

Title: How Do You Respond to Authority?
Text: Romans 13:1-7
Theme: The believer's relationship with government
Series: Fall 2020 – Romans 13-15
Prop Stmtnt: The way you respond to authority reveals how you really think about God.

If you have any boring family reunions this month, I have a couple of suggestions to liven things up. Ask people who they are voting for and then ask them their opinion on facemasks. Some of your families are split over this and it is literally keeping people apart and providing an opportunity for people to say some very unkind things to one another. Those accusatory words are going to last way longer than Covid. We've not only been separated but in some cases are doing things that will separate us even more. Our church is facing some issues that we need to address but, the surface issues reveal heart issues. That is what we need to take to heart. So, in August and September we are going to go through Romans 13-15 because these passages address the issue of how the gospel calls us and causes us to be a people who love one another, honor one another, are hopeful and patient in tribulation and care for another even in the midst of difficulty and disagreement. It can be challenging to love, honor, care for one another with hope and patience in the midst of difficulty, it may feel impossible to do it in the midst of disagreement. But, what is, admittedly impossible for us on our own, is possible because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The gospel is supernatural and as followers of Christ, we are called and enabled to respond in an other-worldly way.

Read Text:

The governor issues a mandate. All businesses must require customers to wear a mask and refuse to do business with the customer if they don't, otherwise you may be fined and could potentially lose your business license. So, it begins: In Grand Ledge, a store clerk in a Quality Dairy Market asks a 43-year old customer to wear a mask. This is what the clerk is supposed to do, right? The customer gets so angry that he in turn, stabs a 77-year old man who just happened to be standing nearby. A couple of days before that, a customer in a Meijer store pulled a knife on a Meijer employee who asked him to wear a mask. A few days ago, a customer and a clerk at a local gas station got into it when the clerk refused to serve the customer because the customer did not have a mask on, and a fight almost broke out with one of our members intervening.

How is this issue being viewed? Over here are the people who believe that masks will help stop the spread of Covid-19. They can point to some research to support this, therefore, we should wear them and anyone who doesn't wear them is an ignorant and selfish jerk. Then, over here are the people who believe that the order to wear masks is unconstitutional and is infringing upon my rights as a citizen of this country. They think that if we give in on this issue, then the government will keep taking more of our rights. If the government can use this to control more of our lives and dispense all of this propaganda so that we will be in fear and dependent on them for income and insurance, then they will be able to control what we do, what we believe and how we think. This is nothing more than a power move on their part and I am not going to give in one inch on this. Anyone who wears a mask is a communist, or at least a socialist.

Those may be the extreme positions, but you probably have people in your family and there are people in our church who are on various places on that spectrum. Does the gospel have anything to say to this? YES! Is the gospel sticky enough to forge a unity in the midst of disagreements about non-ultimate issues? YES! We know that in theory, but what does that look like? So, in this introduction I want you to recognize the difference between ultimate issues (like the gospel) and non-ultimate issues like facemasks. The gospel is our root. The way we respond to the government and our authorities as well as to one another are matters of fruit. The root of the gospel will produce good fruit. This is what we are looking at in August and September. Ultimate issues (root) help us think about, speak about and respond to non-ultimate issues.

Let's get a running start. The book of Romans is about the gospel. Chapters 1-11 deal with the root and chapters 12-16 deal with the fruit. It starts with the hard but necessary news about the reality of our **sin** which makes us guilty before God and in need of a forgiveness that we cannot afford. We need a Savior. We then learn that God has provided us with a righteousness that is outside of us. It comes through faith in Christ. This book teaches us about our sin but also about our Savior and that he offers **salvation** to those who repent of their sin and trust in him. Every person who trusts in Christ becomes a follower of Christ and is born, like a child into the family of God and begins to grow. This growing in Jesus, is called **sanctification** or becoming more and more like Jesus. Sin, salvation, sanctification. The fourth section of Romans addresses the **Sovereignty** of God in all things, including salvation. The fifth section of Romans begins with chapter 12 and is what I call **service**. How does a follower of Christ live in relationship with other believers and his or her world? This is what the gospel looks like in our lives. This is what the gospel produces. Our lives are a living sacrifice – 12.1-2. We don't live for ourselves. It's not about us. We love (12.9), honor (12.10), fervently serve the Lord (12.11), rejoice in hope (12.12). We even bless those who persecute us. We bless and do not curse (12.14) and we live in harmony with one another (12.16). If our enemy is hungry, we feed him. If he is thirsty, we give him something to drink. We do not respond to evil with evil. So, what does this look like in relationship to our authorities?

Some of you think the president is doing a great job and you do not like our governor. Others of you think the president is doing a terrible job, is a terrible person and the governor is doing ok. There may be someone here who thinks both the president and the governor are doing awesome. (unlikely, but theoretically possible). The differing views of our governing authorities provide many opportunities for arguments. That is about the most obvious thing I have said all morning. So, hold the phone. What is the tone of this text? The tone is: Christ-displaying humility and gospel-driven love. Gospel-driven love and Christ-displaying humility is expressed in submission to our authorities. Our posture toward authorities is love, submission, honor and respect because we ultimately love, submit to, honor and respect God.

I. **Submit to authorities because God says so.** (13.1-2b)

A. **Applies to all people**— *“let every person”*

There is on the part of each of us, this idea that the rules apply to everyone else, but us. We are prone to think this way individually and even collectively. Let every person is clear. This applies to you and me.

“*be subject*” – the picture is that of voluntarily placing yourself under authority.

B. Applies to all authorities – “*there is no authority except from God...*” (1b)

Did you notice how many times the text references the authority of God, the sovereignty of God, and the involvement of God? God is over all of the umbrellas. The command to submit is linked directly to the reason. Why do we submit to governing authorities? Because, all of the authorities are under God in reality even though some try to operate as if they are not. Therefore, when you rebel against authorities you are picking a fight with God.

“*whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed*” (2a)

The text does not say, obey your authorities if you like them, if you agree with them, if you voted for them, if they don’t embarrass you, if they are good for the economy, if they make you happy, if the law makes sense to you, if the law is perfectly consistent, if the law is not politically motivated, (I probably ought to quit) etc. Obey authorities because God says so.

Can you obey and disagree? Absolutely! In our country (praise God) you can obey and protest. We have that right. However, if you use protesting as an opportunity for disobeying, you are picking a fight with God. That is wrong.

Now, I find it interesting that Paul uses the word “submit” and not the word “obey.” I believe that is the case because submission describes our posture and attitude, whereas obey describes our actions. We do not mindlessly obey. We do not mindlessly do what we are told to do. We, as an act of our wills choose to show respect to our authorities by placing ourselves under them, which usually means that we obey them. Can you submit to your authorities without always obeying them? Yes. There are exceptions as we will see. I will address this later on.

II. Submit to authorities because it is good. (13.2b-4)

Picking a fight with God is not good. That is the point of 2b. Incurring judgment is not speaking about getting in trouble with the law but is speaking about facing the judgment of God. There is no category in the Bible for a Christian who seeks to live in rebellion to authority. Again, there are exceptions, but they are exceptions. Our general posture is one of submission because this is good!

Look at verse 4. The governing authority is God’s servant for your good. For those of you who hate face masks (like me). Did it ever occur to you that the governor’s orders for you to wear facemasks is actually God’s goodness to you because wearing the facemasks does indeed protect you and perhaps has protected you from either getting or sharing the virus?

“I don’t like feeling as if people are judging me if I don’t have my facemask on.” “What kind of a country is this when I could get in trouble for not wearing a facemask – are you kidding me!?”

Look at v.3, *“Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good.”*

If you are going to go against your authorities, you need to be absolutely certain that you are only going against them because they are clearly against God. Are you certain that the governor’s laws on facemasks is a clear violation of God’s Word? I’m not convinced it is, but you may be. If you are frustrated with me, read the text. How else can you understand it? Some of you are fine with the facemask thing, but you have a boss or a manager that you are very frustrated with. Do you have a posture of submission to them? Do you realize that they are part of God’s grace and goodness in your life? “But they frustrate me and are inconsistent.” Perhaps, but is that not God’s grace to help you learn things about your own heart and have empathy for co-workers and see the value of consistency in your own life?

III. **Submit to authorities because of your conscience** (13.5-7)

If you do not submit to governing authorities then you are picking a fight with God (5a – summary), then Paul adds another reason why we submit. For our conscience.

A. **This is why you pay taxes.** (6)

If you do not pay your taxes, or if you cheat on your taxes, you live with fear. You live with the gnawing fear of being found out. If you just felt a surge of adrenaline in your body, and your heart rate just increased, and you are feeling your body temperature rising and sweat glands opening up, you are an example of this verse. When you owe taxes, you feel as if you are being pursued, hounded, threatened or will be and it is terrifying. You are afraid that it is only a matter of time. Now, do you like taxes? No. But, what is worse; paying taxes or not being able to sleep, rest, relax because your conscience is not clear?

This is the same reason why we submit. Same thing! We want to have a clear conscience before them, before God, and a clear conscience is a wonderful gift from God for our own good being.

B. **This is why you show respect and honor.** (7)

Paul bundles it all together. Do you see why this is so important? Submission means that we look for reasons to obey since we take that as being for our good. This puts us as a people and as individuals in a position to be able display the gospel.

If you follow sports you know certain players who play the refs. They argue, pester, whine all the time, just hoping that their incessant posture of conflict helps them get a few more calls going their way. They will feign offense and put on dramatic displays of shock at anything that is close to being close, so that they will get the next call. They know how to get the fans to target the ump (back when we had fans). Over time, the umpire or referee learns not to take that person seriously. Compare that to the player who simply doesn’t complain. He is respectful and measured. When, what he thinks is ball four is called strike two, he simply gets back in the box and gets ready for the next pitch. Regarding the first player, he acts as if the umpire never gets

anything right, so if he disagrees, it has very little impact. It's nothing new. If however, the second player disagrees, then that would cause the umpire to reconsider because this player never does this, so this must be important.

That is what our relationship with governing authorities is to be like. There may be times when we have to disagree and disobey. But, our disobeying should give the governing authorities pause because we are normally a very loving and compliant people.

I do not want any governing authority to view our church as being full of a people who hate their guts anyway. We want all governing authorities to view us a people who are loving, caring, and very respectful, so that if we have to disagree that it is not with animosity, belligerence or grandstanding.

IV. **Submit to authorities because it puts Christ on display.**

A. Christ fully and perfectly trusted his Father.

He clearly did not like everything he was called to do, particularly the cup in the garden, but his Father was a perfect authority who could be perfectly trusted and Christ trusted him. But, there's more.

B. Christ fully and perfectly submitted to his authorities.

Do you think that the failures of our governing authorities are more offensive to you than the failures of the governing authorities that Christ submitted to?

John 18.33-37

Christ did what we have not done and did what we could not do. But, while his perfect life was our substitute, his perfect life also was our example.

C. God overruled the unjust suffering of Jesus for glorious purposes.

The failures of the governing authorities were used by God to carry out his purposes. That is still going on. Our posture is to obey.

i. 1 Peter 2.13-25

- What if obeying the authorities means that I am disobeying God?

1) The government needs to clearly violate God's Word.

Case in point: Governor Whitmer's orders, thus far give an exemption for religious gatherings. We are not violating her order to meet indoors in groups larger than 10. Now, given the fact that we are permitted to meet, does that mean that we should meet? And given the fact that we are permitted to meet, what should our meeting look like? What does a posture of submission look

like? I think that we should be grateful for the exemption, and should use this freedom responsibly and humbly and look for ways to honor our authorities.

I don't know how else to interpret this text as it relates to that. If, the governor did not provide an exemption for churches, then we would be discussing this question: Is our gathering as a church prohibited by the governor a violation of the Word of God? Or is there a way of gathering that would be in obedience to both? We could gather in groups of 10 or less all over the area and all listen together to the sermon on-line, have our own services, or gather in slightly larger groups outdoor, or have outdoor services. The issue is not the church is being singled out, but that any gatherings due to the threat of the virus. Only if there is a clear violation of God's Word, such as, you can't preach the Bible, you cannot meet together as Christians, etc. do we disobey even from a position of respect. If it is clear that we are being singled out because of our message and beliefs, then we say, "I honor you as my leader but must ultimately obey your Leader, God."

Grace Community Church (where John MacArthur, Jr pastors in SoCal) is meeting in violation of the governor's orders because they believe that the governor's orders are neither lawful (against the 1st amendment) and are against God's law that calls the church to meet together. I love and respect John. I have not studied this thoroughly because I had a very busy week. I don't know how I would come down on this. But, if I disagreed with them on their approach, you can bet that it would be done from a position of love, honor and respect as my brothers and sisters.

LOVE, LOVE, LOVE!
LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN!
PRAY, PRAY, PRAY!