

September 28, 2014
Pentecost 16

"Citizens of God's Kingdom Are Good Citizens of This Country"

ROMANS 13:1-10

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. ⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

I was born at St. Mary's Hospital in Watertown, Wisconsin on August 29, 1947. I am a citizen of the United States of America. I hold in my hand a copy of my birth certificate. I am also a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Shortly after being born, I was born again by water and the Spirit through the blessing of Holy Baptism. You and I share something in common. We have dual citizenships in the this country and in the Kingdom of God.

There is no king like King Jesus. He comes to you in great majesty and power as the creator of the universe. He comes to you and bows down to you and says, "Let me take your sin that condemns you to eternal death. Let me take your sin to the cross, suffer for it, pay for it completely so you can live and thrive in my kingdom where I will shower you with my mercy, love and kindness.

Our membership in the kingdom of God has a profound effect on the way we live our lives as citizens of this country. We are so thankful for the mercy God has shown to us by rescuing us from our sins through Jesus that we want to follow what our God tells us regarding our duty toward our country. One way to say thanks is to listen to what the Lord says to us about being good citizens of the country in which you are living. Let's listen to what Paul tells the Christians in Rome about being good citizens of the Roman Empire and apply that to our citizenship here in the United States of America.

Citizens of God's kingdom honor their government

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established." It is important to realize that just as our God has established orders of society such a marriage and family, he has also established or ordained the concept of government. God's right hand reaches out into our world with the message of the gospel to bring people to saving faith in Jesus. God's left hand reaches out into the world to make it a better place to live by ordering and establishing the rule of government.

Some might argue there is no way God establishes governments because there are so many bad governs in our world today and in the past. Think of what the Christians in Rome were going through as they read this letter Paul has written them. Nero was the emperor of the might Roman Empire. Eventually this demented man will find ghoulish joy and delight in torturing Christians, throwing them to the lions and even burning them at the stake. If a government is bad that does not mean God is bad? Some marriages are bad, but that does not mean God's system of marriage or family is bad. God establishes these levels of society to reach into our lives and bless us with his left hand as his right hand brings us the blessings that of in Jesus' kingdom.

Because you have such riches in the kingdom of God, you want to submit to the government. The word for submit is a combination of two Greek words "command" and "under." We submit to God as our King and we also submit to the authorities that our God places over us. In his book "City of God" the church father Augustine tried to show the Roman authorities that Christians actually made better cities of Rome because they were following God's order to serve their country. Jesus said, "Give to Caesar that things that belong to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

If you decide to rebel against God by disobeying the laws of the land, you will place yourself under God's judgment. "Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." God knows everything. He knows the times you have not respected your government as you should or even failed to pray for your government. I think of all I could be doing to help my government with my prayers. Because I do not like one of my elected leaders, does not give me the right to make fun of them or disrespect them. I realize how much I need Jesus to pay the price for my transgressions to spare me from the judgment to come, and so do you.

God's system of government that he has established serves as a blessing to the people of this country even though it may at times become corrupted as government was corrupted when Paul wrote these words. "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and he will commend you. For he is God's agent to do you good." Government is a blessing for those who do what is right and follow the laws of the land. I think of the beautiful National Parks our government provides to bring joy in our lives. We think of education for our children, safe water to drink, emergency vehicles to rescue people who are sick or injured, even social welfare programs to help them needy and less fortunate.

The government is also there to punish those who do wrong. "But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." Take the example of the lady who was driving in front of me on my way back to the church after having lunch. She pulled up to the four way stop on Woodmere Avenue and never stopped as she made a right turn. Then she pulled up to the stop sign on busy Bradley Road and made a left turn without ever stopping. The government steps into stop those who break the laws with speeding tickets, billy clubs and even a sword or gun if necessary. As bad as the Roman government was, it was a blessing to people as it ruthlessly enforced world peace by killing those who rebelled against the laws. Ships could safely sail on the Mediterranean Sea because Rome destroyed the hornets' nest of pirates that operated out of the great city of Carthage.

Christians who know the riches of God's grace in Christ have another reason for obeying the government. "Therefore it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." Dear Christian, you believe that you are saved from the judgment to come because of what Jesus suffered at the hands of the Roman government. The Roman government condemned Jesus to death. Roman soldiers nailed him to a cross. This was totally unfair and unjust. Yet, it was God's plan to use this evil government to have your sins placed on Jesus so he could suffer in your place. Your King gave his life for you, so you can now be free and serve him. Your blessings give you a sensitive conscience that wants to do what is right in his kingdom. This includes showing the same respect and love for your government that Jesus showed to the Roman government. As they were nailing him to the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

I thought of skipping over this next section, but I cannot. It is in the Bible. We believe every part of this book is true and applies to our lives. "This is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes, if revenue, then revenue; if respect then respect; if honor then honor." We pay a sales tax on items we buy in the store, we pay real estate tax if we own a home, we pay tax on every gallon of gas we put into our tanks, we pay tax on our income. If you have a nice job that earns you \$1000 per week, you do not receive a check at the end of the week for \$1000. Most likely the check will be about seven or eight hundred dollars. What happened to rest of the money? It was taken out of your check for state and federal taxes. Citizens of the this country pay their taxes because out of their love for Christ and the riches they have in his kingdom. They support this system of government that the Lord gives to them. With one hand I give my offerings to the Lord and with the other hand I pay my taxes to the government. One supports God's right hand, the spread of the gospel, the other the government or the left hand of God that takes care of me.

Citizens of God's kingdom love other people

As a citizen in God's kingdom you will be given multiple opportunities to love people the people who are part of your community. "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law." Some of you sitting here this morning have debts that need to be paid, credit card debt, mortgage or car loan or hospital bills. Some of you are debt free. All of us however are deeply indebted to our God for the mercy and kindness that he has shown to us. He has

let you know by his grace about the huge debt of sin you have accumulated in your life on this earth. We know how Jesus has wiped the debt clean. We owe him a debt of love, a debt of appreciation, a debt of thanks that can never be paid.

Here is how Martin Luther described this debt of love that we have toward all people. "Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." He did all this, as Luther says, "That we should be his own and live under his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

Citizens of Jesus' kingdom are so rich in his love for them, that they eagerly look for opportunities to love people who are citizens of the country in which they are living. They don't want to hurt other people by committing adultery or murdering, or stealing or coveting what is not theirs. They want to love their neighbors as they love themselves.

I am a citizen of the kingdom of God. I am a citizen of the United States of America. My love for Jesus and for the riches of his kingdom make me eager to serve him by serving my country, by paying my taxes, by praying for my leaders and by looking for opportunities to love people who live with me in this land that I love. God bless America with citizens of Jesus' kingdom who serve as good citizens of their country. Amen.