

## **What is the Role of the Government?**

Romans 13:1-7

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 17, 2021

Greetings! Thank you for joining us for another online message here at Grace Fellowship Church. Thank you for joining us for another online service, which is not really a service in the usual sense of the term. It's not a message in the typical sense of the term because as you know, this is a recorded event. This is a taped event. We are recording this on a Saturday night in the building where we normally meet at so you can watch it on Sunday and as you know, that's not a usual way to do church. That's not a typical way to do ministry, because this is not a typical time. These are strange and unusual times because of the Coronavirus. And just to say a few words about that, as many of you are well aware, several weeks ago, our provincial health officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, announced that the state of emergency is going to continue for another month here in British Columbia, which means this type of service and message is going to continue, which is not what we were hoping for as a church because our people want to be back together again. We were having our men's Bible study this morning. And I was asking the men how they were doing over the zoom call. And one of them said, "We just feel disconnected from everything right now. It's not just church; that's part of it, but work and neighbors and society in general just feels fractured at the moment." And that can be very difficult, because the longer it goes, the worse it feels, which is why the elders are currently working on a solution to that and we will let you know something as soon as we can. We will fill you in as soon as we are able to do that. But all that to say the work of the church hasn't stopped right now. Just to encourage you, the work of the ministry goes on because God hasn't stopped; God goes on. It's going to take a lot more than the Coronavirus to stop Him. It's going to take a lot more than a lockdown or state of emergency to put the brakes on His work. And so it's important to remember that because it can be so easy to forget that at a time like this; it can be so easy to forget that our Lord is still moving in the hearts of His people. God is giving us hope in the midst of this trial. It's been said that our Lord makes beauty out of ashes and He makes diamonds out of coal. And that's what He does in trials like this. That's what He does in times like this pandemic: He's making diamonds out of this. He's doing a good work in the lives of His people. And we need to see that and not lose heart, which leads me to what I want to talk to you about this morning. It leads me to what I want to look at with you today because today we're in the middle of a series that we wouldn't be in if it were not for the Coronavirus. We're in the middle of a study that we wouldn't even be talking about if it wasn't for this event because it's on the Christian and the government. That's what we're looking at today. That's the title of this new series. It's on the Christian and the government because we want to address something that's on everyone's mind right now. We want to talk about something that's on the news and in the media and that is how is the church supposed to respond to the to the government right now. How are we supposed to respond to this current situation? Because as you know, as you're well aware, I mean, the government is expecting a lot from us right now. It's demanding a lot because they're not just asking us not to meet, they're telling us not to meet. They're not just requesting us to stay home from services, they're ordering us to do it which has raised the stakes quite a bit. It's made things a lot more serious.

We are going to take a look at this topic. We're going to look at several things like what is the role of the government, and what is the role of the church, we're going to look at the job of each as well as their boundaries and limitations, because that's where a lot of the trouble comes from in this discussion; that's where a lot of the confusion arises. Both parties are confused in that they think they can do whatever they want, both the church and the government think that they have freedom with no boundaries. So we're going to talk about that. And then we're going to look at what part the kingdom of God plays in this because, as you know, there's a kingdom of God

and a kingdom of man. There's a kingdom where God is in charge, and God rules and God calls the shots and is a kingdom where man does to some degree, in some small capacity, and we're going to talk about how the two of those coincide. Because a lot of problems come from that as well. A lot of problems come when people think the kingdom of God and the Kingdom of man are the same. And so sometimes Christians want to take this, take the government over and they want to take over the state, and that causes all kinds of issues. And so we're going to look at that as well. But that's what this new series is about. That's the gist of it. We're going to survey what the Bible says about the government. And this morning, what I want to do is talk about the second part of this series with you. I want to look at the second issue that comes up every time the government is mentioned. And that is: What is the role of the government? What does God want the state to do? What does he expect of our political authorities? As you know, the Bible is sufficient for us. It's adequate for all life and godliness, which means it addresses issues related to this world that we live in and to show you this, please turn in your Bibles with me to the book of Romans. As you're turning there, the book of Romans is a very fitting place to do a study like this. It's a very fitting place to go to because it was written to the church in Rome; it was written to a church that was located at the heart of one of the greatest governments a world has ever known: The Roman Empire. We've all heard of the Roman Empire, haven't we? We've all heard of Caesars and the Emperor's and all of those guys. Well, this church was located right in the center of that. And before we talk about this, I just want to read our passage. Read Romans 13 with me. Here, the apostle Paul writes:

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. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is as a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is as a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For 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 taxes due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

We will end the reading there. Just to say a few words about this, I've just told you that the Roman Empire was one of the greatest empires the world has ever known. It was one of the greatest governments it's ever known. And just to kind of show you what I mean and give you a taste of that, the time this letter was written, the Roman Empire ruled over About 100 million people or one fifth of the world's population. So one out of every five people on the planet lived within the borders of Rome, which covered about 2 million square miles of territory. So if you looked at a map and you stretch from Europe all the way to the Middle East, that was how big this empire was; it stretched from Italy to Iraq, all without the use of modern technology we might add; all without the use of planes, trains, and automobiles and computers. So they did all of this. They did it from one place, from one location, the city of Rome. So the Empire itself was actually named after this city. It was the seat of all power, rule and authority in the Empire, which made it beautiful. Rome was a stunning place to see. In fact, if you read a lot of the ancient historians, they say a lot about the architecture there. They say a lot about the buildings because all the money flowed into this city. All the wealth from the Empire came into this place, and with it, the Caesars built, wonderful buildings such as the forum and the Pantheon were all the Roman gods were worshipped. They would put all their gods in one place, and they worship them in this place called the Pantheon. Imagine how beautiful that was. He had the Circus Maximus and the Colosseum where the gladiators fought, and the

Colosseum could sit 60,000 people at one time. In the first century if you went to see a gladiatorial fight, you could sit alongside 60,000 people. It's amazing. The Palatine Hill was there along with Hadrian's Villa and trade market. And it might be worth mentioning that all these buildings are made out of concrete which is something that Romans invented. They use it on all their buildings as well as their roads. They had an intricate network of roads, that stretched out for 200,000 miles. You guys have heard the phrase all roads lead to Rome, it was almost true. They had 200,000 miles of roads, 50,000 of which were made out of concrete, many of which you can walk on today, making it a beautiful place, and an evil one. You have to add in any discussion about Rome that it was a very, very evil place, tremendously wicked. The Romans abused their power. They were notorious for their cruel acts toward human life. For instance, just to name some of their sins, all the Roman Caesars were either adulterous or bisexual, every single one of them. They were enslaved to lust. We complain about our political leaders today and their sexual sins. They're nothing compared to these guys. They slept with whomever they wanted to: slaves, married people, young, and the old. They had no restraint over it, no self-control at all. And they were violent. It was said that the worst job in the Empire was the job of Caesar because you wouldn't live long. You had a very short shelf life. If you were the emperor of Rome, of the 70 Roman emperors that we know of, only 20 died of natural causes. Only 20 of them. The rest were assassinated. Most of them actually sip poison on a regular basis to build up a tolerance to it, just in case someone slipped it in their drink and you could see the ulcers on their lips. Imagine that. They would drown people whenever they wanted to. They would behead them, burn them, skin them alive, tie them up in a sack with wild animals. Torture was a recreation for them. It was fun and entertaining. Some of the Caesars like Tiberias would have a dungeon sell that he would like to go visit daily to see people being put to death. There are also thieves and gluttons as well. There are stories of the Emperor's throwing wild parties where they would purge themselves or just throw up so they could eat more. They would literally binge on food or alcohol and then regurgitate it so they could do it again. Some of them had a whole room in their house called the vomitorium where they would go throw up so they wouldn't have to walk all the way to the bathroom. They were a disgusting people. They were horrifically wicked. They were totally enslaved to their sin.

And after you hear that and you come to Romans 13, you've got to be wondering, what is Paul going to say to a church living in that? What is the Apostle Paul going to tell Christians living in the country Capital, the city of Rome of all places? And where would you even begin to talk about the government there? Look at what he says in verse one, this is what he tells him to do. He says every person has to be in subjection to the governing authorities. I will say more about that in just a moment; I'm going to I'm going to walk you through this passage. But let me just say, when you read that it is shocking. And it is stunning that he would say something like that to these people. You would think he could say it somewhere else, but not here. You would think he could say it to someone in another city, but not in Rome. You come to Romans 13 and you would expect Paul to say you need to rebel against them. They're so bad, they're so evil, they've lost the right to rule, they've lost the privilege. You need to start a revolution, take up your arms, go to war. He doesn't say that. This is one of the passages in the Bible that's shocking for the mildness of it; it's shocking for the serenity of how he says it is. He tells us to be in subjection to the governing authorities. And that phrase be subject is a familiar one to us because this the word *hupotaso*, which we've seen in the book of Ephesians, comes from *hupo*, which means "under" and *taso*, which means "to put". It means to put yourself under someone or to willingly follow their lead. We've seen it in Ephesians, to say that this is how a wife should respond to her husband, this is how she should treat him: she should submit to Him, willingly and not forcefully, but of her own free will and not by being pushed in that direction. And Paul says this is how a Christian should respond to the government. This is how he should react to them. He shouldn't rebel, he shouldn't start a revolt, he shouldn't go to war. Instead, he should be in subjection.

And to add to this, he says this is for every person. If you notice, the passage in English starts off: every person has to do this, and that means just what it says means: this is for everybody. This is something every Christian should do. No matter who you are, no matter where you live, no matter how bad your government is. Because God made the government. That's what he says here in Romans 13. Because God created it. If you look in verse one, he says, "For there is no authority except from God. And those which exist are established by God." The word established means essentially "created" or "formed". Because that's what God did. He formed the idea of government; He formed the institution. It doesn't mean God agrees with everything the government does, because He doesn't. And that doesn't mean that He'll let them get away with everything they're doing, and He won't hold them accountable. That's not what that means, because He will hold them accountable. It just means that the Lord created the concept of the state. It was His idea, no one else's. You know, if you think about it, God could have created the world any way that He wanted to. He could have created human society any way that He chose. He's God. He can do whatever He wants. But He chose to do it like this. He chose to give us a church and a state. We need to see that and understand what it means. And here's how this applies to us today; here's how it relates to you and me. If Paul could say this to Rome, he could say this to us today. I mean, if Paul could tell people in a government like this, that is as bad as this and evil is this and disgusting as this, then surely he could say it to Canada. Surely he can say it to you and me. Because we may have it bad in some ways, but we don't have it this bad. I mean, our leaders may be doing things we don't like but I promise you this, I haven't heard of that. They're not drowning us. They're not burning us or skinning us alive. So we should be able to do this. This should be easy for us compared to them. And I mentioned this because there's a real tendency in the church today to be so negative about the government. We talked about this last time, but there's a tendency to be so critical and nasty towards them, so that every other word out of your mouth has a complaint and every other thing you say is a rebuke or a put-down or an argument. But I just want you to notice it. Paul doesn't do that here, does he? Paul doesn't complain about the government. Instead, he's gracious towards them. He's respectful. This is a very respectful passage. Paul's Jewish, and he's talking about a Gentile government. And he's being respectful. It's amazing.

I also need to mention this, because in some circles, people have taken this further and they've even gone past the point of criticizing, and they're starting to say, "We don't need any government at all. We don't need the state, so we should just abandon it." You've seen a movement toward that in the United States recently. You've seen it in cities like Seattle. They are promoting anarchy. But I want you to notice what Paul says here about that as well. Paul doesn't promote anarchy in this passage. He doesn't say we should abandon the government. He says we need to submit to it. He says we need to support it, follow its lead, because it has been given to us by the hand of God. I don't do this very often, but in preparing for this sermon this past week I followed a debate on Facebook over this. And I have to tell you, I don't recommend that. I don't really recommend following debates on Facebook, you could find anything on there. But this issue of the church and the government came up and, and one individual who I don't know, said in the comment section, "Since I became a Christian, I became an enemy of Canada, because I follow God's rule and not man's." And I remember reading that this past week, and my jaw dropped open, because I remember thinking, "No, you don't. You don't follow God's rule. You're not doing what He says, because God tells you to do this. God tells you to submit to the government and you're saying you're an enemy of Canada? You can't do that. That's not what God tells you to do. He tells you to respond very differently, which is what we're going to talk about this morning.

So if you're taking notes today, in Romans 13, we're going to look at four things that God has called the government to do. That's our outline for today. That's what we're talking about this morning. We're going to look

in Romans 13, verses one through seven, and see four things that God has called the government to do and we're going to look at this because I don't think everybody gets this today. I don't think everybody understands that the government has a place in our society. It has a place in our world today. That's not a pagan idea, that's a Christian idea. It's not a godless idea, it's a godly one that comes right from the Word of God.

The government is not a mistake; it's not an accident. It's not some creature of evolution or something like that. It came to us from the Lord, so we shouldn't abandon it and we can't get rid of it. There will come a day when the Lord will return and He will set up His government. He will set up His kingdom on earth. But until then we follow the government of man. I know it doesn't always seem like it comes from God. And no, it doesn't always seem like it's given to us by Him. Because let's be honest, there's a lot of ideas from the government that come straight from the pit of hell, right? There's a lot of ideas from the government that seemed to come straight from the devil himself, but the idea of government is not and you need to see that concept as a good concept. This is something we need to remember in a time like this with all the chaos and confusion going on in our world today. And we're going to talk about that with four things that God has called the government to do.

The first thing God has called the government to do is to be an authority over our lives, which means that God has called the government to have a position of influence over us. He has called it to have a position of power, not ultimate power, because that belongs to God alone, but power on some level; power to some degree.

And if you look in Romans 13, again, in verses one through two, Paul writes it this way:

Every person has 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.

Now, just to look at this a little bit, you know, the book of Romans has been called Paul's magnum opus; it's been called the greatest thing he ever wrote. This may be for a couple reasons: one because of the size of it, it's such a big book, it's the largest thing he wrote; and also to do due to the contents: Romans is about the gospel. That's the theme of this book. It's all about the power of God unto salvation and the good news that God saves sinners. And the way it's laid out is this, the first part of Romans defines the gospel: tells you what it is, tells you how God saves sinners, and forgives us and pays for all our sin through Christ. And the second part applies the gospel. The second part of the book of Romans tells you how to live this out. And as Paul is telling you how to live this out, one of the first things he comes to is the government. And one of the first things he comes to is the issue of the church and the state, because it would have been so hard for these people. That's one reason he brings it up, it would have been so difficult.

This is something we all can apply to our lives, because we're all part of the government. We all live in a nation of some kind. So whether you're young or old, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, this is something you all can relate to because he says in this chapter, that they are an authority over you. That word authority actually is mentioned three times in this passage, it comes up over and over and over again, for you to get the point that this is what the government is; this is what God has called it to be...it is an authority or the or the Greek word is *exousia* which means "a ruler" or "a power". It refers to someone who has power over you, they have a strength over you to some degree. The King James Version translates that word this way. It says, "Let every soul be

subject to the highest powers”. And that's the idea here. That's what Paul is talking about. These are the highest powers in the land. They're the highest powers in this world. Obviously, God has a power higher than theirs. His power supersedes all of that. But on an earthly level, humanly speaking, these are the highest powers that you see. So you need to respect them. And in fact, Paul says this in the strongest way possible. He puts us in the strongest terms because in verse two, he says, “Therefore whoever resists authority [there's the word authority] has opposed the ordinance of God, and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” That phrase “ordinance of God” means the law of God or the natural way that he wants things to be. Paul says, Whoever resists authority resist that, too. There's a deeper issue going on here. To resist what God has set up is to resist in an ultimate way Him. And as a result, they will receive condemnation upon themselves. That doesn't mean eternal condemnation. Doesn't mean eternal punishment. I mean, civil condemnation, civil punishment. If you resist the government policies, it will come after you. If you attack them, they will attack back because it has the right to do that it has the power to do that. So Paul says for you not to do that as far as it depends on you, as far as it's up to you. Make sure you comply with the governing authorities.

One commentator puts it this way: He says, “Paul gives no qualification or condition to this, because every civil authority has to be submitted to willingly and voluntarily, regardless of whether you think they deserve it or not...” The author goes on to say, “...because human government is ordained by God, in whatever form it may take. Civil authority derives its power from God, like marriage is a universal institution. And like marriage, it is valid regardless of the circumstances. And to say it another way, to sum up what he's saying here, no one can opt out of this. No one can opt out. You don't get a pass on the government simply because there's someone in office that you don't like. It doesn't work that way. It's not the way it is. You don't get a pass on this on this text. You don't get to avoid it simply because you don't agree with them on every issue. Or because you didn't vote for them. You hear a lot of people talking like that today. I didn't vote for the guy. I don't I don't like him. Let me tell you that in Paul's world, and the Roman world, they didn't vote for anybody. This is for every Christian regardless of the circumstances. And this is important because you hear so many people today say that I would obey my leaders if they weren't so evil. Paul says you can't say that, you have to obey them anyway. You have to submit to them anyway, unless they tell you to sin, unless they tell you to not do something or go against something that God commands. We'll talk about that in just a moment, but if they don't do that, you obey them. This is also important because you hear people say today, you know, “I would obey so and so if he was a Christian”. Paul says, it doesn't matter either. You have to obey the pagans. By the way, all the leaders at this time in history in the first century were pagans. Christians hadn't risen to the higher positions in politics yet. So all the leaders were lost. And this is how Paul tells us to behave with that. Because there's someone behind their office, there's someone behind the scenes, setting the whole thing up running the show, and that is God, that is the Lord. This is His thing. So you need to submit out of reverence for Him. This is how you apply your salvation. This is how you live it out. Romans 13 comes after 1, 2, 3, 4, and so on to 12 because this is the outflow of all of that. You want to see someone's Christianity, you want to see their true spirituality. Let them watch, let it let tell them to submit to somebody they disagree with. Tell them to follow a man or a woman that they don't like. That's when the true you comes out.

Recently, my wife and I were watching a documentary about people in Canada who liked to live Way up north. They like to live off the grid as they call it. That's the term that's used-off the grid- where no one's around. And they do it for several reasons. There's lots of reasons people like to live that way. They like nature, they enjoy being in the woods, like the solitude and peacefulness of it. But one reason that comes up is the government. You know, one reason people like to move up there and be all alone is because they don't want the government

interfering in their lives. They want to be free to do whatever they want. But the problem with that is, it's just an illusion. The problem with that is it's a lie. Because you can't avoid the government on every level, you can't get away from it, because you're still within the boundaries of Canada, you're still within the realm of this land. And I promise you, if they start killing people up there, someone's going to notice, or if they do horrific things, the government is going to show up. Because we all live under this authority, it's a face of life. It's been said no man is an island, no man is his own personal kingdom.

And it's definitely true with this, which leads to another point to consider...another thing that God has called the government to do.

First, the Lord has called it to be an authority. The first thing that God has called the government to do or to be in our lives is an authority over us, which means that God is placed in a position of influence. He's placed it in a position of power that you can't get away from. No matter where you move to, no matter how far away it will follow. You go to another country, you'll experience it there. It's a natural way of things, which leads us to another point to consider; it leads us to another thing God has called the government to be and that is: the Lord has called the government to be a minister of good.

A second thing that the Lord has called the government to be is a minister of good, which means that the government needs to help people not hurt them. It needs to use its authority for their benefit, not their detriment. And this is important because it balances the other one out. God is not saying the government can do whatever it wants. You need to see that here. He's not saying that it can run roughshod over people. He's saying that if it wants His blessing, and wants His approval, the government needs to do good for people. And if you read on in verses one through four, Paul writes,

Every person has to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there's 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. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good.

You know, as you read on in this passage, it's interesting, because you can almost hear the objections that Paul's audience would have with this; you can almost hear the concerns that they would have. Because he's saying some pretty strong statements here. Every person has to be in subjection to the governing authorities, they would have read this and said, Are you serious? Paul? Are you joking? Have you seen the government of Rome? Have you seen the people you're talking about? You want us to do that with them? No authorities exist except from God, really? Really? You think these people are from God, Paul? You think they came from him? In response to that Paul says, Yes, you have to remember I'm talking about the institution of government. I'm talking about the establishment of it. It comes from God, because it's supposed to be a minister for good. It may not seem that way at times but God created it. He has a good purpose in mind.

When Paul writes and says, “For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good.” That means in principle, if you do good to your leaders, they will do good to you. In general, and theory anyway, if you respect them, they will respect you. Because there's a trade off here. There's a cause and effect. You do this, you get this. I think we would all say in most societies, that is the way it works. In most governments, that's the way things play out. Because let's be honest, so much of the problems with the government today are not caused by people doing the right things, but by the people doing the wrong things. There are innocent victims of the law, there are innocent people who get accused of a crime. But by and large, the government gets it right.

We like to paint the government out as a bad guy today or a villain and throw stones at it. But the people the government attacks the most are bad people. That's one of its jobs. It protects us from them. And it has other jobs too. There are other good things that government does for us that Paul is talking about here. For instance, in the Roman Empire, which we just mentioned, a couple of good things they did. They had a system of roads, right? We just talked about that. They had a system of streets and paths that were unparalleled. And one thing it did is it allowed the gospel to spread everywhere. One thing these roads did is it allowed people like Paul to take the good news of Jesus Christ all over the world. He couldn't do it without the help of Rome. They also had a system of law that allowed people to travel safely. It allowed them to go from place to place unharassed. So if they were attacked on a road, they had repercussions for that if they were assaulted on their journey, people came to their aid. They had a strong military force, they kept the barbarians out and they had soldiers to keep the citizens safe. And some of their cities the Romans built aqueducts that brought water in as well as underground sewage, if you can believe that. They had baths and public works. But the point Paul is making here is that all of that comes from your leaders; all of that comes from the politicians. It doesn't come from somewhere else, it comes from them. And they did it for you and you need to remember that and be grateful. If you're not careful, it can be so easy to overlook. Nowadays, it can be so easy to forget what your leaders do for you, because there's so much frustration right now, right? There's so much pent-up anger. But friends, just think of where you would be without them. And just think of where you would be if the nation of Canada did not exist. For example, you would have no roads, you would have no streets or way to travel. Because the government provides that for you, they put those in place, and they put speed limits on them and traffic signs to keep you safe. I mean, those street signs didn't just fall from the sky, it just popped up from the ground. The government gave them to you. Without this, you wouldn't have any mail either. Because the government brings the mail, they bring you letters and packages. It's a big deal right now, because everybody's shopping online, everybody's buying stuff over the internet. You wouldn't have any health care or medical service. Without them, you wouldn't have any hospitals or clinics, you wouldn't have any police or firefighters, or border guards or customs agents, or sewage or water treatment, Public Works, all this stuff comes to you from their hands because that's what they're here to do. That is why you have them in your life. They're supposed to be a blessing to you.

The word “minister” here where it says “minister for good”, some of your translations have the word “servant”. They're a servant of God to you for good, they're supposed to serve this way. They're supposed to be a servant of the people. It may not seem that way sometimes. But in principle, that's what they're here to do. You know, I've talked to people in our church from other cultures who have told me that we have it's so good in Canada; we have so easy here. They said, “In our country, things are a mess. Crime goes unpunished. The violence is rampant in the streets.” Someone was telling me the other day about the country they grew up in. They said if you if you build a gas station in the country and do something good like that, for the community, thieves could come in and tear it all down, and nobody will do anything. And in some of these places simple things like running water and



electricity don't work or they don't get fixed. When they break, they just stay broken. Health Care System is ruined, it's falling apart. Friends, we need to remember that we have it so well here.

If you don't think you have it well in Canada, go talk to somebody from another country. If you don't think you have it easy here, talk to somebody from another place. They'll remind you of how wonderful it is to live here. Our problem is not that we have it so hard, we just have it so easy, which leads us to another point to consider, another thing that the Lord has called the government to do. And I'm going through these first ones rather quickly. Because there's a point I want to make at the end here. There's an issue that I want to bring up to you. But just to review these other ones, the first one is to be an authority. First thing God has called the government to do is to be an authority, which means he's called it to have influence over us; He's called it to have power over our lives. And the second, He's called it to be a minister for good. A second thing that the government is to be is a minister for good, which means it needs to use his power to help people not to hurt them and needs to use its power for our benefit. Paul's not saying the government can do whatever it wants. It's important to balance all this out. He's not saying it can, it can run roughshod. It needs to do good things for people, which most governments do. By the way. Let's say most governments, with few exceptions, provide some positive service for their citizens. It's unusual to find one that doesn't because that is how God created it to be, which leads us to another point to consider.

One more thing that God has called the government to do, and that is to bear the sword and be an avenger of wrath. A third and a fourth thing that God has called the government to do, is to bear the sword and be the avenger of wrath, which means that God has called the government to use violence if necessary. He's called it to use force if it has to in order to keep the law. If you read on starting in verse four it says,

For it as a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing, for it as a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is do them: tax to whom taxes due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

You know, as you read on in this passage, you can tell that things are getting more and more serious here. They're getting more and more grave as Paul goes on because he starts off talking about the authority of the government and now he's talking about the sword. Now he's talking about acts of violence. And just to explain this, the sword was a symbol of justice in the ancient world, but justice to the point of punishment. If you've ever seen the statue of Lady Justice, you know, she has a blindfold over her eyes, so she can't see. And she has scale in her hands, because she weighs things in the balance. And she has a sword, because that's how she enforces it. She's not joking about justice. She's not playing around. She has a way to bring it to pass, or to avenge. In fact, the word avenge here it means to repay or punish something and the idea here is that if you disobey the government, this is what you see. If you resist them and defy them and put them down, this is what will happen to you: you will get a vengeance. There's a shift here in this passage, there's a change because first, the government is a minister for good. First, it's a minister for blessing, but now it brings wrath. Now it is a minister of God and an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Now, again, Paul says this because he could hear the objections of his audience; he could hear the concerns of the Roman Church, because they're going to read this and they're going to say, "Paul, we're going to have to resist because Rome was so terrible. We're going to have to defy at certain times. Because there's so bad we can't follow God without that." So Paul says here, "Okay, but be smart about it. Okay, but don't be foolish. Because remember who you're up against here, you're up against Rome, you're up against Caesar. And he's not going to take that lightly." In fact, to calm this down, he says in verse seven, he says, "Render to all what is due them: tax to whom taxes; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." That means you should do this whenever you can. You should submit however it is possible for you to do as a Christian. I mean, if they want your taxes, give them your taxes. Who cares about your money? It's not yours anyways, it's God's so give it to them. If they want to follow some custom, if it's innocent, follow the custom. They want honor, give them honor. Because the government punishes those who don't. The government goes after those who don't comply. It's not worth it on some things. It's not worth being persecuted over everything. To say it another way, and we need to hear this this morning, but let me say it like this, friends, the government and you may not have thought about this before, it's pretty sobering thought that the government is the only institution on earth that has a God-given right to use violence. No one else has a right to do that. No one else has that privilege because the church doesn't have that. Body of Christ doesn't have that. When someone sins against the church, when someone sins against God in our midst, we use church discipline. We talk to them and rebuked them and confront them and we bring them before other believers if necessary. We go through all of that, but we can't get violent with them. We can't bear the sword. We're not given the right to do that. Jesus told Peter to put his sword away. Right? You know, not to be controversial here, but people often ask if the police have the right to bear arms. Do they have the right to carry weapons? Well, absolutely, because it says so right here. They have the right to do that because God has given it to them. Now, maybe some do, and some don't. And there's lots of thoughts on that but they have the right. Others ask if a nation has the right to go to war. Does it have the right to fight for its rights and freedoms? Absolutely, it does! Of course it does. The government bears a sword, it doesn't bear flowers. It bears a weapon or a blade. It doesn't bear roses in order to bring justice.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor during World War II, who lived during the days of Adolf Hitler and the rise of the Nazi Party. He had an interesting perspective on this because he had to think about it so much. I mean, his whole world, the world of Germany at the time was changing in a horrible way. He was right in the middle of it. And at one time, he pointed out that the last time God declared a holy war was in the Old Testament with the nation of Israel. The last time he told His people or His elect to get violent toward anyone was in the days of the Hebrews and the conquest of Canaan. He said, since then, God hasn't done that. Since then, He's given that power to the secular state, which leads to an important question here, at least to a simple question that comes up every time this subject is raised. And that that is this, what do you do when the government doesn't act this way? What do you do when the government fails? As you are reading through Romans 13, and you're reading what all it's supposed to do and all what all is supposed to be, the question is, well, what about when it doesn't look like this? Okay, it's supposed to be an authority, and it's supposed to be a minister for good, and it's supposed to bear a sword and be an avenger of wrath. But what happens when it gets it all backwards? What happens when it doesn't avenge wrath and injustice, but it starts avenging what's right? What happens when the government turns against Christians, or turns against Christian values? You ever wondered that? I'm sure you have. Everybody's asking that question right now. Everybody's wondering that. So we need to stop and say a few words about that. Because this doesn't mean friends that you should never resist the government. We need to say that we need we need to put that out there. It doesn't mean that you should never oppose or stand against what they do. Because Paul did that at times. All the apostles did that at times. In fact, all the apostles were persecuted by the government. All of them

were killed but one, and that one died on a prison island. So obviously, it doesn't mean that there is never a time to defy and disobey. But when is it? Let me give you a few thoughts on that. It's a very important question.

For one, you should resist the government when it tells you to stop preaching the gospel. That's one time when you have to do this. I think that's obvious and speaks for itself. You should resist the government when it tells you to stop speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus Christ because they don't have a right to do that. The government has no God-given right to make that demand. That demand is from the devil. The demand is from hell, it's not from heaven. So that when they do that, you have to defy. Now they can tell you not to preach at certain places, and certain times. They can tell you not to preach on Canada Day in the streets of Vancouver while you're blocking traffic or something like that. That's appropriate. They can say don't preach over here, go over there. But they can't tell you not to do it at all. That's taking it too far. That's going over the line. And we're going to see this next week. But it's the mission of the church to make disciples. It's the mission of the church to preach the gospel and bring people into the truth. That's what we're put on Earth. For. So when the kingdom of man tells us not to, we have to resist. When the kingdom of man stands against that, we must obey God, rather than men. You know, this is not so much a problem in Canada, or North America, fortunately, right now as it is in other places. But you go to other countries like Iran or Iraq or North Korea or China and it's a real issue. A friend of mine had to leave the mission field in China recently because he was about to be put in jail.

Another time when you should resist the government is when it tells you to disobey God. You need to resist the government, when it tells you not to preach the gospel and when it tells you to disobey what God has said, no matter what it is. This spreads the net a little bit here goes a little bit further. But so many Christians are confused about this today. So many Christians are confused about what God expects of them. So let me give you a very practical example, when you open your Bible, one thing it tells you to do is to go to church. When you read it, one thing it tells you is to meet with other Christians in a public way. We talked about that last time. We said quite a bit about that and yet the government now is telling us not to do that. The government now is ordering us not to go to church to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus, which is a good thing. To prevent the spread of a disease, we would all say that's a healthy and a good thing to do for society. But the problem is they've gone from asking us to telling us which raises the issue: so what are we supposed to do with that? Well, I'll tell you what some churches are doing right now. Some churches around the world like California, where they're being told to put off meeting indefinitely are resisting. They're saying "no". I've talked to some people in these churches and they've told me that their leaders have said we can put off meeting for a while we can put off meeting for a season to help. And we're happy to do that. We're willing to do that. But we can't do it forever. And I would agree with that the church can't put off meeting forever. But on the other end, for us here in BC we haven't been asked to do that. Our government leaders are not taking it that far. They're taking it one month at a time. So it's a different discussion here. But the point is that the government shouldn't say things like that. They shouldn't tell us not to meet indefinitely. Because God has told us to meet and we must obey God.

This leads us to another time you should resist the government. One more to consider here. And that is when it asks you to do immoral things. Another time you should resist the government is when it asks you to do things that are wicked or abominable in the eyes of God. We can't do that either. You know, if a day comes when the government says the church can't meet, unless it performs gay marriage, unless it performs homosexual marriage, we would have to resist that. We would have to say no. We pray the day doesn't come. Things haven't gone that far, but it could happen. If the day comes when the government says we're going to close you down unless you sign this document saying you support abortion or saying you support transgenderism and you'll never speak out

against it, we have to do the same. But what I'm trying to say here friends is there is a time to resist the government. There is a time to disobey the authorities. As a Christian, you need to follow them you need to submit to them. You need to give them support, but not if they do that. Not if they go that far. They don't have the right to turn you against God. Nobody does.

In a sermon that he preached on this, John Calvin once said, "Were we like angels, sinless and able to exercise perfect self-control, we would not need a government." He says, "Why then do we have so many laws and statutes? That's because of man's wickedness, for he's constantly overflowing with evil. That's why a remedy is required in the form of our political leaders." But in saying that Calvin also pointed out at the same time, that the government itself is no angel, either. The government is not blameless; it has evil in it as well. So there comes a time when we have to stand up to it and need to be smart and wise about that, but there is a time to do it.

In my studies this week, I came across a story of the time a ship's captain looked into the dark night while he was sailing and he saw a faint light in the distance. So immediately told his signal men to send the message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south, send it out to the lights." To which he received the reply, "No, you need to alter your course 10 degrees." This infuriated the captain. He was so angry that he sent the next reply and he said, "I am the captain of a ship, alter your course 10 degree south." To which he got the message back, "Yes, but I'm the lighthouse. You need to alter your course or you'll crash." Friends, there's a lesson in that. There's a principle and that is this, while we respect the government and appreciate them, and submit to them any way we can. They're not the lighthouse. We are. They're not the salt of the earth, they're not the city on the hill. That's the job of the church. And there are times when we have to tell them to alter their course. There are times when we have to tell the government to change their direction. And we can't back down on that. We can't shrink from that duty. And we'll say more about that next week.

Let's pray for the Lord's wisdom in this. Let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, as we have looked at a deep topic this morning and one that is very prevalent in our lives today, we do close with a prayer for wisdom and discernment. We need your help in this. We need the enlightenment of your spirit. Because Father, we're living in times where these things are foremost in our minds. And we're thinking about these things on a daily basis. What do we do with this decision? What do we do with that announcement? What do we do with that law or that ordinance or that restriction? And Father, I think I speak for all my friends who are listening to say there are times when we don't know what to do. There's times when we're so confused. And yet, Lord, Your word here speaks to people living in a world that was far worse than ours, living in times that were far more evil and dark and it gives us hope. Oh would you help us to be that light on a hill? Would you help us to be a lighthouse to this evil world? And Father help us as a church to know what to do with our governing authorities. We want to do what Paul says here. We want to obey these commands. And we want to balance it with all the other things that we've talked about. But we just need your help. Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ as they go about their daily business and whether it be in the halls of government or whether it be in a workplace or at home. Would you help them to honor Christ in these things? May He be glorified in our lives. May He be glorified in our hearts. We pray this in Jesus name and for His glory. Amen.

Well, that's all for our message today. If you would like to find us online, just look up [gracefellowshipchilliwack.com](http://gracefellowshipchilliwack.com) or if you'd like to see us on our YouTube channel, just type in Grace Fellowship Chilliwack and you will see us there. May the Lord bless you and have a wonderful day.