

Bible Verse: Titus 3:1
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Let me now invite you to turn to our text tonight, which is Titus 3. We're going to turn to Titus 3, and in the remaining few times that I'll be in the pulpit between now and the start of my study leave, we're going to be in Titus 3 and just getting as far as possible as we can in the text before that. This is something that's true, what I'm about to say, but it's also kind of funny, okay? The way that we arranged this, part of the reason that I was away last Tuesday, was to make sure that the messages all came together in the right way. Now picture me on Sunday, September 18th and it's my last message to Truth Community Church for several months. I could not let the text be this in Titus 3:10 and 11, my last text, my parting words to my flock would be "reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted in his sinning, being self-condemned." Now that's a very good, important part of the word of God but there's a place for a right word to be spoken in right circumstances, and I didn't want to end on that text before I left. So we're not going to, we're probably going to end around verse 7 or verse 8 and just spend the next three weeks going through this very important section of Scripture that the Lord is given to us here in Titus 3.

So what I want to do today is read the first two verses. I just felt like verses 10 and 11 would just leave everybody kind of cold. We'll go out on the warmth of the grace of Christ. But for now, we've come to the first two verses of Titus 3, which I'll deal with today and next week, and it's a continuation of the things that Paul wants Titus, and by extension the church, to teach to Christians about practical living in light of true salvation. In light of true salvation. Titus, 2 :14 says that Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." He's teaching on practical Christian living as we saw in chapter 2, older men, younger men, older women, younger women, masters, slaves, it's all about practical, day-to-day life that he's teaching on in this section of Scripture.

As we go to chapter 3, he's still teaching on very practical things that affect everyone in their day-to-day lives and so we're going to read here verses 1 and 2 and just deal with verse 1 here this evening where, he says,

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, 2 to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

Now, beloved, this is a very countercultural passage even within the church of Jesus Christ, and it's part of that instruction that God intends for the church to hold forth to the people of God with all authority, with a sense that this is the command of God in how we are to live. Beloved, we have not stepped into with this verse, we have not stepped into something that is optional for Christian to embrace or reject depending on the political party that's in power at any time; and you know, in the days of Rome they were dealing with the Caesars who claimed to be God, who commanded the people to call them Lord, and who would persecute and kill them if they did not do so. And so we can't look at this and qualify it by our political opinions, this is the word of God in all circumstances for us. And so we need to come to this with a with a humble heart, willing to have Scripture shape and mold us, and I'll try to be very practical in things that I say later on in ways that are bound to encourage many and perhaps offend a few, but as we come to verse 1, notice that Paul starts out by instructing Timothy, he says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers."

Now, the verb tense here in in the comm "remind them" indicates that this should be an aspect of regular teaching in the church. This is not a one-off subject. This is something that should be taught in an ongoing way in the body of Christ. And if Titus, watch this, this is just so rich, beloved, just the simplicity of grammar and just thinking through words and what they mean, if Titus was to remind them to live this way, then it's obvious that they had clearly had prior instruction on the matter. These Christians had already been taught to live this way, probably had slipped away, and were stumbling in this particular area, so Paul comes to Titus, who was his apostolic delegate to establish churches on the island of Crete, Paul considered it of such importance in that formative time, he says, "Titus, be sure that you include this in your teaching ministry to them." And so there was a context to this command, there was a context about this teaching, and we don't know exactly what the form of the prior instruction was, but we do have enough Scripture on this topic to inform us about the consistent approach that we find in the word of God. And what we find is this, and it's a blessing for us to be able to address this outside the context of a contested presidential election, it's a blessing to be a little bit ahead of the curve of an election in the American context coming up this fall, and to just see what God's word says to us about the Christian and government, the Christian's relationship to government. And what you and I have to do is we have to remember this, is that we belong to a different kingdom, we do not belong to the kingdom of this world. Jesus prayed that God would preserve us in the world, but he acknowledges that we're not of this world. We live for a kingdom to come. We have been transformed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son, Colossians 1 says. We know and we understand that we are living for, we are living for a glory that is yet to be revealed to us. We are told repeatedly in Scriptures that this world is not our home, that we are just passing through, as it were, we are pilgrims walking through this world to another destination, a different place. And as a result of that, our affections are not

wrapped up in the here and now of what happens in the passing vicissitudes of the culture or the government that is around us. It is essential for us to understand that.

I realize that some of you have come from churches and had pastors where it was a very political agenda that was taught to you and there was often discussion about what the next piece of legislation was, and, you know, and voter recommendation guides and those kinds of things and all of that has oriented you to think in political ways. Beloved, we have to understand that Christians have been called out of the world. We still have a relationship to maintain with our government, but it is a relationship that is in the context of something superior in our affections, something that is better, something that is more crucial to us. We have our King in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ we have our prophet who instructs us on the way of God. In Christ we have our priest who represents us before God. And in Christ we have our King who ultimately rules over us, and we love him, and we are secure in him and, beloved, we are satisfied in him. We've sometimes, I don't know that we sing it here at Truth, we probably don't. I remember growing up where there was a hymn, a song sung in church, "I am satisfied with Jesus," and there are things about the other lyrics about that that would justify why we don't sing it here, but I'm satisfied with Christ. Well, if we're satisfied with Christ, then maybe, just maybe, consider the fact that we shouldn't get really agitated over the things that happen politically around us. Maybe if we're satisfied in Christ then those things won't have such a grip on our affections. And so what you and I need to do is we need to study Scripture, we need to look at it and see what it says, and we need to embrace it and to love the things of God more than the things of this world, and if we do that, it will enable us to respond better to the authority that is around us. To say it one other way, we need to let Scripture, as the Holy Spirit works in our heart, to overcome our political preferences and prejudices so that we can live to please God.

Now look. There are real moral connotations to the different platforms that political parties put forth. I'm not pretending that Conservative and Liberal politics are of an equal value and that it makes no difference at all. But that's not the point for tonight. That's a discussion for another time. What we're talking about now is the direct biblical instruction to individual Christians about how we are to live in light of whatever kind of government God sees fit to put in authority over us. And one thing that I could say is that, you know, we're pretty familiar with Romans 1 and how God gives cultures over to a depraved mind and all kinds of bad consequences come from that, well, beloved, you know, I think we're living in a Romans 1 culture that's under the wrath of God and one of the things that we as Christians should understand and just to set our expectations accordingly, is that a depraved Romans 1 culture is going to produce for us depraved Romans 1 kind of leaders. If we recognize that and set our expectations accordingly, then we're going to be in a position to live peaceably in the midst of the world that the Lord has placed us in.

Now listen, many Christians respond to authority and to government, and the latest political news with anger or with fear, fear that what I love is going to be taken away from me, or anger against, you know, the unrighteousness of it all. Well, beloved, they are not in living that way, they are not models of the settled peace that this passage

speaks of. And it's just, I'm just making an observation, I'm not even being critical of anyone in saying that, the people that are constantly politically agitated are not people that are manifesting forth the fruit of the Spirit shown in Galatians 5:22 and 23. It's just obvious. I take that as a self-evident, self-proving fact, and as we come to Scripture, we see that that is not, that that kind of agitated living is not the way that God calls his people to live in the life that he is given to us.

And so what I want to do to help kind of set the context theologically biblically for chapter 3, verse 1, I want to consider civil authority in light of how the leaders got there. How did they get to their position of influence and authority over us? And that brings us to our first point here this evening. We'll go through a lot in a short amount of time here, but point number 1 that I want you to really take to heart is this, and it's a fundamental principle of theology. It's this, point number 1: God rules over our rulers. God rules over our rulers, by which I mean this, God himself has established the rulers that we have at any given time. This is an outworking of the sovereignty of God. Our rulers have not reached their position of power, whether it's at a local, state, or federal level, no one has reached power contrary to the intention of God, they've achieved power apart from the outworking of the purpose of God. That's never happened, and there are obvious reasons why that must be the case for people who want to think biblically.

First of all, God is sovereign over everything. God is sovereign over everything. He is sovereign over all, and I'm just going to read verses to you, you can write down the reference and look them up later for the sake of time, but in Psalm 103:19 we read this, Psalm 103:19 we read this, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all." God reigns in heaven, heaven is above earth, God reigns in heaven, he reigns over earth, and so he is sovereign over everything that happens on our planet. He always has been. He is now. And he always will be. God is over all.

In Ephesians 1:11, we read this. Ephesians 1: 11 we read these comforting words and I go back to these again and again, is that we have been predestined according to God's purpose who works all things after the counsel of his will. God works all things after the counsel of his will. Everything that has ever happened in the course of human history, going back to the first moment of creation, everything that has happened has been an outworking of his purpose. God uses even the sins of men to accomplish his purposes.

In Acts 2:23, Peter told the rulers that they crucified Christ according to the predetermined purpose and plan of God. They were acting sinfully and wickedly in their hearts but God had appointed what they would do in their wickedness in order to accomplish good things that he had planned before the beginning of time. God, listen, of course God is sovereign over all. How else could Paul say in Romans 8:21 that he works all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose? Unless he's sovereign over everything, that could never be true. But because God sovereignly rules over everything, that he uses even wicked people to advance his purposes, then that means that he is ruling over all of human history, everything that happens in that big global, most universal sense.

Now beloved, as you continue to work through what this means biblically, think about, you know, you've got the broadest, most comprehensive statement of the sovereignty and providence of God possible in what we just said, well then, human leaders, civil authority, are simply a subset of what God rules over and that which he is sovereign over all. So that we could say, secondly, when we say God rules over rulers, we know that because God is sovereign over all, and secondly, God is sovereign over the rise of human leaders. Scripture is undeniably explicit on this very point. And we could you could think of Proverbs 21:1 where Scripture says that the heart of kings is in the hand of the Lord. He directs them wherever he wishes. But what I wanted to do was I wanted to turn to the book of Daniel, and again, I'm just going to read this, Daniel 2:20 and 21. Daniel 2:20 and 21, where it says this, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding. It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him." Beloved, look at some point in this discussion about how we respond to government, at some point you have to come and answer this question: do you believe the Bible? Do you for real believe the Bible because the Bible says that God removes kings and establishes them, that he rules over everything that happens. And so the consequence of that is this, is that no one has ever obtained a position of authority at any time apart from the outworking of the providential hand of God. God has orchestrated the outworking of human history. God knows the end from the beginning. He is sovereignly moving in everything that happens. If you are a biblical Christian, you must believe that. If you reject that, you are probably not a Christian at all because Scripture is so definitive about these things.

Now look, what that means is that the God who loved you in Christ, who gave himself up for you on the cross of Calvary, and who lovingly by his Spirit drew you into fellowship with him, this is the God who reigns over all and this is the God who orchestrates the outworking of world history, including whoever is in authority at any given particular time. Now of course, you know, in the infinite mind of God, of course there are going to be things that are beyond our understanding. Of course there are going to be things, "God, why would You do it that way?" The prophet Habakkuk asked that question in Habakkuk 1, "I cry out to You violence and You do not save." And God said, "Look out on the world scene, look and see what I'm doing for I am raising up a nation to address the sin of my people." God sovereignly, effortlessly, God effortlessly raising up nations and casting them down so that his good purpose is accomplished in all things.

Now look, the whole question about submission to civil authority starts with whether you accept the biblical teaching on those principles or not because if you do accept them, then it's much easier to embrace what the Bible says about how to respond to them. If you're uncertain about those biblical principles, if you buck against them, you reject them, you resist them, let's say, then you, listen, you have a far bigger problem than who has presidential authority or who's in control of Congress because you're at war with what God has revealed about himself. Forget about your disagreements with political matters, if you reject this teaching about the sovereignty and providence of God and his sovereignty over human leaders, you're at war with God himself and that's a far greater

problem than anything politically that might be happening. That's just the reality of the matter.

And so we see that God is sovereign over all, he's sovereign over the rise of leaders. We've said that he's sovereign even over the hearts of leaders. And so all of this means something, beloved, it means that our leaders do not act outside the boundaries that God has established. God has established his purpose for the outworking of the universe. He raises leaders and brings them down to further his purposes. They are pawns in his hand. They are instruments of his choosing. Just like Cyrus of Persia was raised up, an unbelieving king, had a purpose in the sovereign purpose of God. The kings of Assyria who took Israel off into exile, they had a purpose in the plan of God. The Babylonians, wicked people, godless people had a purpose in the plan of God as he was working out his ways with his people. I consider this to be basic biblical theology, beloved. This is not an advanced course in theology. This is plain biblical teaching about how the world works and who's ultimately in charge.

And so what that means is, as at any given time, God has appointed our existing leaders for this time in human history and this time in our lives, and that has a spiritual implication and a consequence for us. It's sobering. It's sobering to realize that. It's humbling to realize that, that our God is so great that he's far, far more, beloved, God is far, far more than the God of our personal salvation and God's purpose is far more than having a wonderful plan for your life, and his purpose was far more than, you know, than what happens to you on a day-to-day basis. He rules over everything and so you live out your life and you work out your salvation in a Philippians 2:12 kind of sense in a far greater context. God was sovereign when Franklin Pierce became President back in the 19th century. He'll be sovereign over whoever becomes president in 2044 if that's an election year, and I think it is. Everything about our individual lives and whatever is happening in the news and culture and politics around us, it's infinitesimal pieces of a far greater puzzle that is being put together by our sovereign God to accomplish his will. That's sobering, and it's also encouraging at the same time.

Beloved, you and I, we are not at the mercy of hostile forces. When those noble Roman Christians were suffering under 10 waves of persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire in the first 300 years of history after the time of Christ, many of them shedding their blood to protect the word of God and to maintain the testimony of Jesus in their lives, God was at work in that. Those Roman Emperors are forgotten. What those martyrs died for lives on. And you see, if you look at history from a biblical perspective, you are in awe of the fact that men who were exalted for a short time, they're forgotten. The gospel that they tried to suppress, the testimony of Christ that they tried to extinguish, burns brightly in the hearts of God's people and in the proclamation of his word 2,000 years later. And it changes the way that you look at history because God accomplishes his purpose even if evil appears to be prevailing at the moment. And of course, as we'll see hopefully next year after my study leave, is you look at the book of Revelation and you see all of this being brought together in its ultimate culmination, and what we'll find at some point is we'll find that the early pages of Scripture and the early chapters of Genesis and the fall of man and all of the horrific consequences of sin and disobedience and the

chaos that the world was thrown into, all of that in a dozen or more points is answered by the outcome of it all in the book of Revelation. And so God is working out his purposes to a magnificent conclusion in the end, all of which will result in his people giving him praise.

Now, if that's the ultimate outcome, then it affects the way that we live today. It has ramifications for our lives today. Now, what does that mean for the sake of how we live in response to civil authority? Well, that brings us to our second point tonight. Our second point tonight, our first point is that God rules over rulers and, secondly, God rules over us. God rules over us, and in what I'm saying tonight and what I'm about to say still more, it is very easy for a man in a teaching position of any kind of spiritual consequence, it's very easy for a man to gather around himself followers by teaching in a different way and leading people into anger and rebellion against the government and fighting against things and all of that. I get the fact that there are men who build an audience around them, you know, with a hyper-masculine approach to things and, you know, and looking like a, you know, a hero for opposing rulers by name and all of that. But beloved, just be careful who you follow. Be careful what the spirit that you imbibe on these things. Even as we oppose policies like pro-abortion policies and things like that, we rightly oppose those things, and we prefer leaders and we vote for leaders who affirm a pro-life position for example, but, beloved, you've got to keep that in the broader perspective of, you know, once the election's over, then what do you do?

Well, what we find as we go back to Titus 3 is we find this enduring word of God speaking to us and look at Titus 3:1 with me again. God rules over us, and one of the things that he does is he rules over us as the Lordship of Christ is exercised through his word by his Spirit over his people, what we find is this, is that God commands us to obey. God commands us to obey. Titus 3:1, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed." There is a fundamental spirit of submission that Scripture calls Christians to live to in response to their government.

Now look, there is more to come in this message. I'm going to talk about times where we view this in balance with other principles, but you don't go to the exceptions to build your theology, you start with the clear statements of Scripture and, beloved, God calls you, God calls his people to honor authority even if the rulers are not worthy of the honor in and of themselves. And the reason for that is that God has established them, that civil authority is established by God, and the men who hold it at any time hold it by the prerogative and the providence of God. And so the last thing that we should be is rebellious and just consistently resistant to every aspect of authority.

Romans 13 speaks of this as well, and remember there's more coming here, all right? So we just need to realize what the starting point, the starting premise is. In Romans 13:1 we read this, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." And so Scripture is pretty plain here. This is pretty direct and to the point. You may not like, you and I may not like the human

instrument but we must always step back and put it in the broader context that God has put that person there. God established authority, civil authority. It's part of his common grace to restrain evil.

And so we keep that in mind and what this means for you and I as a believer is this, is that our love for Christ, our submission to Christ, our submission to the word of God therefore informs the way that we respond to authority. We see Scripture saying remind them and do it repeatedly to be subject to rulers, to authorities, we see what it said in Romans 13, and so submission to God informs your response to authority and the outworking of this as I understand Scripture and in my own convictions is this, is that the starting point, the presumption that a Christian should have in response to government and the laws of society, the starting point is that I am under responsibility to submit and to obey what they have told me to do based on these passages of Scripture. God commands us to obey.

Now especially in light of what the church of Jesus Christ has lived through over the past 2 1/2 years with the whole COVID thing and response to government, we need to think through these things and round them out a little further. The fact that the general principle is one of submission does not mean that it is absolute and unlimited and completely unqualified submission. Here I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts 5, for example, for Acts 5, and we'll see how far we get in this. Acts 5 beginning in verse 27. The apostles were brought before the authorities at the time. They had disobeyed. "When they had brought them, [the apostles] stood before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.'" We commanded you as authorities not to do this and what have you done? You've kept doing it. And, "Peter and the apostles answered," verse 29, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross." Verse 32, "we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." They say, "Yes, you're the authority but there is an authority over you, and your commanded to us," this is so crucial, beloved, "your command to us not to teach the gospel is contrary to the higher authority of God, and in that instance I have to obey God, not man." Verse 40. We read this, that they called the apostles in, "they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Beloved, they accepted the punishment from the civil authorities for breaking the civil law. They accepted that punishment joyfully and considered it as suffering that was done for the sake of Christ. They suffered for the sake of Christ but they did not rebel against the civil authority in the sense of being, you know, in being vulgar in their response to it, they simply explained their position, "We have to obey God rather than man. What you do with us is in your hands but we can't stop speaking this name that has been given to us." And then so they accepted the civil punishment as part of their punishment. What

this teaches us is this, beloved, as we say that God commands us to obey, we have to let Scripture interpret Scripture as we apply this principle of submission to government.

And now I want to get really specific and in what I'm going to say over the next 5 or 10 minutes, I'm going to offend people on both sides of the spectrum of what I am about to discuss and I don't mind that. That's okay. People can be offended by the word of God, that's between them and the Lord. During the COVID outbreak, many people, including many people within the church, waved Romans 13 against the churches that continued to meet and churches that did not enforce mask mandates upon their congregation. Many churches did that, many leaders did that, and who knows how many unbelieving people tried to silence the churches by quoting our own Scriptures against us. Well, beloved, you and I need to understand this, is that when it comes to the realm of the church, spiritual authority cannot allow government to usurp its sphere. Government does not have the right to tell the church how to worship. Government does not have the right to dictate the terms of worship to the church. So, for example, in the state of California, there were ridiculous regulations put into place that you can't sing, you can't chant, you can't meet together except if you've got a room that can hold 5,000, you can have 50 people in the room, and the government thereby dictating to the church the terms of its worship to God. Beloved, the churches that resisted that, the churches that said, "We cannot comply with that," were on sound biblical principle as they did because Scripture commands us to sing praise to our God, Scripture commands us to gather together and to worship together and to not forsake the assembling of saints. Scripture gives the authority of how the church regulates its worship to its leaders, to spiritual leaders, not to the government. And if a church, listen, if a church lets the government dictate the terms of its worship, it has already surrendered the principle that the government is also going to be able to dictate the terms of its teaching. There are places that the government cannot intrude and the church's response needs to be, "We must obey God and not man."

That is why our church publicly, openly supported Grace Community Church and John MacArthur as they resisted the intrusion of the California government upon their worship. We were in a minority as we did so. But what many people did not understand at the time is that John MacArthur and the elders of Grace Community Church were making a stand not simply about whether we can sing or whether we wear masks or not, they were making a stand for the independence of the church to determine the terms of its own worship. And you know, how different churches decided to work that out in their context under their state governments and all of that, I'm not saying every church needed to do it the same way.

What we need to understand is that there is a principle by which, there is a limitation on the authority of government and you can see this from an Old Testament passage that I was reading. I'm referring to it only because I was reading it earlier this week. Turn to 2 Chronicles 26. 2 Chronicles 2:6. If you have been reading in your devotions in 2 Chronicles this week, see me afterwards and we'll share a good moment together. 2 Chronicles 26:18, and I realize as we look at what Israel was doing with the king and the priest, maybe the analogy isn't the best, but I think the principle here is clear. You had the king with his civil authority intruding upon the spiritual authority of the priests and doing

something that God had given to the priests, not to the civil authority. Speaking about King Uzziah, it says in verse 16, "But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense." Now, that's a no, no. That was not given to the king to do. That was given to the priests, the Levite's. So verse 17, "Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men. They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, 'It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God.' But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. Azariah the chief priest," verse 20, "and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him." Point being the king violated the sphere of the spiritual and those who had spiritual authority at the time said, "King, get out, This is not the place for you to be." And thus showing forth the fact that there are spheres of authority that need to be honored.

Now going on with what I'm about to say, and we're kind of retroactively looking back at what the broad Christian church went through. Every church that I ever spoke to in the past 2 1/2 years wrestled mightily with this. I've talked to so many pastors who lost elders, who lost portions of their congregation over this, over these kinds of issues and, you know, and I just want to speak to these matters because it's demanded by the text here tonight. I am not going to try to give thorough guidance on these matters, that's for another time, but I want to say a few things here. When it comes to civil disobedience on these things, there is a place for us to resist government authority when it intrudes on spiritual authority, but when it comes to that, when it comes to the outworking of government and here I'm differing in a friendly way with some people who are very dear to me, when it comes to civil disobedience, it cannot possibly be right that it's left to an individual's discretion on whether to comply or not. If that is the answer, if everybody becomes his own interpreter of the US Constitution, all we have done is ushered people back into the days of the judges where every man did what was right in his own eyes. Listen, I have a bit of a background in constitutional law. I came by it honestly. And I would never recommend that for myself, let alone for people who have no introduction or familiarity with the Constitution, to say we just let the Constitution be our law. The document itself is not self-interpreting. And so here's my guidance on this whole thing. I do not believe that an individual Christian should decide such things for himself, "Whether I comply with a government mandate or not is my own personal, private decision." I don't believe that that's what Scripture teaches and it's just too inconsistent with the general principle that we are to be in subjection to governing authorities.

Listen, you tell some of these people that it's up to them and they won't obey anything and do you know why they won't obey anything? It's because they've got the heart of a rebel inside them. They want to rebel against everything. They rebel against their parents.

They rebel against their employers. Of course they're going to rebel against government. You can't unleash the sinful principle of rebellion and leave it to an individual conscience who's already disposed that way. That's a recipe for chaos and a terrible testimony by the church of Jesus Christ. And it would also violate Proverbs 11 that says, "Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory."

And so, you know, the perspective of this pulpit, the perspective of Truth Community Church is this, is that individual Christians should not go rogue against their own government. That is contrary to the explicit command of Scripture. You say, "Well, what should they do then?" You know, they got, you know, maybe this plays out in the workplace. "What do I do? My boss is telling me to do this. You know, based on government regulations, they're telling me to affirm transgender people," or whatever. Well, here's what you do, in part you go to your elders, you rely on your elders for guidance. You bring other people into the process of thinking through it. You rely on other authority that God has put into your life to help navigate your way through it, and you rely on them for guidance so that it's not just you but there's a collective wisdom that is going on and consistent with Proverbs 11.

Going further, speaking to my brothers in ministry, one of the things that the elders did at Truth Community Church when the COVID restrictions were so difficult and coming with such fast and conflicting fury against us, is to the extent possible, elders should maintain unity with one another on the issues and go out of their way to maintain unity. What you see is this, is that the principle of compliance with government is interpreted in balance with other principles so that our response to COVID here at Truth Community Church was guided by an important spiritual principle of maintaining church unity. And so all of our decisions were made consistent as much as possible with that grid. Let's maintain the unity of church and realize there's going to be differences of opinion on a non-biblical issue here, and let's do what we can, let's lead in a way that we can so that the church does not violate the explicit command of God to be unified over a non-biblical issue imposed upon us by the government.

Along with that I would say that like-minded churches, we did this, like-minded churches should consult with each other. "How are you handling this? What are you thinking?" And they should rally around other like-minded churches that are in trouble. But beloved, having said that, let me say this also and I've spoken with so many pastors across the entire country so this is a broad-based comment that I am about to make. Yes, there were Christians who left their churches because they didn't think their churches were aggressive enough in resisting the government. There was that side of the spectrum. There were also those who were critical of their churches because they weren't aggressive enough in enforcing what the government said, said, "You should be complying with everything that the government has said," and they leveraged the government against their own churches, against their own spiritual leaders. This is not Spirit-filled thinking that was going on at that time and what people thought the church should do just became a reflection of what they thought about their government. The rebels against government said the church, if the church wants to be faithful to Christ, needs to rebel against the government. Those who liked what the government had to say said the church needs to

obey, on both sides missing, missing the independence of the church in the whole discussion.

And as an aside, I've heard from, you know, lots of pastors on this issue, as an aside, you know, the people that were pro-regulations and pro-restrictions had a way of also wanting to leverage the very principle of love so that love became not what I can do for you but love means you have to do what I want you to do. And all kinds of spiritual principles got turned on their head in COVID. I am glad we're past that and I'm glad that we have a church that's still together on the other side of it. But in a text like this, it's appropriate for us to look back and say, what kind of lessons can we pick up from the rubble that was left behind by that, and these are some of the things that we find. There are limitations on the sphere of government authority, and a church has a right and a responsibility to determine for itself what it will agree with, what it thinks it needs to resist. Within the church, there needs to be a collective response, a collective unified response when we're under pressure like that and we need to stay together, you know, and it broke my heart as I heard other pastors talking about the way that their own people and sometimes their own elders, turned against them in the midst of these things because of a disagreement over a government regulation. It broke my heart because that's not the way the church should function. We love one another. Jesus said, "The world, will know your disciples by the love that you have for one another." And politics and things like that came in and created division in so many churches. It was sad to see, and I have many brothers in ministry who grieved over that and I with them as they did.

Now so what we see about that, it's a long-winded thing about how God commands us to obey. This is just a general overview of how I see it and what I think Scripture, the balance that Scripture leads us to. The introduction of COVID into the world exposed a lot about Christians everywhere on both ends of the spectrum and, you know, I'm grateful that the Lord has led us through that, speaking as a church, speaking corporately, I'm glad the Lord's led us through that and we're on the other side. I think we're a better place for it as a result. But what we have to do is say, "Okay, these are the lessons and this is what we need to apply next time the next thing comes down the road at us." Now, enough of that.

God commands us to obey, he also, secondly, he commands us to pray. He commands us to pray. Our obedience to authority is not to be grudging and ill-tempered. In 1 Timothy 2 we read this beginning in verse 1. 1 Timothy 2:1, it says, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." There is to be a prayerful attitude toward authority. I could do a much better job of that privately than I do and I could do a much better job leading us corporately in prayer than I have done on this particular issue. Scripture convicts me as I speak about these matters, even as I speak, I should say. But what we need to see together is that God calls us to pray for our leaders, for all who are in authority, and, beloved, what that means is that we can't curse them on our feet, you know, if we're going to live with integrity, we can't curse them on our feet and then intercede for them on our knees. That kind of hypocrisy and inconsistency is not worthy of Christ. If they are wicked, then

let us pray for their salvation like we would any other person that we would want to have the love of Christ extended to. And so he calls us to pray.

He also commands us to pay. We obey. We pray. And he commands us to pay, by which I mean God calls us to respond to the government's taxing authority. Romans 13:6-7, and actually we can... well, verse 6, Romans 13:6, "because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." Christians, we pay our taxes in obedience, in glad submission to the God who loved us and saved us.

And so God rules over us by commanding us to obey, commanding us to pray, commanding us to pay, and fourthly, he commands the way in which we are to do all of this. The way in which we are to do all of this, and for our closing comments, go back to Titus 3 here. What is the way in which we are to do this? We are to be peaceable citizens as we submit to civil authority. Titus 3:1-2, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Beloved, our duty is independent of the man who holds the office. We uphold Scripture with our teaching, with our living, and with our praying. God establishes civil leaders according to his secret will, which we do not have access to, and we obey those leaders according to his revealed will, which is found in Scripture. We trust God's wisdom in the establishment of authority, and we look for the coming of Christ rather than favorable government, as our hope.

Now, look, I understand that there is a lot of implications and applications that we've left unaddressed tonight. What we've tried to do is just establish the most basic of principles from Scripture, that the fundamental presupposition is that government is entitled to our obedience because that is what is revealed to us and commanded of us in the word of God. We realize that there are times of exception, limited times of exception, that we shouldn't be looking for every possible excuse to disobey our government and to rebel against it, but rather we are sensitive to those areas where government authority intersects with other authority that God has established, authority in the church, authority in the family. If, for example, the state forbade parents from exercising corporal punishment on their children, I would counsel the parent, "You be very careful how you do it, but you must use corporal punishment because that is appointed by God, and government does not have a right to tell you not to do what God says to do with your children," for another example. These things are difficult. They're going to get more difficult as time goes on, and for the next generation coming up, these things are going to become even more difficult for them. We're going to trust God's wisdom, and we're going to look for the coming of Christ as our hope rather than the outcome of the next election or the establishment of any favorable government. Beloved, this world is not our home, our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will conform our body in conformity with the body of his glory according to the power that he has to subject all things to himself, Philippians 3.

Let's pray together.

Lord, these things call for such great wisdom and help from Your Spirit. I pray, Father, that You would give Your people wisdom as they go forth. Lord, we know that there are men in other countries who have gone to prison over precisely the issues that we've talked about here. Father, we've seen men that we love have to resist in a spirit of godliness intrusions upon the operation of the local church. It's so difficult, Father, and it's so difficult when there are conflicting voices within the Christian so-called community criticizing every step that a man would try to make in faithfulness to the word of God. Lord, we pray that You would be gracious to all. We thank You for the way that You guided our church through the difficulties and brought us out better on the other side. We're grateful for that. We pray now that You would establish these principles in our heart, a trust in Your sovereignty, a willingness to submit to You and to submit to government for Your sake, O God, and to trust You for the outcome, knowing that we do not belong to this world, but to a glorious world that is yet to come under the Lordship and the operation of our King Jesus Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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