



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 13:1-7

Romans

"The Left Hand of God"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're in the book of Romans, and this morning we are beginning a new chapter, Romans 13. So follow along with me as I read and then we will go to the Lord in prayer.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the privilege we have to not only read your Word but come before the throne of grace and seek your help in time of need. We seek your help now for a variety of reasons. First of all, to give us an understanding of the things that

we've read, to guide us in our thinking and help us to apply the principles that Paul sets forth. Somewhat mundane, they may seem. We are to be good citizens. We're to be law-abiding citizens.

Help us to be that, Father, and in being obedient to the laws that have been established, to be a good witness before the world, to live at peace with the world as best we can, as is possible, and to be a clear witness. Help us to be that, Father. We can do that by your grace, and we pray for that.

We pray that you'd give us a clear understanding of the things that we study this morning. We are so thankful that not only do we possess your inerrant Word, and not only as believers in Jesus Christ are we new creatures with new minds but we have a divine teacher in the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth. And so we pray that our hearts would be prepared for His ministry to us and that it would be effective.

But we pray for ourselves in regard to the material things of life as well. We pray for health and we pray that you'd bless us with that. It's a gift from you. We pray for those who are on our prayer list that are recovering from surgery or facing surgery. We pray for problems that seem protracted, ongoing. That can be very discouraging. We pray for those individuals and pray that you'd give healing mercy, and in the midst of affliction, give encouragement. Enable them to know that your good hand is upon them and you are wisely guiding them according to your purpose, which is perfect.

So give encouragement. Give healing if it be your Will. And give comfort to those who are grieving. May our lives be such that wherever we go, we have the potential to do that, that we live obedient lives, obedient first of all to the King of kings and then to the governing authorities and that we speak the truth. That our lives would be consistent with the words that we speak and that we speak words of healing, words of grace, words of eternal life. Make us good witnesses in the world.

Father, we are not here to change society, to make this a moral world and to correct the political system. Ultimately it's flawed and the day is coming when you will correct it by sweeping it all away and establishing the kingdom of your Son upon this earth. But in the meantime, we're to be lights. Not merely beacons of morality but we are to be men and women fundamentally who give the Word of life, the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're to bear fruit for eternal things, so help us to do that, Father. We look to you to bless us in that way. Pray that our time together would motivate us in that direction.

We pray that you'd bless us this evening when we return to this place and bless our time of worship here. And bless our time now as we worship together. We do pray in closing since our subject has to do with the government, those who rule over us, we pray that you'd bless them with wisdom. You have blessed our land in so many ways. You blessed us this day with rain. It's a great blessing. We thank you for that.

You've blessed our nation for so many years with social order, with great freedom, with government that while certainly not perfect is better than anything we see around the world, and we thank you, Father, for what you've given us and pray that you'd bless our leaders with wisdom, bless this land, give us peace, tranquility, that we might progress in godliness and dignity. That we might as a church flourish and be lights in the midst of a dark world. Bless us to that end. Prepare our hearts through our final hymn that we might be prepared to worship and study together. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject this morning is government, a topic that can almost always occasion a spirited discussion. Everyone has an opinion on the government. I learned that as a boy while reading Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. I was impressed with Pap. You remember Pap, that's Huck's father, and I was impressed with him not because he was an impressive person, he wasn't that, he was a drunken derelict dad. What impressed me was that of all people, he had strong

views on the government. Whenever he began to drink, Huck said, he almost always went for the "govment," as he called it.

"Call this a govment," he said, and then he'd start complaining about the government and the law because it always came down on him. "Oh, yes, this is a wonderful govment, wonderful. Why," and then he makes another complaint. And so it goes until he finally trips and falls over something and that ends his diatribe. But it illustrated to me at a relatively young age that everyone has opinions about government, from the uneducated to the erudite, and the apostle Paul was no exception. He had his thoughts on the subject though his were inspired. He didn't complain. What he taught is that government is good. He calls it a minister of God.

Martin Luther had a different description. He called government the left hand of God, the church being God's right hand. Both have different roles. They are not to interfere with one another but the state no less than the church is of God. In fact, Luther described the magistrate, the secular ruler, the governor, as a mask of God through which God in disguise, as it were, governs the world. Now, those are interesting descriptions that he gives of government, and I think they express a truth, a truth about the necessary work that God does for society and for the world and for the church through secular government.

Now, we see that, we see the importance of the state, we see the importance of the ruler in various places in the Bible, but one place in which it stands out is in the book of Judges because there is a refrain in the book in the latter chapters that underscores the importance of government and what occurs when there is a lack of government, and it's the refrain, "In those days, there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes." And what they did was lawless. Lawlessness characterized that age. It was an age of spiritual and social anarchy, an age when it was dangerous to travel the open road for fear of the enemies and for fear of outlaws.

Where there is no government there is chaos and destruction. Europe witnessed that when the French Revolution devolved into the Reign of Terror. The British statesman Edmund Burke wrote a long letter – in fact, more of a book than a letter, but it's a letter addressed to a young Frenchman giving his ideas, his thoughts, which were requested of him, about the events that had occurred in France, and he entitled his letter "Reflections on the Revolution in France," in which he strongly criticized the revolution. Burke was an advocate of order and tradition, which the French had swept away.

Now, he didn't rule out revolution altogether, but he warned that "it will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good." He understood that overthrowing government and the rule of law was very dangerous. He actually wrote that letter before the Reign of Terror began, so he wrote with great insight. Mob rule and anarchy are terrible things, and he understood that.

He also wrote in that letter against a minister in England, someone called Dr. Price, who preached in favor of the revolution and preached against the monarchy, and again he made an insightful observation. He criticized the man for speaking on a subject of which he was ignorant, exposed how wrong he was in all of his points. He was speaking of a subject of which he had not been trained, and as Burke points out, he had confused his role and his duties of that of a minister with that of a statesman or of a politician and he certainly wasn't a politician. He had failed in his duty as a minister and Burke wrote, "Surely the church is a place where one day's truce ought to be allowed to the dissensions and animosities of mankind."

In other words, Sunday is the one day of the week when worldly debates and concerns should be set aside for something far greater, far higher. I agree. And I make mention of that point because there are people in evangelical circles today who urge ministers to use the pulpit to promote political agendas, and I think that's wrong. Sunday is a day to be nourished on the Word of God, not agitated by political

discussions. In fact, frankly, most ministers are not qualified to give a proper lesson on politics. This isn't the place to do that, and we're not the ones to do it, and I speak particularly for myself. I'm not qualified to speak on that subject.

But this is the subject that Paul gives us in Romans 13, human government, and so we address it. We address the idea of politics to some degree, and I will seek to follow Paul's argument closely. His purpose is not to galvanize political involvement. We have a lot of that today in the church. That's not Paul's purpose. His purpose is to give counsel for wise behavior. He doesn't give a complete explanation of the subject. What he does is explain that government is of God, government is God's means of preserving order, and he shows that Christians have duties to the state.

It's certainly a natural subject in a letter that's written to people living in the capital of the empire, but it also fits well in the progression of Paul's instruction. You'll remember that chapter 12 begins a new section of the book of Romans, what is sometimes called the practical section. That's a bad description of it. It's the section of application. For 11 chapters, Paul has largely given us doctrine and beginning in chapter 12, he begins to apply that doctrine to our lives, how we are to live, he explains, in light of the great doctrines that he has preached. And in chapter 12, Paul explains three basic relationships that the Christian has.

First, our relationship to God in verses 1 and 2. We are to be living sacrifices to Him. Second, our relationship within the church, how we relate to the church, to other Christians in verses 3 through 13. And then our relationship with the world in verses 14 through 21. Our relationship with the world is often a difficult relationship because we are dealing with people who don't think like we think and who sometimes treat us unjustly. Our response is not to retaliate. "Do not be overcome by evil," Paul said. That doesn't mean that there is no place for seeking justice, only that we are not to take justice in our own hands. We are not to seek vengeance ourselves.

God has provided a means for finding justice, and it is in His left hand. It's the state. So that brings us to the fourth relationship that Paul describes, the Christian's relationship to government. We have responsibilities to it. We are to submit to it, Paul says in verse 1. Every person – and that really goes beyond Christians, this is everyone but certainly Christians. Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. Now, as I said, it's reasonable that Paul would take up the subject of politics because he was writing to a people living in the capital, the city of Rome. But there may have been a more pressing reason.

A few years earlier, there were riots in Rome that led to the expulsion of the Jews from the city. Luke mentions it in Acts 18. The Roman historian Suetonius wrote about it some years later, and he stated that the riots broke out in the Jewish community at the instigation of Chrestus. Now, that's interesting. It's not clear who Chrestus is but some think that that is a corruption of the name Christ or Christos. So if that is the case, when the gospel was introduced into the synagogues of Rome, disturbances followed like those that Luke records in the book of Acts when Peter and Paul preached the gospel in the synagogues.

The emperor Claudius responded by expelling the Jews, and along with the Jews, many Christians were also expelled because at that time the Romans didn't make a distinction between the synagogue and the church, between Christians and Jews. Among those who were expelled were Priscilla and Aquila. That is when they came from Rome to Corinth and Paul met them. But the way to avoid expulsion, the way to avoid loss, is to be peaceful. Christians, Paul said in chapter 12 verse 18, are to be at peace with all men and certainly not to instigate riots. We are to obey the laws and be in subjection to the government. The reason Paul gives is there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

The state's authority is derived from God. Now, Paul affirms that three times. Twice here in verse 1 and once more in verse 2. "Whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God." So to resist the laws of the land is to resist God's left hand, so to speak, because God is the one who establishes human government. That's not new. Paul didn't develop that idea himself. There are numerous passages throughout the Bible stating that God sovereignly establishes human governments. In Daniel 2:21, Daniel said in his prayer to the Lord that it is He who changes the times and the epochs, He removes kings and establishes kings.

The Lord is sovereign over the governments of the world. He is sovereign over time and all of the epochs of time. When a nation has its time in history, its epoch, its empire, it's because God gives it that season in history. He raises up its conquerors and its kings and its emperors and then when that empire comes to an end, when it plays out in history, He brings it down. It's all according to His sovereign Will and His sovereign hand. That's clear from Scripture. Now, we find that teaching acceptable when governments are good, but what about when they are not? When they are not moral? When they are evil? Is God sovereign over them? Did He place them in power? The answer is yes.

Paul's statement, "Those who exist are established by God," is without qualification. And he wrote that during the reign of the Caesars. Nero was on the throne at the time. In a few years he would begin a vicious persecution of the church and produce what one historian called a carnival of blood. Long before that, Pharaoh was a particularly evil ruler. He considered himself a god. He persecuted the Israelites. But God put him on the throne. It was God who invested him with his power. Paul quotes God in Romans 9:17, telling Pharaoh, "For this very purpose, I raised you up to demonstrate my power in you."

God raised up Pharaoh and He raised him up for a purpose. He raised him up to bring him down. He raised him up and gave him

great power over the Egyptians and over much of the ancient world at that time in order to show His greater power, but God put him on the throne. God raised him up. That's what Daniel said God does to all rulers. And Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon at the time, came to recognize that and glorify God with the same confession after God had greatly humbled the king of Babylon, He said in Daniel 4:35, "He does according to His Will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have you done?'"

God is sovereign over the kings and rulers of this world, even over the tyrants. That doesn't excuse their tyranny. God gives them power but holds them responsible for how they use it. He judges them for their abuse of power. Christ indicated that when He stood trial before Pilate. When He refused to answer the accusations made against Him, Pilate said, "Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and I have authority to crucify you? Don't you know who I am?" "I'm the governor, I'm the one who has authority over you," is what he said, and the Lord answered, "You would have no authority over me unless it had been given to you from above."

In other words, the only reason Pilate had any civil authority was because of God, who gave it to him. And then the Lord adds, "For this reason, he who delivered me to you has the greater sin." The sin of the Jews was greater than that of Pilate because they sinned against the Scriptures. But still, Pilate had sin and he would be judged for his miscarriage of justice as governor. Nevertheless, he had authority. Christ recognized his authority. It was legitimate authority given to him by God even though he misused it. And because it is from God, Christians are to respect that authority and they are to submit to it.

We are not to rebel against the state. This is the conclusion that Paul draws in verse 2. "Therefore," he says - that is, since

government is of God - "whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." So Christians are not to be revolutionaries. We are to be good citizens. We are to drive within the speed limits, we're to pay our taxes, we are to vote, we are to obey the laws of the land. Does that mean that we can never protest? Is Paul's teaching here absolute? Does it leave no room for resistance of any kind?

The answer to that is found in the response of Christ to a similar question that was put to Him when His enemies asked if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. You remember the exchange. He took a coin and He asked whose likeness is on it and they answered Caesar and He said, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar and to God the things that are God's." In other words, Caesar has legitimate authority and has a rightful claim to our support and loyalty, but it is not absolute. Government is not autonomous. It is not free. It is, as Paul said, established by God. It is under Him, and so we are first of all to render to God the things that are God's.

That means when human government enacts laws that are contrary to God's laws, then we cannot submit to them. And there are numerous examples of this. In Matthew 28:18 and in Acts 1:8, Christ gave the church the great commission. He told us, "Go and make disciples of all the nations." We are obligated to do that. That's our mission in this world. But it wasn't long before the apostles were in conflict with the authorities for doing just that. In Acts 4, Peter and John were arrested in the temple for preaching the gospel. They were told to keep silent. They refused and said, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

They continued preaching and again they were arrested. The Jewish authorities brought them into the Sanhedrin. They told them that they had been given orders not to preach in the name of Christ,

but Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men," Acts 5:29. And that is the principle that is to govern our lives.

As I said, there are numerous examples of this in the Bible. When Pharaoh ordered the midwives in Egypt to kill the firstborn Israelite boys, they refused to do it. We read in Exodus 1:17 that the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them but let the boys live. And Moses adds, "So God was good to the midwives." In other words, God approved their civil disobedience. Something similar happened in modern times when people in Europe protected Jews from the Nazis.

My wife and I once stayed in the house of some friends in Amsterdam and in our room was a closet that had been used for protecting and hiding Jews, and I was intrigued by it. I examined it. It had been restored to its normal function but evidently at one time it had a secret aspect to it, and many people had been hidden in that closet. I had wondered how many were there and what happened to those people and what happened to the people who had hidden them? Because what they did was very dangerous. It was dangerous but it was right. We can never obey men when their laws are contrary to God's law. We must be ready to sacrifice our lives in obedience to God.

Daniel and his friends in Babylon were prepared to do that. When Nebuchadnezzar had his dream of this colossal statue and then had the idea of erecting it on the Plain of Dura and having his subjects worship it, bow down to this great image when the instruments sounded, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey. When threatened with death in the fiery furnace, they replied, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, but even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods." God did deliver them.

And later He delivered Daniel when he refused to obey the edict of Darius that no one should pray to any god for a 30-day period except to the king himself. Daniel refused. He prayed openly as had

been his practice, facing Jerusalem three times a day, and he was arrested, and as you know, he was thrown into the lions' den. God shut the mouths of the lions. God delivered Daniel – but he doesn't always do that. Sometimes His people lose their lives for their obedience to Him. Some of these Roman Christians would lose their lives in Nero's persecution.

We don't know our futures. We can't be presumptuous about what God will do. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego understood that. Our God is able to deliver us. But if He doesn't, they recognize that He might not, that He might have another Will for their lives. It will be just as good, just as right. They didn't know the end and we can't know that, either. We leave that to God. For our part, we must obey God rather than men – but that's different from rebellion. Paul doesn't tell us when or even if rebellion is legitimate. Edmund Burke called it the very last resource, and David never sought the life of Saul. He never slew the king when he had opportunities.

But Paul doesn't address that issue. He doesn't deal with every issue. He is writing in general terms to address the needs of the Roman church and the situation it might face. Paul understood these things. He understood government, he understood what he was writing about. Paul was a conscientious man, Paul was a Roman citizen. He had experienced the benefits of his citizenship and of Roman justice, and there were great benefits to it. Roman authorities more than once delivered him from mobs. He also experienced the failures of Roman justice. He'd been unjustly flogged and imprisoned, not a few times. So Paul wasn't naïve about government.

He is stating the ideal, what God intended government to be, not the reality. The reality is human government often falls short of God's purpose for it. Nevertheless, it is of God and it is necessary and generally good and we are to be submissive to it. We are to be law-abiding citizens and not rebels. Paul gives a further reason for that in verse 3. Rulers are not a cause for fear for good behavior. Again,

this doesn't take account of every situation, doesn't take account of persecuting emperors. It states a general principle, and the norm is that governments enforce the law, and so those who keep the law have nothing to fear from the state. It's those who break the law that should fear authorities.

Now, the reason that Huck's Pap was so belligerent toward the government was because he was a deadbeat dad, he was disorderly, he was lawless. He hated government because it restrained him and punished him justly and for the good of others. That's what government is intended to do. It is ordained to protect us from the lawless. That means if we are not lawless, we don't cheat on our taxes or speed on the highway or try to circumvent laws that we don't happen to like, then we have nothing to fear from the government. That's what Paul says. Do what is good. He wants us to be good citizens, and he assures us that if we are that, if we do what the law calls us to do, then we will be rewarded, you will have praise from the authorities, he says.

Now, he reinforces this in verse 4 by giving the nature of government and its function. It is, he says, a minister of God and it's for our good. So from presidents to policemen, officials of the state are God's ministers and that word "minister" is the word from which we get "deacon," so it can be translated "servant." It's a title that gives honor to officials of the state while at the same time giving perspective on them as well. They are ministers of God. They are God's deacons or God's servants but nothing more. They are not gods as the Roman emperors claimed and however prestigious and powerful our politicians may be, they are just servants and they are in their position to serve the people.

They serve our good, Paul says. That is the ministry or the function of a state. Paul doesn't define the good but it probably has to do with maintaining law and order because he goes on to warn against doing evil under the threat of the sword. If you do evil, be afraid, he

says, for it – that is, the state – does not bear the sword for nothing. It is an avenger who brings wrath on those who practice evil. The sword is the symbol of power and force. Government has authority to rule and it is armed in order to enforce that authority. It cannot function in any other way.

So the good has to do with maintaining law and order. This the primary responsibility of government. It restrains evil and punishes it. It promotes order and prevents chaos. That's what Paul prays for or urges us to pray for in 1 Timothy 2:2 where he says pray for kings and all who are in authority so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. When there is anarchy in society and lawlessness reigns, the church is frustrated in its job of doing God's Will. We are affected by the society around us. So government maintains social order, which is good for us because it gives the church the opportunity to meet and to grow in grace and to advance the gospel.

And the sword is government's means of doing that. It is an instrument of force. It kills, and that is the idea here. It has been entrusted to the state to avenge evil by means of execution. The death penalty is not the exclusive meaning of the sword. It can also be used to execute judgment that falls short of that, but its primary meaning here is that of death. The proof of that is the fact that throughout the New Testament, the word "sword" is frequently used in reference to the instrument of execution. You see that in Romans 8:35, Matthew 26:52, "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword." In other words, he who is violent, who is a lawbreaker, will be executed is what the Lord is saying.

So to reject this interpretation about the sword is to go contrary to the overwhelming weight of evidence in the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, where capital punishment is clearly taught. In Genesis 9:6, God affirmed to Noah that the sin of murder is so heinous a crime that the only appropriate punishment is the forfeiture of the

murderer's life. And so to enforce that penalty, God entrusted the state, not the individual. He entrusted the state with the sword to establish His justice and to promote social order. As Paul explains, the state brings wrath on evildoers. Whose wrath? Whose wrath is Paul speaking of here? The wrath of God.

I think that's clear from chapter 12 and verse 19: Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay," says the Lord. God has numerous ways of executing His vengeance, His righteous vengeance. One of the primary ways of doing that is through the law courts. So as Luther said, government is the left hand of God. It does His work by enforcing the law and by doing that justly, by doing that wisely, it restricts or restrains evil in part because the threat of death itself serves as a deterrent to crime.

I know that is a debated point. I can remember 20 years ago reading *National Review* and the debate over whether the death penalty actually restrains evil or not, whether it is a hindrance to crime, a deterrent to crime or not, and I know the argument about crimes of passion, that people who commit murder don't think about these things, they act in passion, not rationally. But notice what Paul says in verse 4: If you do what is evil, be afraid. In other words, the threat of punishment should give a person pause about committing crime. Now, that's a deterrent, according to Paul.

Now, that's not the only reason for the death penalty and that's not the main reason, and that doesn't always deter crime, obviously. The main reason is to establish justice, righteousness.

Now, the power of the sword extends beyond capital punishment. It refers to the state's responsibility to defend its citizens from enemies without and within, to defend the nation against invasion as well as against sedition or rebellion. It is a solemn responsibility. It is a grave responsibility, this power to take life, and a responsibility which, as John Stott has suggested, should be carried out with minimum necessary force. That means it requires a wise

government to wield the sword well, a government that is judicious and careful and cautious. Power in the hands of unwise men brings calamity on a nation and on the church, as the Roman Christians would soon learn.

Government is for our good as long as it uses the sword wisely, and so to promote our good, our tranquility and peace, we need to be diligent about praying for our leaders. And we need to be careful about keeping the laws of the land. That's what Paul is urging here. He is urging us to be good citizens, to be prayerful citizens, earnestly, diligently praying for our leaders and to be good, obedient citizens. We do that not only because it's beneficial to us, that's what Paul has basically said so far, we profit, we benefit if we live law-abiding lives. The law won't come after us. We'll live in peace and we'll prosper.

But that's not the only reason we are to do that, and really not even the main reason. Paul comes to the main reason in verse 5 where he says we're to do that because it's right. It's the right thing to do. That's what he says in verse 5, we should be good citizens for conscience' sake. Government is of God and therefore it is wrong to resist it. We are to submit to the law and the state, and to violate that is to violate one's conscience, what one naturally knows to be right and wrong.

Now, Paul concludes his instruction on government with a reference to raising and paying taxes. Because of this, he says, you also pay taxes, and this is where the rubber meets the road, isn't it? This issue of taxation is perhaps at the center of politics. I won't say it is the center of politics but certainly is one of the central issues of politics. The parties of the right and parties of the left debate whether the government should increase or decrease taxes, but all agree that taxes are necessary. Government can't function without taxation. Important services have to be paid for, the military, the police force, the postal system, garbage collection.

How many services the government should provide, how big government should be, is all part of the political debate. Some of these services could probably better be provided by the private sector, so that's part of the debate, and there is a lot of government waste as we all know, and there are abuses in the tax system. In fact, the power to collect taxes is almost as dangerous as the power to wield the sword.

One of the first justices of the Supreme Court, John Marshall, said the power to tax is the power to destroy. To destroy incentive in business. Taxes can become a disincentive to free enterprise. They can legally deprive people of what is rightfully theirs by legally confiscating property, money, through taxation. So this is another reason why we need to be informed citizens. We need to vote wisely. We need to pray earnestly. Nevertheless, having said all of that, in order for government to function, to keep the peace, to promote justice and an orderly society, we must pay taxes.

Paul says render to all what is due to them, tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. All men should do that whether they are Christians or not, but certainly Christians should be – above all other people – good, law-abiding, tax-paying citizens. That is Paul's counsel on politics and government. He gives a very positive view of the state. It's not a complete explanation of government, it is not a political manifesto, but all that he says is true. And as John Stott has written about our relationship to the state, "Conscientious Christian citizens will submit to its authority, honor its representatives, pay its taxes, and pray for its welfare."

That's our duty as Christians. But our first duty is to the governor of the universe, to the Lord God, and to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and to the Holy Spirit who leads us, guides us, and whom we are to obey. We are, in other words, to obey our triune God. We do that by being obedient to the government as

Paul instructs us to do but also and primarily our obedience is seen first of all in faith, in trusting in the Son of God as the Savior of men, as our personal Savior.

Have you done that? Have you looked to Jesus Christ, realizing that you're a sinner in need of a Savior and trusted in Him and in Him alone for your salvation? He can give you what no government can give you. Government promises much. Promises peace – it should give us that. Promises much more, promises a lot that it probably shouldn't be trying to give us. It promises a lot but it can give us very little, really. At best, tenuous peace, order. But what Christ gives is peace with God. He gives us forgiveness of sin. He gives us life everlasting. Have you trusted in Him and do you have that?

Someday the governments of the world will all end and Christ's kingdom will begin. We become citizens of His realm through faith alone in Christ alone. In the one who died in our place. So if you have not believed in Jesus Christ, trust in Him. Believe in Him. By God's help, may all of us live lives of obedient service to our Lord, the King of kings, and as good citizens of this temporal realm. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace, We're reminded of our duties to the state, to the government. We pray that you'd make us good citizens, you'd make us conscientious Christian citizens, so that we will be good witnesses in the midst of this world. These things are passing away. The best of human government falls short of your ideal and cannot compare to what's coming. But in the meantime, until your Son returns and establishes His kingdom on this earth, we are to be good citizens, helpful citizens, submissive citizens. Help us to be that and in so doing, be good witnesses to those around us. May we do that by your grace and may we seek to do that, we pray, in Christ's name. Amen.