

Let me give you a little inside baseball on how I prepare for what goes on here at church on Sundays. I prepare worship a quarter at a time. This includes the hymns we sing, the order of service, and even the text I'm going to preach on. I even write the little one paragraph "as we gather..." that is on the front of the bulletin which helps summarize the thoughts for a certain Sunday.

Months ago, I chose Romans 13 as the text to preach this Sunday, and now I'm wondering what past me was thinking. However, Romans 13 is a chapter of the Bible that we need to hear now more than ever. The Holy Spirit has seen fit to work through the man-made pre-appointed sets of readings that we read through to bring you His Word from Romans 13 this morning. Romans 13 teaches us that **CHRISTIANS SUBMIT TO AUTHORITIES BECAUSE GOD HIMSELF HAS INSTITUTED THEM.**

Verse 1 reads: **"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."** I. For many, submit is a dirty word. This phrase "be subject to," could be more woodenly translated as be submitted to. It's the same verb in Ephesians 5 where Paul tells wives to submit to their husbands and servants to submit to their masters.

Doesn't the word submit just rub us Americans the wrong way? We're a nation who was born of revolution, and nobody is going to tell us what to do. We want to do what we want when we want to, and anyone who tells us otherwise often becomes the target of our anger and resentment.

And we see this lack of willingness to submit all over our culture. We have freedom of speech, but we use that freedom to tear down those in authority over us who might otherwise be doing a good job. We have freedom of the press, but we often gravitate towards those news sources that sensationalize, criticize, and even outright lie. We have freedom of assembly, but how often in our day and age do we see that freedom abused to get drunk in a crowded bar in a pandemic or to engage in protests that turn violent?

For many, submit is a dirty word. This isn't just an American thing; this is a human thing. This is a sinner thing. The struggle is that sinners are ruled by sinners, even your favorite ruler is a sinner. In a perfect world where those who rule over us were sinless and perfect, sinners would still complain and want to find excuses to disregard what the leader said or commanded. Moses was a holy man, but the people still grumbled at his commands. The Bible tells us that David was a man after God's own heart, but even Absalom his son tried to launch an insurrection.

And we don't need to imagine what it would be like to complain and disobey someone who is perfect because we as Christians don't like submitting to our Heavenly Father who is perfect. James writes, **"Submit yourselves therefore**

**to God.”** Yet we don’t want to. We find excuses not to follow the clear commands that God gives us because we think we know better, or we think what we’re doing really isn’t so wrong.

But in the ancient world, submit wasn’t a dirty word. It was a matter of life and death. Submit is a military word. In the ancient world they had tight military formations called a phalanx where a group of heavily armored soldiers basically make a box of shields with spears sticking out. Picture riot police with their tall shields all in a line.

The word submit means get in line behind or form up behind. Would you rather be in the center of the phalanx, or one lone guy standing ahead of the formation? If you were a police officer in a riot, would you want to be behind the 200-pound guy holding a shield or would you want to be on the other side of the line of shields?

Being subject to or submitting to means that we fall in line with the wishes of those in authority over us so that they can protect and serve us. Heavy is the head that wears the crown, and good rulers and leaders strive selflessly to do what’s right for those under their authority.

And we know that submit isn’t a dirty word because we look to Christ. Jesus Christ although He is God, didn’t consider that high rank as something to flaunt as He became a servant. He submitted to the Heavenly Father and obeyed His will. Jesus was subject to sinful rulers, allowing Himself to be captured, tried, tortured, and executed at the hands of the state.

Do you think the Heavenly Father was wringing His hands when Pontius Pilate was judging Jesus’ case? Was that an example of Him letting something slide past Him? Do you think that the Heavenly Father said, “Oops” when the Romans took over Israel to rule them?

Yet God orchestrated all of this so that you, a rebellious sinner, could receive amnesty and forgiveness. He allowed evil to happen to Jesus so that you could receive every good and perfect gift from Him. He has you submit to Jesus so that Jesus takes the fall and not you.

And from this act on the cross, of Jesus dying and rising again to save you, every good and perfect gift is granted to you by your Heavenly Father. Part of that laundry list is good government. II. Faith sees God's hand even in flawed rulers.

A long time ago a widow lived in a dictatorship and the dictator heard that the widow was praying for him. Even the dictator knew that he was a rotten scoundrel, so he stopped by her farm to ask her about this. The widow replied, “Back when your grandfather was in charge, I had ten cows. He took one of my cows and I prayed that God would strike him down, and He did. But then your father took two of my cows. I prayed that God would strike him down, and He did.

But then you took three of my cows. If I pray for your demise, your son will surely come to take my last four cows, then where would I be?!”

Paul tells us that our Heavenly Father has instituted our rulers. Paul tells us that our rulers are God’s servants for our good. Yes, that includes our president, our governor, and our mayor. We aren’t to say, not *my* president, or not *my* governor because they are whether you like that or not.

And guess what, our rulers are flawed. Even the best ruler is a sinner. Like the widow who prayed for the tyrant, sometimes we can get so sick of the person calling the shots, that we don’t realize that it’s possible they could be better than was is to follow. May we pray for all rulers that they may rule wisely and in accord with God’s will.

Sometimes, it becomes a matter of faith to see that God is still in control, ruling over the rulers with His mighty power. It becomes a matter of trusting our Heavenly Father for us to “**...be in subjection [to the authorities], not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.**” We can do all of this prayerfully trusting that God is working even through sinners to accomplish good even if we can only see good in glimpses.

We can thank God for those glimpses, as the justice system works, even if imperfectly, to punish wrongdoers so that evil is curbed in our midst. We can thank God for rulers who enact legislation and directives that promote well-being in a pandemic. We can thank God for police officers who do their job the right way and compassionately day after day even when “Police Officer Does Her Job” doesn’t make national headlines. We can thank God for rulers who seek to promote justice and equity in our land for people of every age, race, and socioeconomic status.

And yes, III. Faith trusts in the Lord above all else. There are situations where we, to quote the Apostle Peter, “**must obey God rather than men.**” When a ruler tells us to sin, to go against God’s law, we must go against what the ruler said and face any consequences.

We see examples of this in the Bible. Peter preaches the Gospel when it is illegal. Rahab hides spies from the king of Jericho. Egyptian midwives refuse to kill the babies of the Israelite women. Daniel refuses to bow down to an idol.

Ultimately, we know who to trust. We know who to get in line behind. We know who to submit to, and that’s Jesus because He has sacrificed everything for us through His Son Jesus. When a ruler is out of line with God’s law, there is a place for civil disobedience, but that doesn’t mean we won’t be punished by the ruler—even for breaking an unjust law. An unjust law isn’t simply one that we don’t like, it has to be one against God’s teachings in the Bible.

Faith trusts in the Lord above all else. It trusts Him to receive all good things from His hands, even from the intermediary of our governing authorities. It trusts Him to know that our rulers are sinners to in need of a savior. It trusts Him to know

when a law is not just something we don't like but is something that cannot be obeyed. May we trust God and thank God for all that He has done for us in His Son Jesus Christ and strive to be citizens both of this earth and the kingdom that is to come. Amen.