

1 Timothy 2:1-4

We are continuing this morning with our study of Paul's First Letter to Timothy, picking up this morning with the beginning of Chapter 2. Now, if you have been with us for this series then you will know that in writing this letter Paul has had one main, overarching purpose: *to promote the good order and functioning of the church*. Thus far in the letter Paul has sought to promote good order in the church by addressing the problem of false teachers. These teachers had given Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus, and the recipient of this letter, all sorts of problems. So, Paul has devoted the first part of his letter to addressing false teachers and their teaching.

However, having done that for a bit, Paul now turns his attention in a different direction, seeking to further promote the order of the church by talking about how Christians ought to conduct themselves when they are together as a Body of Believers. That will be the main subject matter of chapters 2 and 3, and Paul will come at that from a number of different directions, talking about things such as:

- *their prayers together* - Paul will emphasize in this chapter not only THAT they ought to be praying when they come together but also what sorts of persons they ought to be praying FOR and WHY they ought to be praying for them. In particular, Paul highlights the importance of praying for *civil authorities* as an important way of promoting the good order of the church, which we'll look at more closely in a moment.

- Next, after talking about their prayers together in 2:1-7, Paul will talk about *the manner in which they come together* - i.e., *their attitudes and adornments* with regard to some particular things and, at the end of the day, really trying to address *the state of their hearts* when they DID come together. We'll see that in 2:8-10.

- Then, Paul will talk about how the *the roles and patterns in relationships between men and women* - which God established at creation - are to be worked out in the context of the gathered Christian community. That will be the subject matter of 2:11-15.

- Finally, most of chapter 3 will be devoted to the qualities and characteristics of those that take on the offices of elder and deacon in the local church. Addressing this subject will go a long way toward promoting the order and functioning of the church as well.

And so, with that as a brief overview of coming attractions, let's narrow our focus on the first 4 verses of chapter 2. However, we will not restrict ourselves *only* to the verses in Timothy this morning. While I don't like to jump around very much from passage to passage but prefer, instead, to stay and work with one main passage in its context, because of the subject matter of these first verses and the opportunity they

provide for a timely consideration of certain subjects, we will also look at two other passages this morning: 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7. So, if you're following on in your Bible, you may want to keep a finger in all three places.....

The subject matter that is raised in these verses is *civil government*. And while it is not right there on the surface of the text, the Christian's relationship TO and attitude and actions TOWARD civil government are certainly lurking in the background *behind* these verses. When Paul tells Timothy they ought to be praying for civil authorities and *why* they ought to be doing it - those statements are assuming and implying a certain view OF civil government - a view which we see more fully expounded by Paul in Romans 13 and Peter in 1 Peter 2.

And so, since these verses afford us the opportunity to explore this admittedly *minor* theme in the passage, AND since we find ourselves, both at a state level as well as a national level, surrounded at the moment by politicians and campaigns and heading into an election year, I thought we would take a few minutes this morning to think about this subject and, in the process, include some passages that are further afield than 1 Timothy, in order to expand on this subject. With that as an introduction and background, let's listen to the three passages now and then we'll pray together

(Read 1 Tim 2:1-4, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17, and then PRAY)

The Bible speaks of three basic fundamental institutions in our world, each of which has been established by God: the family, the church, and the state. Each of these has particular duties as well as its own sphere of operation. As such, each institution is *coordinate* with the others.

At the same time, since these institutions exist by the will of God, then they are all *regulated* by the will of God - specifically, by his *revealed* will, which is his Word, the Bible. And so, while these institutions are *coordinate* with each other, they are all also *subordinate* to God's Word, which stands above and judges them all. Now, for our purposes this morning we are concentrating on only one of those institutions - the state or civil government - but we will say a little bit at the end about how all three institutions sometimes interact with one another.

Now, the passage just read from 1 Peter 2 is perhaps one of the main ones in the Bible which establishes the rightful existence of civil governments - always, of course, seen in light of God's greater plan and purpose. As the passage in 1st Peter says, "...Submit yourself *for the Lord's sake* to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him...." and then the passage goes on to discuss PURPOSE which we'll look at in a moment. But for now it is enough to note that Peter speaks of kings and governors as being *sent* by God, as those to whom Christians should submit *for the Lord's sake*....

Similar words and ideas can be found in Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 13, which we also just read. Indeed, Paul says it more explicitly than Peter. Repeatedly he

refers to civil authorities as “servants of God” which, in the KJV is “ministers of God”. This is the reason why, in countries like England and Australia, the leader of the nation is referred to as the “Prime *Minister*” - Why? Because the historical understanding of that role was based upon the Bible and so its title *came* from the Bible which saw civil authorities as “ministers of God” for the good of the people.

And so, apart from any other explanation that might be given, the reason that Christians must respect and pay careful attention to an institution like the civil government - whether federal, state or local - is the same reason why we must respect the institutions of MARRIAGE/FAMILY or the institution of the CHURCH - because all three of these have been established by God.

The authority that the civil government has, the power that it wields is given to it by God. Its *authority* does NOT come, ultimately, from the consent of the people, although consent does have a role in how it works. But ultimately, its authority is not the function of social contracts or landslide election victories. No, the *authority* that a civil government has, it has as a consequence of the fact that it has been established by God - sometimes with, but *not always with* the consent of the governed.

And, lest you think that this is just something that Paul and Peter cooked up on their own, look at John 19:8-11 and you will read one of the most fascinating conversations in the entire New Testament. (Read verses 1-11). Do you hear what Jesus is saying here? In the midst of being interrogated by Pilate, Jesus acknowledges that Pilate’s authority over him, as a secular ruler operating *without* the consent of those whom he governed, was a *legitimate* authority, granted by God. Jesus is acknowledging the *legitimacy* of a government that he knows will soon send him to die on a cross.....And so, Paul and Peter aren’t making this stuff up. They got it from Jesus. The basis of secular, human authority lies in the fact that it has been established with the sovereign permission of God.

Now, that’s the BASIS for the authority that the civil government has. But let’s go further. Let’s think not only about the *basis* for the civil government’s authority, but let’s also think about the *purpose* for which God has allowed these institutions to exist in the first place. When we look back at our passages again, we find words which talk about the *purpose* of civil government - in one place stated negatively and in another place stated positively. In the words of Peter, the purpose for which God establishes rulers is “to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right”. 1 Timothy 2:2 describes this function a bit more positively. In verse 1 he urges Timothy, and the Ephesian Christians with him, to *pray* for those in authority *so that* they [the Ephesians] may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. Paul’s remarks point out the positive function of government: to guard and promote justice, order, and peace.

Now, to fully grasp the significance of Paul’s words here it is helpful to look carefully at the words “godliness” and “holiness”. What SOME commentators have pointed out is that the particular words that Paul uses here are not the *usual* ones used by Paul. In fact, this is the only place in the NT where Paul uses these particular words to speak about holiness and godliness. Now, it may be that there is no particular

significance to that.

However, as some writers have observed, it is equally likely that there IS some significance to it. This is because when you look at how these particular words are used in writings *outside* of the NT, it would seem that these are words that are not so much used to describe the *inward quality or attitude* of holiness as much as they are used to describe the *outward appearance and public practice* of godly living. In other words, Paul is here envisioning Christians living out their Christian lives openly and freely and publicly.

Now, if these commentators are right, then you can see the connection between these things and the matter of praying for civil authorities, namely this: God calls his people to godliness and holiness. Not just an inward and hidden and secret holiness but one that is open, unashamed and observable by others. The role of civil government is to *create and maintain an environment and atmosphere where that is OPENLY possible*, where God's people can PUBLICLY worship and demonstrate their faith without fear of persecution or death. Or, to put it another way, the institution of the STATE, when it properly functions - makes it possible for the institution of the CHURCH to function, unhindered. When you go to the Romans 13 passage, especially verses 3 and 4, you see some of these same sorts of ideas about the purpose of civil government - creating a stable context in which the church might function by promoting good and punishing wrongdoers.

And so, as long as we are on THIS SIDE of heaven, as long as Christians still struggle with sin, as long as the majority of the world's population is composed of unbelievers - as long as those things are true we will need the institution of civil government to restrain those who do not have the inward restraint of the Holy Spirit. We will need the civil government to create a context in which the Church can BE the church, unhindered, and in which good is promoted and wrongdoing punished.

Now, of course, all of this is no guarantee that all governments are, on balance, "good" governments. It is not hard to look around and find examples of governments that are atrocious, as well as some that are quite okay. But then, the same is true of the CHURCH, isn't it? You can look around and find examples of "good" churches and examples of *atrocious* churches. The same is true for FAMILIES - you can look around and find families that are nurturing and loving and families that are deadly and destructive and amazingly dysfunctional.

But the fact that an institution is badly represented does not mean that the institution itself is invalid. While civil governments vary in the degree to which they effectively fulfill their biblical purpose, the reality is that, ON BALANCE, the amount of evil that *could* be taking place in the world is substantially held in check by the existence of human government. Again, there is much to be pessimistic about in the world. But the mercy of God is seen not in how bad things are but in seeing how much good there still is, in spite of ourselves. Without the presence of the admittedly faulty institution of civil government, the outworkings of our own sin would have resulted in the

self-destruction of the human race *millenia ago*.

Well, if the civil governments exist by the sovereign permission of God, and if they exist for divine purposes, then it follows that Christians have an obligation, under God, to give a *legitimate* response to *legitimate* authorities. What does such a response look like?

First up, there is *prayer*. The passage in 1st Timothy says that we are to pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people, in particular for “kings and those in authority”. Now it is significant that Paul singles out the authority figures here. But why does he do this? Well, in addition to reasons already given, he also does it because the governing authorities would have been the people *least* likely to have been prayed for. They would have been despised, hated and feared - they were the sworn enemy of the church. And yet Paul says that the Ephesians, when they came together, should pray for these people. You see, Paul wants them to understand that there is no class of person that lies outside the scope of our prayers because - and we’ll look at this in depth next week - there is no CLASS of person outside the realm of salvation.

Which is the point of 1 Timothy 2:3 where it says that God wants all men to be saved - the “all” here means all people *without distinction*, not all people *without exception*. Paul is emphasizing here why they should pray for all kinds of people - even people that were enemies of the church, whom they hated and despised - not because God is planning to save everyone - in that case there would be no point in singling out any one group - but because God saves all kinds of people - including people you least expect, which for the Ephesians was government people. So, we should pray for them.

But the prayer for salvation is not the only prayer we should pray. Beyond the prayer for their salvation, we should also pray for their *performance*: that they should rule in such a way that what results is peace, justice, and stability in society. Listen to what God told his people through the prophet Jeremiah, *after* they were carried into captivity by a pagan nation, and living in a *pagan city* (Read Jeremiah 29:4-7) The sort of prayer described in Jeremiah - that’s the same kind of prayer we ought to be praying with regard to our own city and state and nation - and with regard to those who LEAD our city, and state, and nation. We pray for the peace and prosperity of the city, state, and nation, and that those who rule will do so with justice and mercy and will, as a result, create a society in which the church can BE the church, openly and unashamedly.

Secondly, in addition to *praying* for those in authority, Christians are to also to *cautiously or critically submit* to those in authority. (Read 1 Peter 2:13a, 15, 17). Peter’s words and the clear *implication* of Paul’s words in 1 Timothy are that Christians are to OBEY those in authority, to uphold the laws of the state, to be “good citizens”. And notice Peter’s words here - we are to submit “to every authority instituted among men” - that is, Christians are not free to pick and choose what sort of government they submit to, based on their personal preferences. Remember, when Peter wrote these words, he knew that his rulers were not Christians. He lived under an *oppressive* government. When Peter wrote this, he could point out the faults and cruelties of the Roman

Government as well as the next guy. Still, remarkably, he says Christians are to submit.

Now it's important to get this right. There is no *particular* form of civil government that is sanctioned by Scripture. The Bible does not say we must submit to democratic rulers but not socialist ones. You cannot take the Bible and use it as some sort of PROOF TEXT for capitalism, or socialism or communism, or any other -ism. The Bible is an "... ism-free zone". The fact is, most systems can find SOME support in the Bible, including communism, and yet *all systems* find themselves *critiqued* by the Bible and *out of step* with the Bible in many places - including our own system of government which is *woefully* unbiblical, in some places.

And so it is that Christians are to submit to the authorities that exist, *for God's sake*. We are not free to pick and choose those things we will observe, or not observe, simply on the basis of personal convenience or preference. I might feel that the 20 mph speed limit in my neighborhood is *ridiculously* slow - but that doesn't mean that I am free therefore to drive any old speed I want to. I might feel that the speed bumps in the parking lot at the Bluebonnet library are insanely high and are ruining my suspension, but that doesn't mean I can go get a jackhammer and start tearing them up.

No, as Christians, we are to submit to the authorities that exist *for God's sake*. We do it because of *who God is*, not because of the person of the ruler. And this holds true whether the authority in question is a believer or not. As John Calvin observed, it can be shown over and over again in Scripture that even *wicked* rulers were often used by God as instruments of judgment, to exercise his wrath against sin. So, even if the ruler himself or herself is not *personally worthy* of honor or respect, the OFFICE THEY HOLD, by God's permission, *is worthy of respect*.

In the Book of Daniel, 2:37ff, he says that God himself had established the *pagan king*, Nebuchadnezzar who ruled with an iron fist. Listen to the language Daniel uses to address this pagan king, "You, O King, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory..." And then, in Jeremiah 27, speaking about the rule of this *very same*, tyrannical king Nebuchadnezzar, God says this, "If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the Lord, until I destroy it BY HIS HAND.....Serve the King of Babylon and you will live..." These are God's words, telling his people, how to live under the rule of a pagan king. More examples could be offered, including David's response to Saul as Saul, the king, repeatedly tried to take his life, but the example of Scripture is clear: Christians are to respectfully submit to governing authorities, for the Lord's sake.

Now our response to civil authorities is not an un-qualified response. The Christian response is not *bare, mindless* submission but rather *cautious or critical submission*. Now the words "cautious" and "critical" are important and, really, tie into the third response to civil government which the Bible endorses. The first response is prayer - prayer for the salvation of those who rule and for the performance of those who

rule. The second response is *submission* - cautious submission. And the third response that flows out of that cautious submission, and which the Bible endorses, is the response of *considered resistance* or *civil disobedience*. Let me explain what I mean by that.

In my opening remarks, I said that there were three divinely established institutions: the family, the church and the state which are coordinate with each other and *subordinate* to the will of God. But the fact that these three different institutions can be distinguished from each other does not mean that they do not affect and impinge upon one another. And this is where the issue of cautious submission comes in.

You see, while we *are* to submit, the instruction to submit to authority is not unconditional, it is not without qualification. In Acts 5:29, for example, we see the person of Peter, the very author of one of the passages we have been looking at - and in this passage Peter is in a situation where he has been forbidden by human authorities to preach the Gospel. So now Peter has a dilemma. God says to do one thing, the civil authority says to do another. What does Peter do? In that situation, he says, "we must obey God rather than men". As we have already seen, Peter's point here is not *total disregard* of human authority. Rather, his point is that *on this particular issue* he should and must disregard them. In forbidding Peter to preach, the STATE had over-stepped its bounds. It had intruded upon the sovereign sphere of the church. It had gone against the God by which its own authority had been established.

The implications of all this, then, are that there will be times when Christians may have to engage in "civil disobedience" or what might also be called "considered resistance". I say "considered" because for the Christian who understands the divine RIGHT of governments to exist and rule, to go against that rule is a serious step and not one which you should take lightly, without carefully considering all the factors. This means Christians are not free to participate in resistance movements simply because we prefer one form of government to another or because we stand to achieve greater personal gain through one system as opposed to another. It means we aren't free to resist a government simply because the leaders are not Christians. You will find no support in Scripture for that kind of disobedience. The only freedom given to resist civil authority is at those places, and over those issues where obeying human authority would *require* one to disobey God....

The whole issue here is where we *start* in our thinking and behavior. We are to respond to this truth - that all authority is established by God - we are to respond to that truth with submission *until we are given a biblical reason not to*. Admittedly, it is difficult to know in what manner we are to resist or to what extent we might oppose the evil demands of a civil government. There is no formula. Each case would have to be evaluated on its own merits. On balance, however, the approach we are told to take in Scripture is the only viable alternative - submit, until given biblical reason not to.

James Boice tells the story about a German preacher, Martin Niemoller, who was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel and for speaking out against the atrocities of Nazi Germany. Another minister visited Niemoller in prison and told him that if he would keep quiet about things he could go free. In the course of their conversation, this other minister asked Niemoller how it was that he ended up in prison, to which Niemoller responded, "How is it that YOU are NOT in prison?"

Civil authority exists by the sovereign permission of God

Civil authority exists to restrain evil and to promote good

Civil authorities are to be *prayer for*, *cautiously submitted to*, and sometimes, *sometimes*, they are to be dis-obeyed.