

Sunday, July 7, 2024

Romans 13:1-7

Obey authority by faith

Verse 1: "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."

Paul encourages them to obey the authority that is above us, even though he feels the persecution of the looming Roman Empire. If we look at Psalm 136:15-20, we see that God's authority is above the national authority. Psalm 136 is a psalm of thanksgiving for God's grace, but it is also a psalm of thanksgiving for the Pharaoh who opposed and forced the Exodus, for Israel's protection against kings during the conquest of Canaan. The Psalm's author was thanking for every authority involving God's authority. Like this the Bible always teaches that God's authority is above national power. We are encouraged to submit to state authority with faith that God is above the powers of this sinful world. This is not a compromise, but a path to victory by trusting God to fulfill our earthly obligations.

Verse 2: "Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

We know that this is not an absolutely easy statement to make because it was spoken in the context of the first Christians, who were suffering from the persecution of the Roman Empire and were persecuted as heretics by their fellow Jews. I believe that the Apostle Paul's strong faith, experience, and biblical view of history, and yet the Holy Spirit's overwhelming guidance led him to make the statement. In the last month, I gave the example of King David forgiving his enemy, King Saul. David saw that his enemy, King Saul, was sleeping in front of him. At that time, his subordinate Abishai recommended that he could kill King Saul now. However, David said this. **1 Samuel 26:9-10: But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish."** David had faith that God's authority was above the king's authority, so he did not take vengeance on Saul but waited for God's righteous treatment.

What do you think? We Christians should pray and come to this Word with faith in every generation. Until I was a junior in college, South Korea was under a military dictatorship. Fortunately, I was little, so I was not greatly affected, but I later heard that my high school teacher was arrested for forming a teachers' union, and one of brothers at church was a college student who was a leader of the demonstrators, so he was immediately called into the army and deployed to the front line, where the situation was most severe. At that time, many Christians were wondering whether they should demonstrate or worship in churches. When I look at the situation in Myanmar and Hong Kong today, my heart aches. Christians are very

challenged by the word of God even today when the government's power is not righteous, so let us pray together for our brothers and sisters who are suffering in many countries.

I am proud and grateful that we live in a very good country. Japan and Canada are both good countries with very stable politics and human rights are guaranteed. However, there is no perfect government anywhere in this world. At any circumstances, we walk with pray in our relationships toward our daily authorities: our bosses at work, our teachers at school, our parents, our siblings and partners at home, our doctors, and other professionals.

Verse 3: "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended." The obedience or disobedience of the law is largely a manifestation of government authority. If you are afraid of government power, you are probably breaking the law in many cases. If you do good without breaking the law, you will be praised by government power.

A good example of this is when Japan was in warfare, many Christians in Japan did good without defying authority. Missionaries in Japan devoted themselves to Christian education, and by 1912 there were 84 Christian schools in operation (from General Incorporated Association, Kotae no Nai Gakko). In addition, missionaries and many other Japanese Christian educators devoted themselves by faith to the education of women. Please pray that when we struggle with authority in our daily lives, we will remember this God's Word and do good with pray.

Verse 4: "For the one in authority is God's servants for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." We have learned that God's authority is above the authority of the world. This means that God is superior of the authority in the world. Therefore, the one in authority is doing God's work for Him as God's servant. And they also reward those who do good and bring judgment to those who do evil. Now, you are probably thinking, "Well, the Bible doesn't add up these days." You are probably thinking, "I don't agree with the Bible." In a democracy, the opposition can criticize the ruling party and the people can criticize the government without restraint. Therefore, the following words are important.

Verse 5: "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience." Here we have a wonderful word. It is the word 'conscience'. According to the dictionary, conscience is defined as a personal moral sense that informs us of what is right and wrong, commands what is good, and shuns what is evil. It is a God-like quality that God gave to human beings. Every human being has a conscience. It is very natural and universal. These days, I sometimes volunteer to visit foreign jails in Shinagawa. I met a prisoner and he told me that he regretted that he made his mother grief

by his own crimes. But each conscience is different, and the purity and the depth of conscience will be different. It depends on the person.

But what do we Christians have in addition to conscience? We have faith in Jesus, don't we? What did Jesus do for us? Hebrews 4:15-16 "For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." During his public life, Jesus experienced the same trials that we do. He was frustrated by the supreme court of the Jewish and the Roman Empire. However, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, "May Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39) He prayed like that and was crucified to fulfill His mission as the Son of God. That is why Jesus understands well what we struggle for authority while we live in the world.

We Christians can deal with the authority of the state and many other authorities in our respective positions, not through blind obedience, but through our own conscience, faith, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Germany was executed for his role in the assassination of Hitler in order to destroy the Nazis. Looking at these predecessors, we can learn that he acted on his callings while praying to God with faith. Pastor Bonhoeffer also made his decision, fulfilled his responsibility, and resisted authority with his life. When we are overwhelmed by all kinds of authority, we should also seriously face it in our relationship with God and fulfill our decisions and responsibilities with faith.

Verse6. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Verse7. Give everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

As an example of this practice, verse 6 gives the civic-mindedness of paying taxes, and verse 7 says, "Do your duty to everyone." The apostle Paul recommends. He encourages us to revenue those who should revenue, like the state authorities, and to respect those who should be respected, like the leaders of society.

Today's words are so profound that I pray to understand them as a life-long experience. Pastor Yim, HyunSoo, who pastored a Presbyterian Korean church in Toronto, Canada, was a missionary in North Korea for many years. But he was suddenly arrested in February 2015 on suspicion of espionage and held in a North Korean foreigner detention center for about 2 years and 6 months. Grace Korean Church near at the King George station in Surrey was also supporting Missionary Yim, so I was praying for him for a long time. Later, after Pastor. Yim was miraculously released in August 2017, he testified to the world about his experience in the North Korean foreign prison. And many people were all amazed at the sure work and presence of God in that prison. Pastor. Yim was able to share the gospel with the North Korean

soldiers and guards, even though he was sick and dying from hard labor during his incarceration. God was at work even in the midst of terrible state persecution, preaching the gospel to those who were not yet saved. And because of Pastor Yim, many Christians are still praying for North Korea.

Even in our daily lives, sometimes we have bosses who order us to do things that are impossible, or we may have a hard time meeting a bossy school teacher. We may be struggling daily in the midst of all these authorities. It was really difficult last year during Taishi was taking his college entrance exam. When Taishi was to apply to a university with a Christian recommendation, a teacher of a Buddhist congregation did power harassment to Taishi. He said, "I have never seen an entrance examination like this before. You will fail! You are not good enough to enter the collage." Three months before the entrance examination, he told directly to Taishi. And Taishi suddenly lost his motivation and confidence and could not study anymore and didn't go to school for one month. When I saw that serious situation, I was really sad. Why did that teacher say that much cruel? I was troubled because that would influence bad to my precious son's future. I wanted to complain immediately, but I had already become a pastor, so I held back and prayed for Taishi. Then, I blessed the teacher as I had learned in Romans. As I reported to you, Taishi was admitted to both Aogaku collage, his first choice, and Dokkyo University, his second choice. The principal of his high school was overjoyed because Taishi was also ranked No. 1 in Kanto in boxing, and also got the first prize of English speech contest, which were not often such an accomplishment in his high school. And to the principal's surprise and his overjoy, Taishi was chosen as the best graduate in the school and proudly received the award at the graduation ceremony. Hallelujah! This experience was a great joy for Taishi and me and also all the brothers and sisters who have been praying for us. And I am sure that the teacher was embarrassed that he did. I learned through this trial that God rewards us with abundant grace when we live by faith. Hallelujah!

Let us pray together. Beloved Heavenly Father! Jesus Christ lived according to God's will, knowing well that God's authority takes precedence over the authority of the world. Please guide us, the Holy Spirit, so that we, too, can follow the authority of the world according to our conscience and faith. If there are people today who have not yet accepted Jesus as Lord, I pray that they will be able to believe in Jesus so as soon as possible. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.