

Our General Disposition Toward All, Part I - The Imperative

Call to Worship: Psalm 27

1st Scripture: Romans 13:1-7

2nd Scripture: Titus 3:1-2

Hymn #502- *Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart*

Hymn Insert- *Speak O Lord*

Hymn #700- *Trust and Obey*

Introduction

Sometimes, in the Scriptures, when an author seeks to address a specific issue, he moves from addressing that specific issue, into extracting a broader, universal principle out of it. The Apostle Paul does that here, and in doing so, we are given a very relevant and critical principle for our time.

Even as the Apostle Paul has been dealing with character issues, he moves on then to express how we ought to treat governmental authorities, and in doing this, he leads us to understand what our general disposition, as Christians, ought to be toward *all* people. And as he has done in the previous verses, he follows up the *imperative* command with a sobering *indicative* reminder, which ought to greatly motivate us to strive to pursue and maintain the general disposition given in the imperative. This morning, we will begin then, by addressing the imperative (the command). And next time, Lord willing, we will consider the robust and convicting motivation, given in the indicative that follows. Ideally, it would be great to address this whole package in one sermon, but time will just not allow me to do that, in a way that would adequately represent the whole of the text.

I. Be Subject to Rulers and Authorities

“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work...” (vs. 1). And so, here is the specific command, which deals with the attitude that we ought to have toward our governing authorities.

We are to be *subject* to rulers and authorities. The Greek word, “*hupotasso*” which is here translated “subject,” is the same term that is used in Ephesians 5, where wives are commanded to *submit* (or to be submissive) to their own husbands. And so, the idea being conveyed here, is to place one’s self under the other, similar to the military concept, where lower

ranking soldiers would place themselves under the authority of higher ranking soldiers. And the whole idea of being “subject” or “submissive,” means that the individual being commanded by God to do so, does so, humbly and willingly. In other words, it should not have to be forced. It is a willful submission that consciously seeks to honor and respect the ones, to whom, you are subjecting yourself.

And this submissive spirit is to be directed toward all who are in governmental positions of authority, be it, policemen, judges, governors, presidents and any others who are appointed as a means of maintaining order in the country. Whatever the hierarchy of structure entails, from the lowest citizen to the highest office of President, that hierarchy is to be honored by all Christians, in accordance with where they are placed within it. From the Apostle Paul’s standpoint, this submission would have been directed toward everyone, from the emperor/Caesar (even Nero), to the local king (Herod), governor and/or procurator, and to the centurions and officers, who served underneath them.

Now, Paul elaborates on this further, by defining two general ways, in which, we are called by God, to subject ourselves to rulers and authorities.

1) To obey them. At the very basic level, less violating God’s higher authority (again, there is a hierarchy, and God is at the top of all chains of authority), we are to follow the laws of the land, and we are to obey the governing rulers and authorities, who have been placed over us. And so, unless we are dealing with a moral compromise (a governmental authority orders you to do something that is sinful in God’s sight), we ought to obey those who are over us, in all things. We will get to some specific examples, shortly. Simply put then, we must and ought to, do what they say.

2) To be ready for every good work. That is, to be ready to do whatever duty your governing authorities call you unto; both, to comply and to proactively aid in helping them achieve their desired ends for the nation, especially as they act as God’s sword bearers and administrators, seeking to restrain evil and to promote the general welfare of the people. In short, this entails being a good citizen, cooperating in whatever work your government calls you unto, even when that work is disagreeable or non-preferable to you, as long as, it is not immoral (in violation of God’s Law).

And so, the assumption here is, then, that we are to channel good works of service unto our nation, in accordance with the dictates of our government, in every direction that is within the bounds of God's moral Law. And that means, even when the government itself is involved in great evil and corruption (remember, Paul served under the Caesars and Nero), you serve willfully, in those areas that are either amoral or morally good, while not treading down paths that are immoral or contrary to the Lordship of Christ. You see, Paul says these things, so as to root out any form of anarchy, which would even use the evil workings of the government as a means of discrediting the entire system of the government itself. The point is that, generally speaking, we can still be subject to the government in all areas that are not directly connected to wicked and corrupt practices. One example (in our day) would be that we can pay our taxes and seek the spiritual/physical welfare of our leaders, without supporting legislation that would promote abortion or gay marriage...etc.

Now, brethren, before we move into verse two, which carries us into the general disposition that we are to have toward all people, including governing authorities, let me just leave you with a few practical applications that spring out of this first point.

1) There is a growing disrespect for Law Enforcement Officers in our day, which ought never to be embraced by Christians. Officers must operate within the boundaries of their legal jurisdiction, and yes, sometimes, some cross those boundaries, but as a general principle, we ought to respect and honor all Law Enforcement, in keeping with this command, and we ought to cooperate with them, whenever we are able to do so. That means respecting them and following their orders when we get pulled over. And that certainly mean not cursing at them or exercising hand gestures toward them which are offensive, just because we have free speech. Freedom of speech is a wonderful thing, but Christ says that people will be judged for every careless word that they speak. We have no right to speak carelessly or freely, if in doing so, we are offending God.

2) As unfair as we might think any particular taxes are, and there are many that are simply wrong in my opinion, we are called to give to Caesar, the things that are Caesars. And so, we must and ought to pay our taxes, even when we don't agree with them. [Not cheating on

income tax forms, not working off the books, not using poor government spending as an excuse, since they will give an account to God for that stewardship...etc]

3) Finally, because we live in a democratic republic, our primary means of effecting change, at the level of government, is in the voting booth. And for that reason, discussing politics and giving opinions on candidates...etc, is certainly acceptable, again, when done with the right heart and God-honoring attitude. But, once the office is filled, we ought to honor whoever it is that fills the office, without condoning any immoral or corrupt behaviors.

That said, Paul then bridges this command into the general disposition that we ought to have toward all people, including governmental officials.

II. Our General Disposition Toward All

“...to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men” (vs. 2).

And so, again, Paul here carries his specific charge, for Titus to remind the Cretans to be subject to rulers and authorities, into the general disposition that they ought to have toward all people.

1) To speak evil of no one. This means not engaging in conversation that is mocking or unnecessarily offensive toward anyone, and again, this is especially geared first and foremost toward conversations surrounding governmental authorities. Now, if you just consider our present president and our former president, both being from opposite sides of the political aisle, it wouldn't take much thought to recall how often this command has been, and continues to be violated, even by Christians.

How many times have our presidents been called all kinds of names, and how many memes could we locate through google that would exemplify exactly what Paul commands us not to do here? How many times have people referred to the man in office as a piece of (feces) or some other term that would imply that he is worthless? Brethren, for us, that ought not to be. And if we have engaged such talk on FB/Twitter posting, we ought to repent. Whatever we think of the man in the office, he ought to be respected, if for no other reason, then for the sake of the office, remembering that God has sovereignly ordained such a man to fill that office. We would

do better to pray for them, and to plead with God to bring about proper justice in His time, if necessary. Mocking and cursing and speaking disrespectfully about anyone, does not suit the purposes of God in redemption.

And again, this ought to be our attitude toward *all* people. We ought to avoid speaking evil about anyone. And next time, Lord willing, we will get to the indicative motivation, which supports this charge. But suffice it to say for now, brethren, that especially in our internet driven world, words are constantly flung around, here and there and everywhere, and God is not pleased by the careless, loose lips, of finite, self-righteous sinners. When I hear Hollywood elites make statements, there's an immediate part of me that wants to smash my keyboard, with the hope that somehow, they might feel it. All kinds of words can begin to rage through me, but I have to slow down, back up, exercise self-control, and remember that, in Christ, I am to speak evil of no one. And we ought rather to pray for such people. This can tie into gossip and slander and a whole gamut of communicative avenues, dealing with anyone, but I think you get the point.

2) To be peaceable. Rather than adding to chaos and division, and jumping on the band wagon, tidal wave, of harsh expressions of frustration against others, we ought to be those who are thinking biblically and redemptively. We know the general reason for the evil in the world. We understand that all of mankind is fallen and lives out of his fallen nature. We ought not to be surprised by corruption, evil, wickedness and every defiled action and word that comes out of the human heart. We know that there are also higher powers and principalities at work, which stand behind and drive the forces of evil that exist in our visible world. We know that the devil has the entire unregenerate world under his deceptive sway. And so, we ought to think, act and speak differently. We don't simply parrot the talking points of those who follow our political bent, because we know that the only hope for democrats and republicans and independents and progressives and liberals and conservatives, is a righteousness that comes from outside of all of us...namely, the righteousness of Jesus Christ!

And so, brethren, we ought to think redemptively. We ought to strive to respond to the world's circumstances with a gospel focus and mindset. While everyone else is standing upon their own self-righteous high wave, we stand upon the Bible. We seek to think God's thoughts after Him, and God's thoughts drive us to think peaceably, redemptively, seeking to make Christ

known to all people. Now, this doesn't mean compromising with evil in any way, but it does mean, addressing it from a redemptive standpoint. Salvation and conversion do not involve making republicans into democrats or democrats into republicans. It involves calling all people to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone, can justify sinners and reconcile them to their God. People don't need a new political view or standpoint, they need a new heart in Christ! They don't need a new political hero, they need a Savior! They don't need to see their political agendas advanced, they need their sins washed away! And so, we speak evil of no one, and strive to be peaceable. One brings the democratic vantage point. Another brings the republican vantage point. But we bring the gospel vantage point, the only vantage point with power to save and to change sinners from the inside out!

3) Gentle. Consistent with not speaking evil of anyone, and with being peaceable, Paul adds, "gentle." Christians are not to be abrasive, arrogant, harsh, loud, boisterous or careless with their speech. Again, understanding the reality of all that is going on behind what is seen, coming from a redemptive standpoint, we strive to be intentionally gentle, carefully choosing our words and actions, in such a way, that we would adorn the gospel and not bring a reproach upon it. This is akin to what Paul says elsewhere, when he says, "Let your gentleness be known to all people. For, the Lord is at hand." Let your perceptive demeanor, be one of sincere concern and care, even toward those who oppose you. Or, as our Lord states, "Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who spitefully use you and who say bad things about you." Be winsome, show them in your love for them that there is a gospel that has changed you, and it is readily available to them.

4) And finally, right in keeping with peaceableness and gentleness, "showing humility to all men." You see the two ends of the container there? Speaking evil of *no one*, and showing humility to *all men*. The universal negative (of no one) unites with the universal positive (to all men), to complete the picture, doesn't it? Showing humility, not spinelessness, not compromise or lack of conviction, but rather, an attitude of lowering one's self, unto the exaltation of, and concern for, others. Rather than biting back or returning evil for evil, the Christian seeks to elevate the cause and welfare of all others, for the sake of Christ and their never dying souls.

Again, all in all, brethren, these characteristics; this general disposition that we are to have toward all people (even those who oppose us), is only attainable, if we pursue it prayerfully and with a redemptive mindset. There is no other way. Bring this into your politics, whoever is in office, and into the context of how you treat all people, and you will be a firebrand for Christ! People don't need to see another zealous, political, rebel. They need to see Christ. They need to see a reflection of the One who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and you will find rest for your souls. For, I am gentle and lowly in heart, and My burden is light." This was Jesus's general demeanor toward sinners (tax collectors, prostitutes, drunkards and sinners of all kinds). And that is what people need to see in us, brethren.

Next time, Lord willing, we will get into the indicative motivation, which ought to drive us unto pursuing and maintaining such a general disposition toward all people, rich and poor, high and low, great and small. May God give us the grace to stand out, as lights, in our wicked and perverse generation! May God give us the heart and mind to think, not selfishly, not self-righteously, but redemptively!

The Gospel!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25