Sermon Highlights

Living Under Authority: The Christian's Responsibility to Government and Neighbor

Summary:

Drawing from Romans 13, this sermon examines how believers are to conduct themselves under governmental authority while waiting for the consummation of their salvation. Pastor Bruce Gordon traces the biblical history of human government from its institution after the flood in Genesis 9 through the present age of grace, establishing that government was ordained by God to punish evil and promote good. While affirming the Christian's general obligation to submit to governing authorities, the sermon makes clear that this submission is not absolute -- there are times when obedience to God must take precedence over obedience to man. The overarching motivation for how believers relate to government, neighbors, and society is not obligation or fear, but love. The sermon concludes with an urgent call to spiritual readiness, urging believers to cast off the works of darkness and put on Christ, making no provision for the flesh, because the day of final salvation draws ever nearer.

Key Points:

- Government was instituted by God at the time of Noah as recorded in Genesis 9:6, with the purpose of punishing evil and promoting good among men

- Human nature gravitates toward authority, which is why even those who claim to reject oversight will seek out some form of governing structure

- Submission to government is a general principle, not an absolute command -- Daniel, the three Hebrew children, and the apostles Peter and John all demonstrate that obedience to God supersedes obedience to unjust human authority

- Not every government in history has been a direct expression of God's will; some regimes, such as those of Hitler and Pol Pot, represent the corruption of what God intended government to be

- Romans 13:8 is frequently taken out of context -- the command to owe nothing except love is about relational and spiritual obligations to one's neighbor, not a prohibition against financial borrowing

- Christians are obligated to pay taxes honestly, and cheating the government on taxes is not merely a civil matter but a sin against God

- The motivation behind submission to government, payment of taxes, and love of neighbor is the same: genuine, selfless love

- Believers are called to put on the Lord Jesus Christ daily, which means actively engaging with Scripture, prayer, and the community of faith while guarding against the influences that feed the flesh

- The urgency of godly living is grounded in the nearness of final salvation -- every believer is closer to standing before God today than the day they were first saved

Scripture Reference:

- Romans 13 (primary passage)

- Genesis 9:6 (institution of human government)

- Psalm 2 (Christ ruling with a rod of iron in the millennial kingdom)

Stories:

- Pastor Bruce Gordon illustrates the natural human gravitiation toward authority by describing how children without parental discipline will often seek out gang structures that impose their own rigid hierarchy, demonstrating that the desire for governing authority is embedded in human nature

- The illustration of a new military recruit who refuses to wear his issued uniform and shows up to inspection in his own clothes is used to picture the believer who professes faith but continues to live according to the flesh rather than putting on Christ -- with the pointed observation that standing before God in such a condition will prove far worse than facing an angry drill sergeant