

In the name of our Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

13 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 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 he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Friends,

There is no doubt that 2020 is and will be a memorable year. It started out as a prosperous year with low unemployment and the economy on fire. That came to an abrupt halt with the pandemic and when it seemed like we were recovering from the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd brought protests, riots and chaos. Now the pandemic is surging and we might wonder what's next.

Obviously, the government has been front and center in all that has been going on. Not only the national government but also the state and local governments. We might agree or disagree with some of the decisions and directives coming from the government and I am not here to tell you that the government is right or wrong, but now might be a good time to look at what God's Word says about the role of the government in our lives.

And so, on this 4th of July weekend, as we consider the words of the Apostle Paul about the government, may we ask, **"God to Bless America with Faithful Servants."** May God, **"Bless our government's service to our Christian family,"** and may God, **"Bless our Christian family's service to our community."**

I. In the chapter before these verses the Apostle Paul encouraged his readers to offer themselves as "living sacrifices to God." Just like us, God had chosen them to receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He brought them to faith through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Word and sacraments. God's grace was now their motivation for living a new life of service to God and others. Yet these words must have been a shock to the Christians in Rome. They lived under the emperor Nero. He was a cruel and wicked leader and enjoyed persecuting and

killing Christians. Yet, in spite of Nero's cruelty, the inspired words of God said to submit to his authority and Paul gave them the reasons why.

After all, remember that God has established the governments that are on the earth, but the leaders of these governments in many cases have not ruled according to God's will. Many have taken the power given to them and abused it, yet, even when rulers abuse the power given them, God still uses them to fulfill his will for his people.

Here are some examples for scripture of how God used an unbelieving ruler for his will. God sometimes used nations to discipline the Children of Israel like when he used King Nebuchadnezzar to take the Children of Israel into captivity in Babylon and then later, after they had repented, God used Cyrus, King of the Medes and Persians to release them. Or think about when Jesus was born, God used the Roman government to call for a census so Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. God used the Roman road system and universal Greek language along with the persecution of the Christians to spread the Gospel quickly and out into the far regions.

We, too, might have a problem with these words from Paul. We don't always want to submit to the governing authorities, especially if we doubt the wisdom of their mandates and orders. Yet we can see what happens if people ignore the law and if governments relinquish their responsibilities to provide security and safety.

Pandemics can get out of control. Peaceful protests can very easily turn into mob violence and lead to destruction of property and loss of business. If the government steps back or is pushed out, people live in fear and lives are damaged and some lives are even lost.

So, what do we do? God tells us to submit to the governing authorities because they have been established by Him. Our laws allow us to peacefully protest but if that protest turns into rebellion and destructive acts then we are rebelling against the government by acting outside the law, and also rebelling against God and that is a losing proposition in many ways.

So what do we do? We want to pray for our government and for our leaders. We want to pray that they govern with wisdom. We want to pray that their decisions help maintain law and order so that we can live in peace. And we want to ask God for wisdom as we chose to participate or not participate. We ask God to help us resist the temptation to participate in destructive acts. And we want to ask God for wisdom as we vote. To help and guide us as we chose our leaders.

Our leaders are not perfect and neither are we. As we consider our actions, sometimes we are guided by the law and the fear of punishment but Paul tells us to let our conscience guide us. As God's people we know right from wrong and so our actions should reflect the love of God that is in our hearts. And when we fail, we ask for forgiveness and God brings us that through faith in Jesus. These are turbulent times but we ask God to bless our nation, our actions and our Christian family's service to the community.

II. Paul puts it this way, “⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not

covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God above everything else and the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-40))

Jesus went to the cross to pay for our sins and he sent the Holy Spirit with the gift of faith so that we can believe and trust in all that he has done for our salvation. That motivates us to keep the greatest commandment of loving God.

And Jesus reminds us that one way to show love to him is to try to obey all of his commandments, especially to show love to our neighbor.

During recent events we saw some of that as residents cleaned up after the looting and rioting. we saw the people of the Twin Cities come together with food to help those whose grocery stores were destroyed. During the pandemic we have seen it as people helped those at risk by shopping for them and running errands when needed. But we have also seen hatred and greed raise its ugly head and so we know that there is still a lot of room for improvement.

This weekend we are celebrating the birth of our country. It is not a perfect country but it has been established by God. As we celebrate the freedoms we have as citizens of America may we also remember that we are citizens of heaven through faith in Jesus our Savior. May we remember the great price he paid to redeem us and bring us into the kingdom of God and may that encourage us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

There are some areas we may need to change and some areas in which our country needs to change. May we look to God’s Word to bring us wisdom as we act and may we share God’s Word as we look to love our neighbor as ourselves. Today we thank God that we are citizens of this great country and every day we thank God that we are citizens of his kingdom. Amen.