

Romans 13:1-7, "A Citizen Under God"

Introduction

- As we all know, politicians, government officials, and medical personnel are really working hard to bring this year-long coronavirus outbreak under control as soon as possible. It's a tough situation that wouldn't go smoothly no matter who was running it. However, every day in the news there is a lot of criticism and harsh news about the measures to contain the spread of the virus; the leaders of the country are often in the crosshairs of criticism.
- This is because those who are in power are expected to make the right policies at the best time. At the same time, what should we do? Power is exercised. Policies are implemented. What our, the citizens, role at that time? How can we, the citizens, cooperate with the leaders who are in power, especially in times of crisis?
- The scripture passage we'll be looking at today talks about how we view political power, what the role of citizens is, what a healthy society looks like. The principles of Christian society are shown in the context of the Roman Empire in the first century AD. Let's read it and think about how it applies to us today.

Romans 13: 1-7

¹ 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.

² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,

⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

- Let's look at 3 points from this passage. First, God is in control of and institutes all authority and power. We see clearly here how power should be used. Second, we'll look at what our role is as citizens. Not merely accepting it as a duty because that's just how it is, but how we can approach citizenship proactively and Biblically.
- And third, we'll look at taxes as we think about what a healthy society can look like. Jesus also addresses this issue, so we can ask, "what is Gospel life in society?" The use of power, the role of citizens, and gospel life in society.

1. The Meaning and Use of Power

- So, according to Romans 13, God appoints countries, laws, political systems. Some people are given power, and through using it rightly, God guides so a society can run healthily.

*"¹Let 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.
²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."*

- The word "authorities" here does not only refer to kings, rulers, those in political authority. It's pointing to the whole legal and political systems that are in place for a healthy society. In the 1st century when this was originally written, it's clear that this was about the Roman Empire and its political system.
- Naturally it was a completely different political system than our modern democracy. However, let's respect the laws established in accordance with democracy, the people who are elected and exercise power, and the political system of legislation, justice, and government. Following obediently is the basic attitude this passage teaches.
- According to the Bible, whether kings or authorities, they are people and systems with power working for the health and safety of society, because God has appointed them. Proverbs 8:15 – 16
"By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; ¹⁶by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly."
- However, that doesn't mean we don't wonder about some things; it raises some questions. There are many political leaders who don't believe in God. Tyrants who don't think of people as people. Can we call selfish politicians who only consider their own gain "God's servants"? (Romans 13:4) Can you say that governments or bad laws that persecute Christians, deny human rights and dignity, instead oppressing people and causing suffering, are "instituted by God"? (Romans 13:1) In the book of Daniel it says this:
4:17 ... that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.
- Daniel was a prophet who served Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian Empire that destroyed Israel. Nebuchadnezzar acted as if he himself was god, a diabolical tyrant who persecuted Daniel and his fellow Israelites, even tried to burn them to death. But in spite of that Daniel served him, recognizing him as a king who God had put in place.
- Nevertheless, God has not given kings, authorities, and their political systems blank permission to do whatever they want. Their policies, activities, and methods will be tested by God. Are their policies, activities, and methods right, do they benefit citizens, do they contribute to a healthy society? God is not blind. He can even see the motives of their hearts. That is why Daniel repeats:
Daniel 4:27 Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity" ... ³¹ ... "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² ... the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will."
- In other words, God removes leaders who do not practice righteousness, rightly do God's will. If they do not govern by doing what is right, according to righteous law, and serve God's purposes, they will be subject to the severe judgment of the God who has entrusted them with dominion. This is because those entrusted with power are "servants of God" (Rm 13:4)
- The power and control they exercise is not their own. They are only entrusted by God. The word "servant" here means one who serves at the table. They are the ones who serve at the table prepared by the master, for the master, and for the guests who are

invited to the table. Those who are entrusted with such authority are those who serve the Lord God and people, citizens.

2. The Role of Citizens

- So if that's the case, what is the role of citizens? It says here, to follow authority, avoid evil, and do good:
13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.
- The teaching about power and authorities in the first half of Romans 13 naturally flows following the second half of Romans 12. There Paul says not to take revenge on those who do evil, but leave it to God's holy anger, and overcome evil with good. In other words, in Romans 13, countries and governments will with righteousness handle those who do evil.
- The Lord Jesus too taught not to repay evil according to what is called "Lex Talionis", based on the Old Testament "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". Rather he taught to overcome evil with good, to leave those who do evil to God's wrath.
Matthew 5:38-39
5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.
- When you look at it like this, you could say political powers and their systems are given by God's grace, to judge the wicked and reward those who do good. So we are free from taking revenge, because God will judge with righteousness.
- As a citizen of Rome, how did Paul himself act toward authority? For example, when he was preaching in Philippi, because of the jealousy of the Jews, he was whipped and imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Thankfully his innocence was cleared and he was released, and Paul said this:
Acts 16:37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out."
- Another time, Paul is persecuted by the Jews, Jerusalem falls into uproar, turmoil, and when Paul is arrested and about to be whipped he asserts his Roman citizenship. And he appeals to the Roman Emperor, to be tried there. In other words, our role as citizens is not only to follow obediently.
- This includes properly exercising our rights under the law and cooperating in the workings of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches. In today's democracy, unlike in biblical times, all people can exercise their right to vote and participate in politics. Everyone has the opportunity to exercise political power.
- What's more, we should choose to obey God rather than powers that deviate from His will and do what is unjust and illegal. Acts 5:29
Acts 5:28 "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." ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.
- When Peter and the Apostles were interrogated by the Sanhedrin, and the High Priest forbids them from teaching in Jesus' name, they declared they would follow God. Paul too writes in our passage today about the importance of following God with a clear conscience:

⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

3. Gospel Life in Society

- In light of that, you could say all people, (rulers and citizens) are invited to the building of a healthy (Gospel) society. There is a tendency to read over Romans 13, this text teaching about authorities, powers, and political systems, as if it does not apply to us. Or to just come away with a superficial understanding that if I follow country rules and authorities I'm doing fine.
- However, this is for the kingdom of God that reflects the grace of God, and Paul raises one clear example: the obligation to pay taxes. The reason he mentions tax payment is probably because it is the most obvious example of social participation and contribution, and also because it tended to be an issue among Jews, and Jesus himself addresses it.

⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.
- Here Paul calls those who are in power "ministers of God". The Greek word here for "minister" is "leitourgoi", and refers to someone who works in the public sector. In particular, it's a public duty in society, a community service performed by ordinary citizens who covered their own expenses (with pocket money).
- Moreover, Paul uses this same Greek word for "minister" again in 15:6, in reference to his own work preaching the Gospel of Christ to the gentiles. (In Japanese, 13:6 is "God's public servant", and 15:6 is "servant of Christ Jesus")

15:6 "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
- In Romans 12:1 we were told all of our work, our jobs and our lives themselves are "holy living sacrifice" just like religious acts such as worship and prayer. In the same way, our work in politics, government, and the use of authority is also an act of worship.
- In doing so, we discard dualism that separates the secular from the sacred. We usually think of national institutions, politics, and the exercise of power as secular. On the other hand, worship, prayer, and the ministry of the church we consider sacred, right?
- However, according to the Bible, politics and ruling power are Holy in the Lord. We act in politics and governing with the same thought and motivation as we do in worship and prayer. We should pay our taxes without cheating and exercise our police powers for justice and truth, pleasing unto the Lord.
 - Chiune Sugihara was a diplomat in Lithuania during World War II. In July 1940, many Jewish refugees crowded the Japanese Consulate in Lithuania. Because their lives were threatened by the Nazis and they had nowhere else to go after the Soviet invasion, they were trying to escape through Japan. However, the Japanese Foreign Ministry forbade the issuance of visas. Even so, Sugihara defied the Foreign Ministry's instructions and issued "visas for life" (transit visas), saving as many as 6,000 Jewish refugees.
 - Although Sugihara was a diplomat who saved many lives, he was expelled from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the war, because he had

disobeyed government orders. It was not until 2000 that his honor was officially restored by the Japanese government.

- This is a good reminder that to exercise power, we need the power of the gospel of Christ. The grace of the cross of Jesus is also necessary for the average citizen to overcome evil with good, without doing evil or taking revenge. In the end, a healthy society life requires the righteousness of God, the righteousness of Christ, received by faith.
- Therefore, since the Bible encourages us to pray for those in power, kings, politicians, and leaders of our country, let's pray for our leaders. We should not criticize mismanagement or bad policies without praying and cooperating with them. Even if they are politicians or people in power who do not believe in God. *1 Timothy 2:1 "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior"*

(Prayer)

Heavenly Father, we praise your name. You created the whole world, and reign with rich wisdom, eternal love, and amazing grace. Please guide the leaders of our country, in politics, finance, education, and culture, to do what is right. May those who are involved in legislative, administrative, judicial, and other roles of power fear God. May they seek God's will with humility and know what is good, what is pleasing to God, and what is perfect. And lead all citizens to turn away from evil, to do good, and to do right in the roles they are entrusted with. Protect and use as Your servants those who are laboring day and night to bring the spread of corona virus under control. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.