Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit to the governing authorities. For no authority exists except by God, and the authorities that do exist have been established by God.

The other day I ran across an interesting video of a Christian who had an interesting thought to share. His basic thought was that democracies can exist only in a Christian or a religious environment. It was an interesting opinion and I am not so sure he was wrong. His thoughts went something like this. “It is the Christian or religious environment that teaches that we are to obey the law because that is the right thing to do. In other words, we obey because it is the exercise of our faith. Laws are meant to be obeyed. Laws are meant for the good. So as people of faith, we recognize that obedience to the law is what you do for the sake and good of all.”

So just take that premise for a moment. “We obey the law because that is the right thing to do.” What happens when society begins to take the stand that disobeying the law is the right thing to do? I might decide that the law is unfair or it doesn’t benefit me or I just don’t like the law, therefore I believe it is my right to disobey the law! I benefit from disobeying, therefore it is right for me!

Now ask yourself what happens when the lawmakers or the members of the government also take the attitude that “It is the right thing to disobey or ignore various laws?” What you end up with is a form of chaos, an unruliness in society that will hurt and harm everyone. Please note that is what is really happening in all those places that have riots and destruction going on in the name of justice. That is what is happening when lawmakers, government officials, decide to defund police or even to give a pass to certain people when they break the law. The end result is chaos and if we are not careful as a society the end result will be the destruction of the society and country that we know.

Why do I bring this all up? Trust me, it is not because I want to be political or because I want you to vote this way or that. You all know me well enough to know that I do not consider it my job to tell you how to vote. I will encourage you to vote, to exercise your right as a citizen of our country for the good of the country, but I will not tell you how to vote. Nor do I like being political for the pure sake of politics. My job is to teach you God’s Word and what it says. My job is to direct you to the wisdom and marvel of what God lays forth for our good and salvation. But do note, the text we are going to look at today is definitely going to have a “what’s going on in the world today” bunch of applications. Our theme will be: **THE AUTHORITY OF GOD.**

If we just look at the simplicity of the words before us I think we can already begin to grasp what God has to say. As far as God is concerned, every single governing authority is one that exists and is established by God. In other words, we are instructed to submit to the governing authorities because those authorities are the representatives of the Lord our God. And do note that very interesting word “submit.” Rienecker/Rogers in their Biblical and exegetical book describes the force of this word wonderfully. They write: *“The word has primarily the idea of giving up one’s own right or will, i.e. “to subordinate one’s self.”* In other words, you obey because it is the right thing to do! No one forces you, you do it because you willing want to do the right thing.

God’s Word says very simply; As a Christian you are to submit (willingly) to the authority of the government. Again, it doesn’t matter what kind of government it is. Be it good or bad, you are called upon to obey, to submit to those authorities and to obey its laws. That is why the text goes on to speak of taxes, revenue, respect and honor. God says that if your government ask those things of you, then give it. When tax time rolls around you honestly pay what you owe. If you have to pay for licenses, permits, and the like, then do so. If the government asks of you respect, you give it. If honor, you give it. God tells you and me that as Christians we are to do “submit” to our government as a part of our faith.

Now I am sure that brings to mind numerous questions. Is there a time when we can disobey the government? The answer is, “Yes.” We may disobey the government when the gov’t tells us to do something that is contrary to the Word of God. Acts 5:29 tells us plainly, **“We must obey God rather than men.”** In this particular instance, the Jewish gov’t had commanded the Apostles not to preach and teach in the name of Jesus. The apostle’s did anyway. Mind you, they suffered consequences for those actions, but in this case they followed the clear command of God rather than men. For us, modern day applications would be: the Gov’t allows abortion, but Christians don’t do that. The gov’t says we are not to gather together in large groups because of Covid. Please note that this is not a command to not worship but rather an order forbidding assembly. Then please note that almost every state I know of had clauses that forbid the prosecution of churches if they did meet, because many governors are aware that our Constitution forbids making worship illegal. I have to be honest and tell you that in our US of A there have not arisen any real instances of our gov’t hindering religion and for that we should be grateful.

What about dealing with things we know or think are wrong in our gov’t? In our democracy we have the legal right to disagree with our gov’t. We also have legal ways and means of getting what we don’t like changed. We can do so with our votes (but that means you have to vote out politicians who don’t represent the people) or do so by taking up petitions to get new laws or ideas across. We do not have the right to bomb, burn, loot, kill, to create civil unrest, or to infringe on the gov’t given rights of individuals because we don’t like what we think is a wrong.

As Christians our biggest responsibility is to be a responsible citizen. Whether you think it counts or not, you are to get out there and vote. You are to support your government, to let your representatives in gov’t know what you are thinking. Most important, you are to pray for your gov’t that your gov’t maintain a moral foundation in its lawmaking. In other words, be the kind of Christian that let’s your light shine and that light is reflected in your gov’t. Mind you, I am not advocating and never will, that we force people to follow the Bible or be Christian. But I firmly believe that God’s laws and ways are better and more just than what man can make up. Let your light shine and God will establish gov’ts based on what He sees as best and beneficial for his purpose and will. Be mindful of that. God establishes gov’t for his purpose and will and you may not have a single clue as to why this gov’t or that exists. You trust God.

Now, I do need to address a few other verses. Verse 2 says, **“Therefore the one who rebels against the authority is opposing God’s institution, and those who oppose will bring judgment on themselves.** Verses3-5 **3For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to evil. Would you like to have no fear of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will receive praise from him, 4because he is God’s servant for your benefit. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because he does not carry the sword without reason. He is God’s servant, a punisher to bring wrath on the wrongdoer. 5Therefore it is necessary to submit, not only because of wrath, but also because of conscience.**

Note what is said here. The government is to uphold its laws, that’s how a society functions best. And it is made clear by the Lord just how gov’t will operate. You do wrong, you may suffer a consequence. You act evil, you may be punished. You murder and do horrid hurt to others, God says the gov’t **“does not carry the sword without reason. He is God’s servant, a punisher to bring wrath on the wrongdoer.”** Bottom line, don’t be out there doing wrong and then get mad because the gov’t punishes you. That is the basis of every society. We are so fortunate that we live in the democratic republic we do. There are countries that have dictators or even tyrants and despots who at the whim and wish of the leaders indiscriminately dispose of citizens in whatever way they chose. Contrary to what is being said out there, I thank God for our Country and gov’t because it is still the fairest and most just kind of government that is out there. Can we do better here and there? “Yes.” But make sure that what you think is going to be better is really better.

Now let’s talk of how this section ends. Verses 9c-10, **“Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor, so love is the fulfillment of the law.”** The call we have is to love, love our neighbor as ourselves. What a better world it would be it we would all practice that. If I wouldn’t want my house burnt down, my business destroyed, my family terrorized, my fellow citizens beaten, my goods and wares stolen, then don’t go out there and do it. If I want the right to free speech and to live my life as I see fit (where it does not hurt or harm others) then don’t limit others in the same. Love is our call.

And yes, when we speak of love we have to speak of Jesus and what he is and has done. We are told, God is love and the best place to see that love of God is in Jesus. The simply and gracious message of the Lord our God is this. “There is sin that has brought destruction and death. But I have sent my Son to suffer the punishment for sin, the sins of the whole world. My Son, Jesus, lived the perfect life you could not, willingly went to the cross to suffer my eternal wrath and anger for sin, in other words, to take the eternal punishment you deserve upon himself. My Son Jesus died for you. And my Son Jesus rose from the dead. That resurrection (yes, the actual and physical resurrection of Jesus) teaches a number of very important and solid things. First, Jesus is my Son. I told you that you could identify the Savior because he would lay down his life and take it up again. Just as promised Jesus did that.

Second, the resurrection of Jesus proves he is the Savior and redeemer from sin. The Scripture clear foretold that the Messiah would be a savior, one who would cleanse us from our sins and whose punishment would bring us peace. Jesus told us he had all authority given to him including the authority to forgive sins and grant eternal life. All of this rests on the resurrection of Jesus. As I say to people, “When Jesus says he is going to suffer and die for the sake of souls and then rise again from death to show he is telling the truth, and HE DOES THAT…listen to Him!”

Third, the simple promise of Jesus then applies to us: **“Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I in you.”** Well, Jesus lives and has ascended into heaven and has prepared a mansion for all. Our job is to simply believe this promise of Jesus. In other words, Jesus has granted us forgiveness and eternal life through faith. That’s the point of our faith, the gift of eternal life in heaven. And as faith settles into our lives we will then do what is right and good, not because we have to, but rather because we willing submit to the Father’s authority over all. All because of Jesus.

I believe that love will guide us and serve us wonderfully. By the way, if you paid attention to the gospel reading found in Matthew 18:15-20 you heard a unique application of love. Love points out wrongs. Love corrects faults by being personal and gentle and humble with our fellow believers. And then it lays out for us what to do when our love fails to bring repentance. We stop treating them as believers. We don’t kill them, destroy their stuff, steal from them, picket their house or even publicly shame them. We just don’t treat them as fellow believers in the hope and prayer that they will repent and return to faith in the Lord. Love doesn’t mean there is no discipline. Love means we discipline with love.

Well, I am sure there are still lots of questions out there on so many situations arisen in today’s world. I guess you will have to ask me privately on all the issues and how God’s Word directs us to think. We know what our responsibilities and positions are. We will follow the authority and wisdom of our God simply because of Jesus and his love displayed on the cross. Amen.