

**Text: Romans 13:1-10**

**13:**<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

<sup>6</sup> This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. <sup>7</sup> Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

<sup>8</sup> Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

**Prayer of the Day:**

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Verse of the Day:**

Alleluia. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Alleluia. (Philippians 4:4 RSV)

**Sermon Text:**

I'm going to start this sermon off with an admission. I went back and forth on what to preach on until I absolutely had to commit and get something written. I think I have preached on these words one other time in the 15 years I have spent in a pulpit. I generally have avoided them and that not because they aren't great words of our God for us to consider in our everyday lives. They certainly are! There isn't a Word of God that is not worth our contemplation. But when we start talking church and state, even deeper still, when we start talking Christian citizen and state, there is just a lot of material and not enough time in several sermons to cover every nook and cranny that quite frankly people want covered when we dive into this topic. I've always felt like this section was just a bit of a ticking timebomb. Especially in our current climate, perhaps it is even more so. So, I would look at it and say, "naw, one of the other passages." Which in turn would speak to the importance of being a watchman and applying God's Word to God's people, to our everyday lives and make me feel guilty for walking away from Romans 13 at a time when it is so very applicable to our lives. Anyway, long story short, we are going to take a look at the ticking timebomb and hopefully snip a wire or two in the process without getting completely blown to bits as we do it. If you didn't already infer it from all of that, I think these words of Romans chapter 13 are **TOUGH WORDS FOR A TOUGH TIME** which probably means they are the right words for Christians to dwell on in such times. You see here, **GOD SPEAKS ABOUT GOVERNMENT**, and our role as Christian Citizens within it. Here **GOD REMINDS US OF OUR DEBT OF LOVE**. So, here we go!

I want you to imagine a world that is completely pagan, unbelieving and uninfluenced by the teachings of Christianity. In fact, Christianity is quickly becoming the scapegoat for the problems of society around it because of its allegiance to Jesus Christ rather than the false gods which can be found everywhere within society. Sin of every imaginable type is not only practiced but celebrated by those who have the means to indulge in it.

This is the world of the Apostle Paul, who, if commentators are correct as they do their work, may well have written the book of Romans around 58AD during the reign of Emperor Nero. Even secular historians don't have many nice things to say about him. In fact, it is Nero who was fabled to have set fire to Rome and blamed the Christians in 64AD, some speculate that he did it simply to clear the area for a lavish living quarters for himself. It's also generally accepted that in the Christian persecution which followed both Peter and Paul himself were martyred.

Why am I telling you all this? Because God inspires Paul to write under the reign of this emperor the words before us today. *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. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 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 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. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also 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.*

Beginning to understand in our world today why this section of God's Word might make a body nervous? Move to the right or the left and landmines and powder kegs are just waiting to explode. Rather than providing my own comments on this, perhaps it's best to hear the words of Professor Armin Panning. He is the author of the People's Bible which covers Romans and was published in 1999. "We live in an age when there is considerable fear and distrust of government. Some of that, to be sure, is traceable to the fact that God's representatives are weak and sinful human beings who at times may not represent God properly. But by far the greater basis for fear and anxiety in the presence of authority figures is the guilt factor. People who know they are not in compliance with the law recognize that they properly should be punished for their disobedience. Hence they fear those to whom they are answerable, whether that be their workplace supervisor or a traffic officer to the Internal Revenue Service (p211)."

Now to be sure, our government has not been given the right to force us to sin. Panning along with many others rightly later points to Acts 5:29 when he says, "If civil authorities should require things that are in opposition to God's will, then the Christian will have to follow his conscience and "obey God rather than men" (p213 footnote)." That said, Christians will want to make very sure that what is being asked is actually in opposition to the will of God and not simply what they want the will of God to be before throwing away what are the very clear words of our lesson today. So whether I live as a Christian in Russia, China, Germany, England, the good old United States of America or even Nero's Rome (and there are or were actually Christians living in all of those places) God wants us to submit to our authorities unless they have demanded for us to sin. This is of course a whole other sermon in Acts 5:29 but suffice it to say even then, we would respectfully abstain from sin as did the apostles, or the handmaidens in Egypt. I'm going to pause here and hold up a book that is worth a read, especially in our world today, this is Civil Government written by Professor Daniel Deutschlander. We have it available in our Library. You can also order it from Northwestern Publishing House. It is expertly written and in our current political climate worthy of your consideration.

That's heavy stuff! But why? Why would Paul urge Christians in Rome under Nero of all people to submit to authority? Why not take up arms and establish a Church run state where the Gospel rules by force of law? Paul reminds us that God is not about establishing flimsy earthly governments which topple and fall. Nor does the Church of God rule with an iron scepter, or the law of the land. It has a far greater tool. *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 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." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

This one has been getting hammer these days too. "Love" and even "Love your neighbor as yourself" have been concepts used to glance over any number of sins in our world. Consider those very last words once more, *love is the fulfillment of the law*. It does not throw it away or seek to find a million ways to circumvent what God has clearly asked of His people. It fulfills it! Love actually keeps the Law of God perfectly or it's not love!

Up until now, this sermon has been a ton law. Law will always serve as a mirror in our lives. This mirror does not reflect how Facebook fabulous we might be, nor does it delete the image after 5 seconds so we aren't held accountable for what we have done. The Law shows our sinfulness and my lack of perfection, my lack of love. Another admission, I have not loved others as I should! I have not loved my government. I have not loved my neighbor. Frankly there are times I don't even really love me and in my real moments of darkness times I would even question God and not only my love for Him but His for me. So, things look pretty bleak as we march through this section of God's Word.

But this section, though law, allows the glimmers of the rays of the Gospel to begin to peak through the clouds. For if there is a "*debt of love*", it is because of love that God has shown to me. And if "*love is the fulfillment of the law*", then God, who is love (1 John 4:8,16) has fulfilled that law in my place, for me, in order to earn a place in heaven at His side for all eternity for me and for you too. Remember those Words of 1 John 4, *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* My keeping of Romans 13 does not earn me a place in heaven but Jesus' keeping of it does and though my lack of love deserves only the punishment of my government in this world and my God forever in hell, Jesus perfect love has provided my place in heaven. His perfect life is my own! His death pays for my sins against government, God and all others! His resurrection is my assurance that God's love is for me and ha means heaven is my own and so having been loved, I love. No not to earn God's grace and mercy, but in appreciation for my God, seeking always o live a life that displays His Word and way so that others may see and know and live in the love He has for them. That is what all of our lessons this week ultimately point too.

Dear family, fellow members of the body of our Savior Jesus, we have only scratched the surface of this deep pool that is Church and State and the role of the Christian citizen within each. I pray the Word of God has provided much to chew on in the coming week as He spoke **TOUGH WORDS FOR TOUGH TIMES** about out government and the debt of love which we owe to Him and to each other. I really hope, that with the help of God, I haven't blown up all the landmines and powder kegs which lay strewn about us in these difficult days and as you seek to navigate them in your everyday life God grant you the strength to display His love in all you think and say and do. Amen.