters the room, everyone stands out of respect.

I get that people have a right to sit during the national anthem or not recite the pledge of Allegiance, but to do so in my opinion is a sign of disrespect to the nation whose symbol is that flag, to disrespect the men and women who sacrificed to make this nation possible, past, present and future. We are told to pay respect those in authority, again because God put them in that position.

3. Pay Honor

While similar to respect we understand honor to mean the right that person has because of his or her position to receive respect and recognition.

It has troubled me these recent months with the lack of respect for law enforcement by groups of people who have incited riots, looting, and destruction of property, for their blatant disregard for life or the law. They need little excuse to quickly escalate a demonstration to destruction. There is no respect.

I read on Thursday from the Hartland Patch that “Not my president” rallies are being held in Detroit and no Christian should participate in such a gathering because that person is ordained by God and we are told to show them honor and respect.

I saw a post by someone on Facebook stating that even though they didn’t vote for Mr. Trump they would still support him as president. That is respecting and honoring the authority God has placed over us.

Government is established by God
Obedience is expected by God
Love is the example from God

III. LOVE IS THE EXAMPLE FROM GOD – v. 8

If there is one difference that should mark us as citizens and those who are non-Christians it is the love we are to demonstrate. Verse 8 tells us first that love is our debt.

A. Love is Our Debt – v. 8a

Love is the only debt a person will ever be able to pay off. Take care of all other debts by paying them off, but there will always be an ongoing debt of love. Jesus says in John 13:34-35 we are to love others as He has loved us. By the way, that’s with everything we have. He says that this is the way we show others that we are His followers. John would pose the question later by asking how anyone can say they love God whom they haven’t seen if they don’t love those they can see. We are never free of the debt of loving others. It’s a command. Love is our debt.

B. Love is Our Duty – v. 8b

Notice that the verse concludes by saying “he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” The law requires it. The sense in which Moses gave this law and which Christ refines it outlines for us that there is both a moral and social responsibility affixed to it. Love is not only our debt it’s our duty.

Let me once more remind you that God sovereignly placed these rulers in authority over us. We have a command to obey, honor and respect them. But our job is not finished. There is still much kingdom work yet to be done. Not only are we to pray for our leaders, and participate in our government to make this a great nation, we are also to pursue righteousness and proclaim the gospel.

In closing let me share one final thought from the pen of Dr. Tony Evans from His book *Kingdom Citizens*. “As kingdom citizens, we must promote and protect a biblical view of civil government, which is to maintain a safe, just, righteous, and compassionately responsible environment for freedom to flourish. We must be willing to truly live lives that cause those around us to watch and respond with their own commitment to Christ – with their own willingness to proclaim, ‘Their God is my God.’”

Regardless of who is in office God is in control and we have an obligation as citizens to obey and respect them. This testifies Christ to others.