

Authorities and Authority

Romans 13:07

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This is the last Sunday, loved ones, that we will discuss the relationship of God's children to the civil government and that's because we're coming to the end of this portion in Romans 13 where God talks to us about the Christian in politics. Many of you have agreed with some of the things I've shared and have found them in your own experience, and many of you, I know, think differently. And it seems to me very important that in this last conversation that we have that I give an introduction and then give you an opportunity to ask questions that you think express maybe another important side to the issue.

So loved ones, we're coming to the last of this portion of Romans 13, and we've come to the verse where Paul summarizes what God has said through him about our relationship to the civil authorities. You'll see how Paul puts it in Romans 13:7, "Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." In other words, God is saying through Paul, "You ought to give the civil and political authorities what is due to them because of their position -- what is due to them in money and what is due to them in respect. You ought to pay the Federal and the State income taxes. You ought to pay the import duties and the tariffs. You ought to show respect to teachers, to policemen, to judges, to all Federal and State authorities and you ought to give honor to people in those positions. You ought to give honor to the President of the United States and to all other people who are in positions of official authority, both political and civil."

Why? Well actually the biggest reason, loved ones, is Romans 13:1. That's the biggest reason of all. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." Because God says so, that's why. That's the first reason you should do it. If you say, "Why not kind of circumvent their regulations if you possibly can? Why not treat the President or the judges or the policemen as figures of fun? Why not treat them according to their ordinary human weaknesses and frailties or according to their own abilities and virtues? Why not make fun of teachers? Why not make fun of people in authority? Why not try to get around the regulations and find loopholes in their system if you possibly can?"

Well, the biggest reason is because God says you shouldn't. That's the biggest reason of all. He says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." And loved ones, just about a second after you die, there'll come a moment when you're alone; absolutely alone. And it will require your blind and immediate obedience to the God of the universe at that moment, to go down the right pathway in that twilight zone between life and death. And that blind and immediate obedience does not come after a life of disobedience. It will only come at that crucial moment, a second after you die, because you have practiced a habit of obedience to your God. And then, at that moment when you'll be coming out of whatever it is -- the pains of cancer or unconsciousness -- at that moment, you'll immediately obey your Lord at the crucial time. So that's why we should do this -- because God says it.

Now if you say, "Does he tell us why he says that -- why he tells us to give such respect and such submission to these civil and political authorities?" He does loved ones, and you'll find it in Romans 13:4a: "For he is God's servant for your good." For he is God's servant, that's why. You're paying them and their salaries because they are God's servants. "God's servants -- you mean people

like Spiro Agnew, Richard Nixon, John F. Kennedy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, J. Edgar Hoover were God's servants?" Yes, that's what God says; God says they are his servants.

Now you may say, "That's stupid. There are thousands of men like that in political and civil places of authority throughout the world that don't care a bit about God. They don't even believe in God; or if they do believe him they just blaspheme his name. How can you say they're God's servants when they have no interest in God and no interest in doing his will?"

Loved ones, in the same way as God called another such person his servant. There was another mighty king that opposed God's will for his people in every way possible and yet God used him as his servant.

You'll find that in Romans 9:17: "For the scripture says to Pharaoh" (Pharaoh was the enemy) "I have raised you up." Or God, in other words says, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

God didn't make Pharaoh bad; Pharaoh chose to be bad himself. But then God used him -- so, in that sense, God's servants. In other words, to make it clear, you can look at the rest of Romans 13:4a to see in what sense God's servant: "For he is God's servant for your good." That's it. God used Cyrus who was not a Jew. He used Pharaoh who was not a Jew. He used the Babylonians who were utterly opposed to Israel. He used many of the nations, who didn't believe in God, as his servants to provide for the survival of Israel.

In that same sense God uses the civil and political authorities to provide for our survival. It's in that sense, loved ones, that they are God's servants. You remember how all that civil and political authority business started. It was back in the early days of the world's creation when a certain chaotic situation occurred. You'll find it in Genesis 6:5, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Then in Genesis 6:11, "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold I will destroy them with the earth.'" The place was so chaotic because of us all doing what we wanted that God had to destroy the whole place, except for Noah and his family, with the universal flood that lasted for a year.

Then the flood disappeared and God made a strange kind of promise. You'll find it in Genesis 8:21. "And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.'" God promised, "I'll never destroy the earth again, but in order to corral the selfishness of man and their determination to destroy each other, I am going to initiate the rule of law."

That occurred in Genesis 9:6 when God established the basic law of all civil laws:

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image."

That was the beginning of civil government and political authority. God did it to keep us from destroying each other, so that all of us who will eventually receive Jesus would have the chance of doing so without being wiped out by the chaos and anarchy and violence around us.

So that's why political government exists, loved ones. And that's why God has made these political

and civil authorities his servants for our good in order to keep us alive. In other words, God uses the policemen and the judges and the Presidents and the legal authorities to prevent the cruel hands from choking us to death before we have a chance to get to know Jesus. That's using the power of the sword to restrain the cruel hands from creating chaos and violence in our society and destroying us before we have a chance to get to know Jesus.

The power of the Spirit in the body of Christ exists to change the cruel hearts that direct the cruel hands. It's an entirely different function we have as the body of Jesus. Our job is not to restrain the cruel hands -- that's the job of the civil and the political authorities. Our job, as the body of Jesus, is to change the cruel hearts that direct those cruel hands and that's why God initiated civil authority and why we are to respect it.

Every time we see the civil authorities in that light, we release certain powers. Every time we see the President -- not as a silly cartoon figure that we regard as just an ordinary man, or, at the same time, as a kind of royal President that we elevate beyond any criticism -- but instead see him as a man that God has allowed to come into that position. And when we see that he is God's servant in order to preserve us from violence and chaos, we see him by faith. By faith we see him in the position as God's servant, rather than seeing him by sight as somebody we've elected, or as some ordinary person who is trying to do a job that's too big for them.

And every time we do that -- every time we know these figures of authority, not according to the flesh; not as the other non-Christians regard them -- as people who happened to get elected -- but every time we know them after the Spirit -- as people who are God's servants to us, we release two mighty powers to influence their hearts.

The first is found in Proverbs 21:1. And every time we look at them in faith it is unto us according to our faith in regard to this mighty truth. "The king's heart" -- or the President's heart or the boss's heart or the manager's heart or the foreman's heart or the teacher's heart or the professor's heart or my father's heart-- "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." It's a stream of water coming down from the faucet. God overrules according to the faith of his people that these men are his servants. God is able to overrule even their wrong decisions so that it does not turn out for our harm; but it turns out for our good.

The other mighty power it releases is in Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to them that love God." God works all things for our good even through the drunken cop on the end of the street, or the cop that takes bribes from prostitutes. He is able to use the good judge and the fair judge as well as the alcoholic judge. God is able to turn them in his hands as long as his children will see them by faith as God's servants whose purpose is to preserve the world from chaos while they, as God's children, allow his Spirit to change people's hearts through their lives.

Now you may say, "What about when they use your taxes to fund abortion or to build nuclear submarines? What if they use your taxes to do things that you don't believe are right?" Well loved ones, in a democracy like ours, where the majority rule has to count whether we like it or not, you first of all vote. You exercise your right to vote to get the right person in. You write to your representatives in Washington, deluging them with mail if you want to. But you write to them. You run for office yourself, if God calls you to that vocation.

But you do not further God's will by disobeying his direct command to pay them their taxes and to give them respect. Do you see that? Such civil disobedience as refusing to pay taxes or refusing to

give them the respect that God tells you to give them, simply furthers the cause of chaos and anarchy and it cannot be used by God to change their hearts. It cannot be used by God to change them, themselves.

In other words, we are in the same position as Jesus: "Put away your sword. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight. But my kingdom is not of this world -- my kingdom is not this external kingdom of America or Russia. My kingdom is within men's hearts. That's the kingdom that will remain after death occurs. That's the kingdom I am fighting for." And loved ones, for those of us who are God's children, civil disobedience is a civilian pursuit. It's something that soldiers of the Cross do not get involved in because they have one task -- and that is to bring hearts into the kingdom of Jesus. And they will do anything to do that.

What if the authorities tell you to do something that would force you to disobey God -- what do you do? If the civil authorities tell you to do something that would force you to disobey God, what do you do? Well loved ones, it's clear and is found in Acts 5:27. This situation occurred several times in the New Testament and this is one of them. "And when they had brought them, they set them before the counsel. And the high priest questioned them, saying, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'" That's it.

Actually, our present government here in the States allows you a great deal of latitude: you can educate your children at home if you want, you can start your own schools if you want, and you can refuse military service if you want. In most ways, we are able to submit to God and to submit to the government also. But if there should ever come a time when you have to choose, you obviously are told, by God himself, that you must choose God.

What if you live in a fascist society, or one of the military dictatorships of South America, or a godless oligarchy like Russia? The same truth applies, and it's the basic truth; the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. That's the basic truth for every ordinary Christian. Even in a Siberian prison you can still love God and have heaven in your heart. Even when you're about to be executed the next day, it is still true that God can control the worst dictator in the world for your good. Maybe not for your present happiness in this life, but he still can control it so that you will enter heaven, whatever occurs in this present life. That's the general, basic, guide that God gives to us, and thank God that he gives us that.

How many of us here are not facing Siberian prisons, but we're facing difficult circumstances and hard things and we live or work in awkward situations? Loved ones, the truth is that there is no external circumstance that can prevent you being a full, complete child of God and going to heaven when you leave this world. God has assured us of that.

Now, I'll keep quiet so that you can ask questions.

Q:<inaudible>

A:The question is roughly this: Doug is pushing me on capital punishment. He's pleading all kinds of the best examples possible so that I would agree with him! I understand Chuck Colson's encouragement that you give as much time to prisoners to repent as possible. But it's interesting, Doug, even in Chuck Colson's last newsletter, there was a detailed account of a man, who has a

friend here in the body who knows him and prayed for him in those important days, and even that dear man pleaded that they would execute him and that he would receive what was due to him. He had repented and had become a Christian and died a Christian.

As someone wrote me in a little note: "What about people like David, or some of the kings like Saul who obviously weren't executed even though they caused another man's death? Well, maybe because they caused it indirectly, but I still think they were due death. In each case, you remember, death reigned throughout the family: David's son was killed, and there were others that continued to be killed as a result of his action. So it seems that in those special cases, because they were the kings and were still being used by God, they were not executed but the execution was virtually carried out in their families.

It seems Doug, difficult to find in this book (the Bible), reason for opposing capital punishment unless you hopelessly and illogically mix up the realm of the civil authority and the religious authority. Then you start applying the Sermon on the Mount to the political authorities – "turn the other cheek" and all that. But then that prevents war. If you're going to apply that to political authorities, nobody can fight. And the truth is that the Sermon on the Mount and the whole spirit of those commands is given to the heart within; the kingdom that reigns within our hearts. But still, there are mosaic laws that apply to the external civil authorities.

In other words, loved ones, you'd be in a hedonistic situation if you started to try to apply the law of continual forgiveness in the case of every robbery that took place: there would be chaos. You'd be opposing the whole purpose of God's laws, which is to create order and prevent chaos and anarchy. But think what would happen if every time somebody did a million dollar Brinks job, we simply said, "We forgive you!" They'd be doing it again tomorrow and it would become the rule of the society.

So I think Doug, still, you have to keep on this side of the issue the political authorities that govern by the mosaic law and on this side the kingdom: the authority of the kingdom and the spiritual authority governed by Christ and his commandments.

Q:<inaudible>

A: I think I can respond, Tom, in a way that will put you at peace. Loved ones, when Jesus calls you to stand up for something like abortion or to oppose abortion, I think you are governed by your conscience to do it. But Tom, what I am desperately afraid of is that the church, as a whole, begins to turn its eyes from saving souls to issues like that that are secondary to the saving of a soul. So that's what I'm concerned with. Brother, I'm with you. And I don't think you should apply what I'm saying to the individual. I think all of us are called by Jesus to stand up for different things as Christians. But I was very concerned that with the whole impetus and drive in the country, it would be like Jesus' disciples suddenly turning from saving people's souls and turning around to abolish slavery. That would have been disastrous for us. We'd never have found the kingdom. So that's it.

No brother, I am for what you're saying and I am for the individual's right to do it. But I think, loved ones, it's very important that we, as a body of Jesus, do not get directed down a side road. Do you know one of the concerns that are on some of our hearts about what we regard as a religious movement that has taken place in America? How many missionaries has it sent abroad? You know that the answer to that is pretty pathetic if you compare it with all the religious books that have been

published and all the churches that are filled with people.

It's amazing how few missionaries have been sent out by it and the mark of revival is that there's always a great explosion of missionary endeavor: people are concerned first of all for others -- for those who do not know Jesus. That's, I think, what God put on my heart: that we needed to keep our searchlight on the main issue. It was a bit like the anti-Semitism attacks were for us, it was vital to keep on preaching our way through Romans, looking for God's word. We were not to get deviated and start defending ourselves against anti-Semitism.

So loved ones, you'll find that in your own life as well. There are a thousand side alleys you can go down. But we have been introduced to Jesus for one reason -- to introduce as many others to him as possible before we die. That's the purpose of our lives.

Q:<inaudible>

A: Loved ones, here's what I would love to share with you -- this time as a European. It's very important that we Irish, when we're in Ireland, do not tell you in America what you should do in your situation. But as a European could I say to you that it's very important, too, that you don't try to tell us (in Ireland) what to do in our situation because it is so very, very different from yours. And brother, that's one great caution I would bring to each of us in this room. About as much as we can manage is to get God's mind on what we are to do in our own situation.

When we begin to talk about loved ones in Russia or in other countries, it seems to me we need to talk with great caution and with great respect to their situations. So I would be very reluctant to say, "Yes, that's the answer", but I do think that loved ones in Russia have already shown that those who have grown in Jesus are those who have kept their eyes on Jesus. Those who have got entangled either in trying to compromise with the authorities or trying simply to oppose the authorities have found that they have got preoccupied with civilian pursuits.

So I would certainly agree that the whole attitude in Russia would be very possible for you to say that God will not let anyone, even powerful leaders, do anything that will prevent me knowing Jesus in my heart. And even if God allows me to be sent to a Siberian prison, he will so arrange things that I will still be able, whatever brainwashing or torture I have to endure -- to stay with Jesus. I believe that that's what has enabled many loved ones to die in peace in Russia. It seems to be that that would certainly be a reasonable position to take and, loved ones, a position that many of us in Europe have had to take. We've often been in situations where we haven't been able to change the circumstances. One of the beauties of America is you can often change the circumstances -- except that sometimes, now we're beginning to find even we can't change the circumstances.

As the power of evil intensifies in the world, we find it increasingly difficult to make things the way we think they should be. And many of us in Europe and in Asia have suffered all kinds of impossible external circumstances and yet lived in freedom in our hearts. I would submit to you that probably the final circumstance of all that we each meet in this life is such a circumstance: that circumstance when you stop breathing. At that moment, to all intents and purposes, our life has ceased. And at that moment it's so important to have our reality inside.

Q:<inaudible>

A: I am very skeptical, Jim, of the idea that there are legal revolutions. That's the distinction

that some theologians make: that there are godly revolutions and ungodly revolutions. It seems to me it does not stand up to logical analysis. The only thing I suppose one can say is that that majority in a certain nation come to a certain point where God allows them to do certain things that are not his ideal, just as he allowed Israel to have a king even though he didn't think it was the ideal.

I am sure many of us who face the violence of our present society and some of the anarchy in our present society have wondered if we're not reaping some of the benefits of our attitude earlier on. But it seems to me very difficult. I can't answer that question (about God's thoughts concerning revolution). At least I am honest.

Q:<inaudible>

A: The question is regarding the issue of bearing arms. And it seems to me even our government make provision for us to refuse and to do alternate service and that's why I think it's part of the bewilderment that we have in trying to explain the origin of our nation. There is so much evidence that God has blessed America and blessed us with an enlightened government and with a liberal government and blessed those dear men, people like Jefferson and many who weren't Christians at all. He seems to have given them wisdom beyond their understanding for us. And I think all of us who are Americans stand in the middle of a great miracle for which, loved ones, there's no one more grateful than the naturalized immigrant. He knows more than anybody else what a blessed country we have. What a dear nation we have and what a great government we have.

Q:<inaudible>

A: It seems to me Jesus has called us to be responsible citizens in every way, loved ones. And it seems to me what he is saying is do it with love in your heart and respect for your authorities and not with a rebellion in your heart. But be responsible citizens and speak out on issues and use your vote and exercise your right to vote and write to congressmen and run for offices as God guides you. But do it with a heart that trusts God and not trusting your ability to change things. That's the heart of it, loved ones.

Trusting God that even if you are not able to get your way on abortion or even if we're not able to get our way on capital punishment, that God himself will so overrule that nothing will happen that will prevent us doing what he wants us to do for Jesus and that, finally, the heart of the king is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. And loved ones, as we encourage our children to exercise that faith, there'll be a peace that they will come up in -- not that fearfulness of the people running to the mountains and storing in the food and the guns -- but there'll be a faith and a confidence that our children will come up in knowing that we have someone who is governing the governor. And that's what's so important: that we rest in that peace.

So you should know that, in regard to your bosses or those who are in authority over you, the heart of each one of them is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. God will not allow anything to happen to you that he cannot use for his glory in your life. That's probably the final deliverance from slavery, isn't it?

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for the way you deal with everything in your world. And we thank you for the book of Romans that has been such a blessing to us over these years. We thank you Father for

the encouraging direction you give us to trust that you are in charge even of the world leaders.

You are in control even of those military dictators and you are certainly in control of our President and those in authority over us in this nation. Then we thank you, our Father, that with that strong faith in our hearts, you are in a position to direct us to take certain actions. Actions that stem from faith and not from fear. Actions that stem from your intuition in our hearts and not from some label, phrase, or emotional issue that is raised by others.

Father we thank you that we can act from a position of quiet faith that God will work all things for good to them that love him and that the heart of the king is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. And then we can act in peace and in blessing.

Lord, we thank you for that. We thank you Father that it applies to us in regard to our taxes and in regard to those who are in authority over us in our businesses and in our jobs and in our schools. Lord, we don't need to be anxious about them or worry. You will allow them to do what is good for us and nothing more. We thank you for that.

Now, the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.