

Some days, when I'm teaching from the Bible, I'm very aware that the main person who needs to be hearing the message, is probably me. And today's one of **those** days. You might find this hard to believe, but when it comes to "authority", I've always had a natural inclination, to be just that little bit rebellious. I sometimes have the attitude that I know better, and therefore I can ignore the authorities...

So today I'm going to be preaching to myself, and you lot can listen in...

Today, we're learning about the ruling authorities of our lands:

- About their position and their authority
- About their purpose and their function
- And we're going to be talking about how we as Christians, should be relating to them. –What does it mean to be "a citizen of the Kingdom of God", and at the same time, "a citizen of our nation"?

So, the governing authorities:

Governments of the world, take many different forms.

- There are still a **few** true Monarchies (not a constitutional monarchy like England). A true monarchy is where a king or a queen has **real** power (absolute power). Power over life or death. And there's not many of those left in the world today:

Brunei, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Swaziland, the Vatican State, are true monarchies – where the King (or in the Vatican State) the Pope, has absolute power. What **they** say, goes.

- Then there's constitutional monarchies (Like England, Sweden, Netherlands, Morocco, Australia, New Zealand, Canada), where our head of state is a King or a Queen, but they really don't have much power. We are essentially a democracy, ruled by Parliament
- And there's democratic Republics; and
- Various forms of dictatorships

And because most of us have been brought up in a democracy, many of us begin to believe that democracy is the **only right** form of Government and it's the only one that God would ever have us have... Right??? Wrong.. In fact, I can't really think of "Democracy" being in the Bible at all.

The point is, "There is **no** governing authority (on this earth), that has not been put there by God". God gives those who govern, the **right** to govern. He gives to them, the **authority** to govern. Whether our governments are good, or whether they're bad, has got nothing to do with it. What we have to accept, is that God has put them there, and they are acting as God's servants.

And this is quite timely, as we distantly observe the civil unrest in a few isolated pockets, as some violently protest against their new 'President elect' in the United States...

When I was in Bible College, and studying the reformation, I did an assignment on this. And I still remember what Martin Luther said: He taught that The Christian must always honour his/her authorities, even if they are unjust rulers. Why? – because they hold their office at the decree of God. And he

basically says that if we end up with a bad government, well we probably deserve them. He said that the:

*world is too wicked, and does not deserve to have many wise and upright princes. Frogs must have their storks...*ⁱ
(referring to one of Esop's fables)

So, God has appointed the governing authorities. And the power that He gives to them (their authority), is **immense**. They have power over life and death. You and I are not allowed to wield that power. We haven't been entrusted with that power. But the governing authorities have. And you may feel that you could do a far better job than the government, but that's a moot point, because God hasn't given you that authority.

The very first verse of Chapter 13 says: **Let every person be subject to the governing authorities...**

And the word used there for "person" is "Psyche". It means "Soul" / "Life"... That means "every bit of us" – with our very lives, we are to yield to the authority of those who have been appointed by God.

So, God has appointed governments of all types, and He has given them authority. But authority to do what?

Well, what we find in this reading, is a government's **primary** responsibility, is to maintain Law and Order. And as they do this, they are doing it on behalf of God. The very word that gets translated to "government", in the Greek, it means to "*control*" and "*restrain*"ⁱⁱ.

And that's the primary role of the government – to control and restrain society.

Unfortunately, as we become more and more self-centred, we seem to want something **other** than that from our government... And we've begun to place unreal and unsustainable expectations upon them:

- We expect them to support us financially.
- We expect them to subsidise our various ventures.
- We expect them to provide the very best health care the world has to offer, and blow the cost....
- We expect them to give us all sorts of rebates;
- and subsidies;
- and grants;
- and financial assistance...
- We want them to give us more,
- And other people to pay taxes, while we pay none...

And every time we have another election or another budget, there seems to be another bidding war for our vote, promising things to us that our country cannot afford, and saddling our children and our grandchildren with a debt that they'll probably never be able to repay, just so we can have a better lifestyle, and our kids can do it tough in our place.

That's not the Government's primary responsibility. (I've gone off track).

Their primary role, is to maintain law and order. They have authority to punish the wicked, and to reward the good.

V2 says: **whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.**

Now, it doesn't say whether that means we will be judged by God, or judged by the authorities – it's probably both... But certainly, if we resist the authorities – if we break the law, and are found guilty, what do you expect is going to happen???? We'll be punished, of course. That's the power that God has given them:

V3 says:

³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

And if we live according to the gospel – if we're doing the good required **of** the gospel, then our good conduct, **should** ensure that we're not getting into too much trouble with the police (or with the law courts).

What this all boils down to, is their place of authority. **We** are to be **under** their authority. We are to submit to their authority... **But.....** there may be rare times, when that doesn't mean "to obey them". For instance, if our government banned us from praying, or from preaching the Gospel, it would be right for us to disobey. Why??? Because there is a higher authority than the government. **God** is that higher authority, and we must **always** be obedient to God first.

- *In Nazi Germany, some Christians disobeyed the 3rd Reich. And it was right for them to do so.*
- *When King Darius decreed that no one should pray to any God but himself, Daniel prayed. And he was thrown into the lion's den because of it.*

- *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused Nebuchadnezzar's order to bow down to his statue. And they were thrown into the fiery furnace.*
- *In Acts 5, when Peter and John were ordered by the authorities to stop teaching in Jesus' name, they said "We must obey God rather than men"*

*And it was **right** for them to disobey in these circumstances...*

But most of the time, our submission to the authorities, means that we'll be obedient. But I do want you to notice, it tells us to submit – it doesn't tell us to obey.ⁱⁱⁱ

How do **you** go with authority? Do you have trouble with authority? You know, some of us don't want to recognise any authority other than our own. There was a time in Israel, and we can read about it in Judges ^{Judges 21:25} **In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.** And that's exactly how a lot of people would like to live today – just doing what's right in our own eyes – submitting to no authority other than our own. But do you know how that turned out in Judges? It was a society filled with violence; anarchy; idolatry; immorality; genocide; Abuse...

When everybody does what's right in their own eyes, society becomes a shambles. And God won't have it. And that is why God has appointed our leaders, and we are to submit to them.

You know, we think that the politicians are there to serve us – we may even use the phrase "Public servants". They are not.

They're not **our** servants. They're **God's** servants. And just like sometimes the good that God does for us, is pretty tough on us, well sometimes the very best acts that the government will do **for** us, will be pretty tough on us too. But it's for our 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.

We know that the day of wrath is coming, and the Lord is restraining His ultimate judgment and the 'pouring out of his wrath' until that day... But that doesn't mean that God does **not** punish evil today... If God was to completely remove His restraint on evil in society, what would happen? It would descend into anarchy, in no time at all...

And so, it is **right** for our authorities, to not only restrain, but to punish – to carry out *God's wrath on the wrongdoer*.

.....

Now, this is the point at which I might get myself into a bit of trouble. And I hope I don't offend anybody's sensibilities... I have made a commitment to always teach, not what's popular, but what God says in His word. And here we are told, that the authorities "do not bear the sword for no reason"... God has given our governments, the authority to bear the sword for a

reason. What is that reason? To avenge – to carry out **God's wrath on the wrongdoer**.

A sword, is used to defend, deter, detain, and execute. You don't rap someone over the knuckles with a sword. You don't smack them on the bottom with a sword. You don't write out a fine with a sword, or rehabilitate with a sword. A sword is used to defend, deter, detain, and execute.

And as I said, I hope I don't offend anybody, but I can't get away from the fact that God **instituted** the death penalty, and He never repealed it.

And even though, in our 21st Century sensibilities, we may find it abhorrent, justice can never be truly served, with the abolishment of the death penalty... If somebody has murdered another, justice doesn't demand rehabilitation... Justice demands retribution... That's all I'm going to say on that.

We live in a country who **have** abolished the death penalty, and that's our Government's right, and we respect that... *But it does grate, when we tell Indonesia that they shouldn't be executing convicted criminals who happen to be Australians. Because the Lord has appointed the Indonesian government, to rule, control, and restrain, those who do evil in Indonesia. And we must respect the God-given responsibility, of the Indonesian authorities, to avenge, and carry out wrath on the wrongdoer...*

So, why is it OK for our governments to kill?

Over the last few weeks, it's been all very exciting in St George – we've had Duntroon conducting some exercises in our town, and we've had armoured vehicles convoying through our streets... We've been treated to machine-gun fire at 5:30 in the morning... It's all been happening...

But they have been practicing and preparing for one thing: To defend against anything that would stand against the Authority's right to govern. And they weren't practicing their machine-gunning to make noise: They were practicing to kill

Likewise, our police don't carry a gun to wound. Once it gets to the stage a gun is drawn, they're trained to shoot at 'centre-of-mass', which will critically wound or kill.

But doesn't the Bible say "Thou shalt not kill"... Well actually no it doesn't.

A better translation would be "You shall not murder". An even better translation is "You shall not wrongfully kill", which in our legal jargon would include murder in all of its 'degrees' and it would even include 'manslaughter'...

It is wrong for you or I, to kill – we don't have that authority. But our governing authorities do... I don't have the right to carry out vengeance. But that is a **duty** that God has given to our governing authorities to do for our good....

Even in the Old Testament – 'an eye for an eye – a tooth for a tooth'^{iv}, was never about seeking personal vengeance – they are laws to be judged by the community. And what it was actually about, was the **limiting** of retribution, so that the punishment would fit the crime, and the punishment wouldn't exceed the crime... So eg., if somebody accidentally broke

somebody else's leg, that didn't give them the right to beat the offender to death.

An eye-for-an-eye and a-tooth-for-a-tooth, was so that when the **authorities** carried out judgment, the **punishment** would fit the crime.

Now of course, to the Christian, Jesus taught us to **never** seek personal vengeance. He said: **Matthew 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. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

What He's describing, is "We don't have to stand up for our rights". "We don't have to personally insist on vengeance". "And we should never seek vengeance ourselves".... But the **government** has been given the **duty** to carry out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Alright, I hope I haven't upset too many people. I'm just telling you what God says in His word.

Righto:

Because the authorities are serving God, we **must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.**

We shouldn't **only** obey the authorities because we'll get into trouble if we don't... We do it because it's the right thing to do. We do it, because we have the insight to recognise that this is God's good ordering of society. *Our submission, is part of that "good, well-pleasing, and perfect" will of God, discovered by the renewed mind'...*

And we pay taxes for the same reason...

You know some of us – we might do quite well for ourselves – But we think our throats are cut if we've got to pay a cent in tax... Have you ever looked at it this way? "You are supporting a ministry of God, when you pay your taxes."

The human way, is to structure everything we do, so that we can pay the least amount of tax we possibly can... And quite often, those, who in real terms, are earning quite a lot of money, end up paying very little, or no tax at all...

And here is a lesson that most of us probly don't want to hear: It is **right** to pay our government taxes. **Why?** Because they are ministers of God.

Something that I've always struggled with, as a minister / or a pastor, / or whatever I am, is exactly that: "What am I?" As

much as I don't want to have a title in the church, or a position description or whatever, there's sort of a bit of a need for it. And when we were writing the constitution of Bush Disciples, that's a decision we had to make – what are we going to call the position of the person who does the job that I'm currently doing? Not as a 'title', but what will the position be called? Would it be the position of:

- *pastor; or*
- *minister; or*
- *senior pastor;*
- *or would it be a priest*
- *preacher*
- *teacher*
- *padre*

And I struggled with all of this, because I didn't want anything to set me apart from anybody else. We are **all** ministers of God. **Many** of us have a gift of pastoring.

Some Roman Catholics want to call me “Father”, but the Bible tells us not to call any man “Father”...

So, because we had to have a position description, we chose the word “Pastor”.

But, whenever I have to fill out any government paperwork, and describe my occupation, the appropriate legal term, is “minister of religion”.

And have you noticed, our politicians still use that title as well: We have a minister for defence; a minister for agriculture; a minister for health; We have a minister for this; And a minister for that... We have a **Prime** Minister...

A minister, is someone who is carrying out a service of God. It stems from the priests, who would minister at the altar. But I wonder, how many of our Governing authorities, actually understand that they are ministers of God. Because they **are** – whether they know it or not.

I suspect we'd have fewer people with political ambitions, if they knew they were aiming to be a minister of God. And I suspect the decisions they made, would be quite different, if they understood, that they are ministers of God...

But do **we** understand this? Do we understand, that our governing authorities are ministers of God????

And just as it is right to pay tithes and offerings, to support ministers of God in the church, it is right to pay **taxes**. It is right to pay other government fees and charges. It is right to give respect, and honour, to those in positions of authority.

It is right to honour our police. It is right to honour the Dept of Transport. It is right to honour the judges. It is right to honour our political leaders....

Now you and I mightn't agree with all of the laws that we are bound by, but it is still **right**, to give respect and honour, to those who are in authority over us.

Now of course, as we touched on before, there **are limitations** to this. And there will be times, when it is right to **disobey**. But that won't be very often.

Righto. I want to end, by looking at Christ. If there was ever anybody who submitted to authority, it was Jesus. He had ultimate authority, and yet He yielded to God's appointed authorities. He even allowed them to crucify Him...

And through His death and resurrection, by faith, we are brought into God's Kingdom. But until the time Jesus returns, we are at the one time, citizens of the Kingdom of God, and citizens of our nation. And we honour God, and we honour Christ, by submitting to the authorities... In Christ, we are free to submit.

OK, I suspect, there will be a lot of questions, and some of you might be a bit angry at what I've said. Let me have it. Questions....

ⁱ Luther M. [Brandt W (Ed)]. *Luther's Works Volume 45 The Christian in Society II*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg. 1962. (p114)

ⁱⁱ Louw, J.P. & Nida, E.A., 1996. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *But perhaps our submission to government is compatible with disobedience to government in certain exceptional circumstances. For heading the hierarchy of relations in which Christians find themselves is God; and all subordinate "submissions" must always be measured in relationship to our all-embracing submission to him*

Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

^{iv} Exodus 21

^v Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.