

“WITH...respect”

Scripture: Romans 13:1-7

Graphics: Stones, hands, togetherness

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC are called to live out their salvation with a set of characteristics that accompany the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Focus Phrase: Even though our government authorities aren't perfect (hardly), we are to respect the authorities and work for good in order to offer Jesus to the world.

1. Introduction

- A. God created the world, “in the beginning...” and it was JUST as God intended it. Perfect. He created man and woman in the same way. Perfect.
- B. But everything changed when sin entered the world through the first man, Adam and the first woman, Eve. After that, and to this day, Creation has been groaning for the day when it will all be put back together again...perfect, new, re-created when Jesus returns. That day is coming...but is not yet here.
- C. Do we as followers of Jesus, though, because Creation is messed up due to sin, burn it to the ground and do everything we can to reject, neglect, and ignore it?
- D. Most of us would say, NO! I'm convinced, based on my training as both an environmental engineer and a pastor, that our interactions with the environment are critical because it's within and through the created world that we live, move, and have our breath. If we burn down creation because it's not perfect, then we're destroying the very home in which we live.
- E. Instead, we work to preserve, conserve, and nurture the environment so that we can live in humility and peace. In fact, because we live with fresh air and water, at least to some degree, we can then more easily share the Good News about Jesus.
- F. The same line of thinking could be applied to many institutions or entities. Take the church, for instance. The church is not perfect, and it's filled with hypocrites and sinners, right? I mean, you and I are here, aren't we?
- G. Our families are a hot mess, sometimes...yet, blood is thicker than water and it's the only one we've got, so we keep pressing on together.
- H. Schools, businesses, the internet...you name it...when things are working well, we celebrate. When things don't go well, we either live with it or work for change. Are you tracking with me, so far?
- I. Why is it, then, that our passage today from Romans 13:1-7 has become one of the most controversial passages of all scripture?
- J. This small section of scripture is Paul's instruction to the church in Rome in the first century to (wait for it): be subject to the governing civic authorities.

- K. And just like the church, our communities, and the environment, governing authorities are not perfect...so what should be our attitude toward those who are in positions of authority over us.
- L. Ben Witherington writes, “Paul’s basic principle when it comes to ethics is: live at peace with everyone, offering no offense, except the inherent offense of the gospel and its necessary implications (both theological and ethical).
- M. This couldn’t be more timely for us during a global pandemic, where we find ourselves looking to the governing authorities for guidance. It couldn’t be more timely for us during the racial upheaval, riots, and protests against the governing authorities charged to protect us.
- N. Yet, what’s Paul’s message to the church in AD50, how does that translate to 2020, and what’s our response to that message today?
- O. This sermon series is called WITH. We’ve heard Paul’s encouragement to live out our faith WITH humility and WITH peace. Today, Paul tells the church to live out their faith **WITH respect**.
- P. Like well-worn stones in our hands, these characteristics are solid, dependable, and foundational to living out this faith in Jesus.
- Q. Let’s pray and then open our bibles...let’s see what kind of trouble we can get into this morning :).
- R. PRAY!!!!**
- S. Open your bible to Romans 13. We’ll read this whole section and then dive into what it means for the Roman church and for us today...verse 1...

2. Scripture

- A. READ ROMANS 13:1-7**
- B. Let’s dive in, shall we?
- C. The very first thing Paul writes is that this applies to EVERY person. The Greek here means every SOUL...Christians and non-Christians, alike. This follows from the previous section that we studied last week, where Paul was encouraging ALL followers of Jesus to live WITH peace and share peace with the non-believing world around them.
- D. Paul then turned to the civic, governing authorities. Paul most likely was thinking of Rome, here, but more generally, he was talking about whatever ruling authorities there was and is throughout all time. If it helps us to picture what he’s talking about, think of the US government or NYS government. That ought to get your blood pumping!
- E. “Be subject to the governing authorities...” or, “...**submit to** the governing authorities.”

- i. This concept of governing authorities is based on the basic Old Testament notion that it's God who raises up rulers, and also puts them down. (BWIII)
 - ii. Paul uses the Greek term for *be subject to* or *submit to*, which DOES NOT mean *obey*. Being subject to someone is different than obeying them. There have been, are, and will be times when Christians could not OBEY a law from pagan civic governments. However, that doesn't mean that they don't continue to submit to the authority of that government as an entity.
- F. Another important thing to hear Paul saying is that his concept of government is a **properly run, ethical, good-of-the-people, moral entity** that keep its citizens safe and is all about order and justice. He's not talking, here, about corrupt governments.
- i. At this point in history, it was the very beginning of the reign of Emperor Nero. Things were pretty good for this new group of Jesus-followers. They were kind of flying under the radar, unnoticed because they were small. Nero was generally tolerant. Paul was simply asking the Roman Christians to not make waves by being rebels or causing trouble. Even though Nero was a pagan, he still had the authority to make their lives difficult.
 - ii. As it would turn out, Nero later became VERY VERY intolerant of these Christians, threatened by their zeal and passion for sharing the gospel, proclaiming a new kingdom with Jesus as their King. But at this point, when Paul was writing, they could be in concert with (subject to) the governing authorities, submitting humbly and peacefully within the system that was keeping them safe from lawlessness or persecution.
- G. The reason why, Paul states, is that it was generally accepted by the Jews and Christians that all things were under the sovereignty of God...even, and maybe especially, the governing authorities. God had the sovereign power to raise up, appoint, and work within the government. And those authorities had the God-given purpose (or *ministry* as Paul says) to do God's will - to keep the peace, ensure safety, and bring justice, when needed.
- H. To resist the governing authority, for whatever reason, even theological or moral reasons, was, basically, to resist God's sovereignty. That's a bold statement! But, in the first century, it was exactly how they operated. They weren't saying the government was perfect...but they didn't want to burn down what God had put in place, either. Just like Creation...or the church.
- I. And, in fact, in verse 3, those who did what was good (followed the laws, lived in peace with others, didn't cause trouble) would "receive approval" from the governing authority, AND, more importantly, from God, Paul said.
- J. The opposite was also true. If you do what is wrong in the eyes of the governing authorities, trouble would come, sometimes even with the sword.

The sword was an implement of justice used by the civic authorities...it was the hammer to keep people in line. You get the idea.

- K. For Paul, this was about not only doing the right thing in God's eyes, but doing the right thing for the right thing's sake...for conscience. I don't know about you, but if I knowingly break a civic law, my conscience tells me pretty clearly not to do that again. If I'm hunting or driving my car or paying my taxes, the Holy Spirit in me keeps pushing me to do the RIGHT thing.
- L. In fact, Paul turns to things like taxes and payments and honor and respect in verses 6-7. If you owe taxes, pay your taxes. Don't skip out or try to outsmart the authorities. If you owe payment for something, PAY IT. If someone is due honor, then honor them. If someone is due respect, then give it in full.
- M. Even though the governing authorities weren't perfect, Paul is laser-focused to say to the church in Rome:
 - i. God appointed the governing authority because God is sovereign over ALL things.
 - ii. God uses those authorities to keep order and enact justice, because God is a God of order and justice.
 - iii. Because you are under the authority of God, and because God appointed governing authorities over you, be subject to the governing authorities.
 - iv. In your submission, do that which the governing authorities ask, not because you always agree, but because it will allow you to humbly live in peace as you respect those whom God has put in charge of those things.
 - v. If you do, then you don't have to fear the governing authorities and, in fact, will be confident in your faith because you know Jesus is in control.
 - vi. When Jesus returns, all this changes, but for now, this is where the church lives.
- N. It was that way in the first century...and, I argue, it is that way today.

3. Application

- A. So what does this mean for us, Pastor Steve? I'm glad you asked!
- B. For many years, and most intensely over the last few months, the concept of submitting to governing authorities has been a hot-button topic. This country was founded by a group of people who could not obey the governing authority from which they came. Remember the Boston Tea Party? Ever since, we, as a nation, have been attempting to do things in a new way that stands for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as our Declaration of Independence states.
- C. We've seen it go well. We've seen it go very badly. We've seen people come together in unity, while at the same time seen people injured and killed.

- D. In 2020, social media and the vast amount of information we get from countless news and media sources has not helped us wade through the tornado of data and opinions. We're left with a big question mark over our heads as we attempt to navigate this life WITH respect as followers of Jesus Christ.
- E. But that's just the thing. We're followers of Jesus Christ! WE are FOLLOWERS of JESUS CHRIST!
- F. Any ethic, any opinion, any response, any theology we might have MUST (MUST) first and foremost come under the sovereignty of our God who created everything out of love and who sent His only Son to die on a cross to redeem the hot mess we call this world.
- G. This admonition from Paul to the church in Rome obviously is not about the tyranny of wearing a mask in public or black lives matter or the IRS or anything else in the 21st century.
- H. **But if our God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, then the sovereignty of God is also the same.**
- I. This, then, is not about whether or not we agree with a particular law or tax, or not. **This is about whether or not, for you and me, Jesus is indeed on the throne praying for and waiting for all creation to be re-born through Him.**
- J. If he is not, then have at it. Burn it all down. Riot, protest, flame the world on social media.
- K. **But** if Jesus IS on the throne, and, by the way, He IS, then **until He returns**, we who follow Him are called to be subject to whatever authorities have been appointed over us.
- L. Now that I have your undivided attention (or at least have your ire up, maybe), what are you and I to DO about it? How do we live out our faith WITH respect for the governing authorities over us?
- M. Because of Jesus, with humility and with peace, here's are some practical things to pray about and consider:
- i. First and foremost, **Respect Authority**
 - a. Authority in your world today is in civic government, law enforcement, the military, the church, our families, at work, and other places.
 - b. When you, as a follower of Jesus, interact with the authority in each of those realms, start with an attitude of respect and go from there.
 - c. Even as I say that, I wonder how many are struggling with how in the world to DO that when you disagree with, are angry or frustrated with, those in authority right now?

- d. Remember...Paul was talking to the church about respecting governing authorities at their best. He doesn't say anything about how to respond when things are corrupt or malicious.
 - e. No matter what, respect is ALWAYS the place to start, and as far as it's in your control, living out your faith WITH RESPECT for authority is the best plan of Jesus.
- ii. Second, **Let the gospel do the offending**
- a. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."
 - b. The gospel itself - the fact that an innocent man died to set humanity free - is offensive to anyone who values human life. Yet, God loves the world to such a degree and in such a way that sacrificing his only Son for you was not only necessary, but desired...offensive love!
 - c. Let the gospel do the offending in this world. You and I don't need to defend the gospel. You don't need to weaponize the gospel. You don't need to use the gospel to shame others. The gospel does just fine doing all those things on its own...it's offensive just the way it is.
 - d. This is why so many who are offended by the gospel want those who hold to the truth and grace OF IT to be quiet. And, actually, that's the best way to respect authority. Confidently and humbly and peaceably allow the gospel to speak for itself. It has taken down the most corrupt of leaders and the most vile of contenders.
 - e. Stand behind it. Stand in it. Stand on it. But let it do the offending.
- iii. Third one...(now I'm meddling) **Don't take the law into your own hands**
- a. One of the very real and tragic realities of the past few months has been that a small minority have taken the law into their own hands and made a mess of the order and justice of the appointed governing authorities.
 - b. Police officers that have broken the law and their own rigorous training with lethal results. Rioters have broken the law and destroyed whatever they wanted in the name of justice and under the lie of being protesters. There's enough blame to go around...and it's all a result of our broken sinful nature. I'm not here to go down that trail.
 - c. As a follower of Jesus, taking the law into your own hands is nothing short of sin.
 - d. N.T. Wright wrote, "Justice is served not by private vengeance but by individuals trusting the authorities to keep wickedness in check."
 - e. I'm super-proud of the people I know who are Jesus-followers who have endured frustration and confusion around the edicts that have come from

our state and federal government during this pandemic. Through it all, they have been vocal, understandably, but they have not taken the law into their own hands. It's not Jesus' way!

- f. Jesus-followers model what it's like to do what is asked, enduring it all humbly, without taking the law into their own hands. It's not about you or me!
 - g. This is hard stuff, for sure. Something as simple as wearing a mask in public falls into this category, does it not?
 - h. Don't take the law into your own hands.
- iv. Finally, Paul says, **Pay what's due to whom it's due**
- a. Pay the taxes that are due...on ALL your income, no matter the source. There's no such thing as "under-the-table" for followers of Jesus. Ever.
 - b. If you have a bill due, pay it on time and with respect for those who have provided something to you.
 - c. I sometimes get annoyed when Stacy checks the receipt every time we leave a store to make sure we paid for everything we bought or didn't over pay. She puts me to shame when she goes back to let the store know we were UNDER-charged. She not a super-Christian (well, maybe she is)...she just wants to do the next right thing.
 - d. If someone is due honor, give them honor. Pay what's due. Every time. It's all about respect.

4. Conclusion

- A. We yearn for Creation to be put right again. Sometimes we feel it all the way down to our toes.
- B. We yearn for those leading us in every arena to always make the right decisions and keep us safe and happy. But, as we know, that day is sometime in the future.
- C. For today, this week, live out your life WITH respect for those in authority over us. It's counter-cultural. It's rarely easy. It won't often win you friends.
- D. Yet, as we submit to God and God's will, submitting to the governing authorities is a tangible sign that Jesus is Lord of ALL! That He's YOUR Lord! We are called to rise above EVERYTHING in this world, as we turn it ALL over the Jesus.
- E. WITH...respect.
- F. Let's pray!