

Beloved, open your Bibles with me to Paul's challenging letter to Titus. Titus, his genuine child, according to our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Our love and thanks to Brady and Diana for leading us in song. It is good, isn't it, to lift our voices, to sing loudly to our King. I'm reminded when I read of heaven in Scripture that it is not a quiet place. Quite the opposite, as a matter of fact. Heaven, particularly the throne room of God, is loud, loud. Run a little experiment sometime. Do a little study of all the descriptors of heaven where it describes the scenes there and you may be surprised what you see. So fear not if you are a church mouse to lift your voice loudly. Let praise be done on earth even as it is in heaven.

I want to extend our thanks as well to Nathan, dear brother, for arising to the sacred desk last week, for laboring in the Word, to serve it up so richly for us and fully, brother, we are grateful for you and your diligence and faithfulness to the text. The Lord has given us a rare gift in Nathan and Caylea. We are so thankful they are a part of our family. Well, those who are with us will recall that we left off having, at long last, completed chapter 2 of Paul's letter to Titus in a message titled, The Sacred Desk. I received many phone calls, many emails, and as many of us, your pastor included, were certainly cut to the heart through that text. We looked not only at the authority of Titus the preacher, but we explore the basis of that authority. Rooted and grounded solely in the Word of God and what is to be the congregation's response to God's true structure and plan. Answering the questions concerning the expectation, not only for the man on this side of the sacred desk, but for the flock that receives from those labors. What a strange thing. What a very strange thing that throughout history, God has taken nobodies by the world's standards. And He drapes them in the garment of His Word. And He cloaking them in the highest authority. Giving them an alien authority. One that princes and kings throughout biblical and secular history have trembled before. We are reminded that God is a God of authority. That He made our lives and our world and our spheres to operate on the principle of authority. That we are all people who are both in positions of, and we are people who are under positions of authority in our lives.

Paul reminds Titus, as we closed out chapter 2, precisely this. That Titus is to speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. And that he was to let no one disregard him. As we consider the close of chapter two and now our introduction to chapter three, we're reminded that as we exist and live our everyday lives, that we interact with various spheres of life in this world. As Christians, we not only interact with the body, with church life, where there are figures and positions of authority in that sphere that are accountable for you, that watch over you, that watch over your souls as men who will have to give an account for both your spiritual health and your care. But we also interact with our family sphere, and civil spheres, governmental spheres, all where we interact with the lost on a daily basis. And while the sphere of God's word, of church life as it were, that encompasses and commands our highest allegiance to God and His word, they hold our highest love, the spheres of the church, of family, of government and civil, sometimes and even in some instances, overlap with one another. In fact, it is God's intention that those spheres have places of overlap. He did not create His children to be isolationists or monks sequestered away, but rather a salt sprinkled out over a dying world. Not only do we have interaction and overlap with the world and our dealings in life, but God has specifically planned our life in such a way to be the hands and the feet in the face of Christ to that world. To be ornaments of grace that shine and reflect the sun with such brilliant splashes of color and light that the world looks on with curiosity and wonder.

Over our next few messages, Paul is going to address this very sphere with Titus. Meaning our interactions as Christians with the world. He's going from looking on the inside to church life, as it were, to looking outside. Knowing that we carry an obligation to the lost around us. That we carry the weight of our testimony to the world around us. And that raises many questions, doesn't it? In fact, the extent of our interaction with the world, what we are called both to do and to not do, that is a dividing line in so many areas of theology and of faith and practice. How do we approach our duties to the spheres that God has appointed outside of church life? All right, up to this point, Paul's focus with Titus, Paul's aim has been to highlight the activity and the conduct inside the church. All right, the first two chapters have largely been about what? About setting the church in order, how believers are to interact with one another, how we are to conduct ourselves in the life of the church, et cetera. But Paul knows that as we do life as a biblical church, well, the world is gonna take notice. governments, local, state, and national, will take notice. In fact, truth be told, we are all Christians. In fact, if we are Christians who

are living their lives out loud, our lives are under a microscope by those very spheres. Why? Well, simply put, because the true church of Christ proclaims an exclusive gospel. The church beautiful makes a public proclamation that there is only one way to be reconciled to God. That there's only one gate provided in all time and eternity to come through and that there's only one name given under heaven by which we might be saved. And they say, oh, that's such a shame. We could have been good friends with your Jesus. But he had to go and say, "I am the way." I'm the only way! And if what the church beautiful professes to be true, my life as an unbeliever is in opposition to the great God of heaven. If what the church declares is in fact the ultimate reality as they claim, then my reality is false. My life I have built, my pleasures, my riches, they rest on a shadow. Your God and Your book tell me that my life is not actually my own. That I am accountable for my life and that I will give an account for every word and deed. Your book, you hold up, says that I am in fact not the highest moral authority in my life. That I'm not the creator, but I'm the one created. That I'm not the potter. That I'm the clay. I have to say I don't like that at all. None of this the world can abide. But saints the only way to discredit the message is to discredit the messenger. They can't discredit the word. They have tried and tried. Fortunes and lives have been spent to disprove this book and they can't. The only thing left are the imperfect purveyors and evangelists of this book. Attack those who claim His name. The church faces the onslaught of a world that has been pricked and seared in their consciences. The world faces a flashlight in their eyes, as it were, when they were quite comfortable in the darkness. In fact, Scripture says they loved, and they loved the darkness. And these are the spheres that Paul says you're gonna be sprinkled out over, that you are going to mix it up with and interact with, so we'd better know what that looks like, what it means, but equally, saints, what it does not mean. What is our responsibility to the culture at large? What is the mandate of the church? With a hostile world looking on, desiring to discredit our message, how then shall we live? What is our responsibility to these spheres? Paul has labored in great detail to outline our duties in the church sphere to Titus thus far. But saints, what about when those worlds collide? or when everyday spheres overlap as designed? How then shall we live? These are monumental questions. The answers to which will inform and dictate a large part of what your life looks like and what you spend your time on. These questions Paul speaks to have tentacles that are unbelievably far reaching. But they're critical for both the faithfulness of the individual Christian and of the universal church. Today we're going to explore Paul's commands concerning how we are to live toward an idolatrous world against a world that has set everything, has set themselves against everything that God has decreed. a world that calls evil good and good evil, how then shall we live? What is our responsibility in light of Paul's commands here today as we begin our third and final chapter? But before we begin this incredible dive into these deeply practical and charged words by Paul, most of you will remember that as we have completed each chapter of Titus, we have taken time to zoom back out and to read Paul's letter just as the original audience would have heard it, all at once, just as it was written. The small churches on the Isle of Crete would have received this letter as it was passed around, and they would have rose to hear it read in their presence. So, beloved, if I could ask you now, let us join with those early churches in doing the same. Would you rise with me now as we read Paul's letter to Titus, just as they would have heard it? Thank you.

Hear the word of the Lord.

"Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of God's elect, and the full knowledge of the truth, which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which the God who cannot lie promised from all eternity, but at the proper time manifested his word in preaching, with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior to Titus, my genuine child according to our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father in Christ Jesus our Savior. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you. Namely, if any man is beyond reproach, the husband of one wife having faithful children, who are not accused of dissipation or rebellious, for the overseer must be beyond reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of dishonest gain, but hospitable. loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word, which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to reprove those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they're upsetting

whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of dishonest gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

This testimony is true. For this reason, reprove them severely, so that they may be sound in faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. But both their mind and their conscience are defiled. How they profess to know God, but by their works, they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and unfit for any good work.

But as for you, Titus, Speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine.

Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith and love and perseverance.

Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good. so that they may instruct the young women in sensibility, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be slandered.

Likewise, urge the younger men to be sensible, in all things, show yourself to be a model of good works, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in word, which is irreproachable, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. And urge slaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be pleasing, not contradictory, not pilfering, but demonstrating all good faith, so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in everything. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us that denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live sensibly and righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority.

Let no one disregard you. Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to slander no one, to be peaceable, considerate, demonstrating all gentleness to all men.

For we ourselves also once were foolish. disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the kindness and affection of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not by works which we did, in righteousness, but according to His mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by His grace, we would become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is a trustworthy saying. And concerning these things, I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be intent to lead in good works. These things are good and profitable for men. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and conflicts about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and sinning, being self-condemned. When I send Artemis and Tychicus to you, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Diligently help send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them. And our people must also learn to lead in good works, to meet pressing needs so that they will not be unfruitful.

All who are with me greet you, greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.

You may be seated.

How must it have been for that early church? Well, saints, as we mentioned, this series titled, How then shall we live? It's gonna be a multi-part series, inclusive of the first few verses of chapter three. With part one today, of course, focusing on verse one. So with that, beloved, let us look to our text for this morning.

Titus three, verse one. Titus three, verse one.

*Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work.*

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, your word is timely. It is perfect. Lord, it cuts to the heart. It separates the joint and marrow. Lord, it slays our sacred cows. And Lord, this is difficult for many of us. Lord, we ask that you would give us sensitive and soft, teachable hearts. We ask that you would help this preacher to rightly divide the word and to apply it. Lord, that we might know how we are to live toward an unbelieving world. That we might know how

we are to shine and to love an unbelieving world. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would be in our time today in your text, we ask that you would apply to the hearts of your people and to this preacher. We pray all of this in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

Well, nearly five years ago now, can't believe it's been that long, during the height of the COVID era, churches and employees and individuals were suddenly confronted with a situation that Well, frankly, the modern American never thought they would have to face. We were forced to answer the question, the very pressing question. What happens when Christ and compliance collide? What do we do? As a church, as a Christian, as an employee, as a citizen.

On July 24th, 2020, a statement was released by the elder board of Grace Community Church that was literally a shot heard around the world. In a statement titled, Christ not Caesar is the head of the church, this board of elders laid out the clear commands of scripture concerning the authority of secular government in the sphere of the church. Declaring that while the civil government had been given authority by God and scripture to rule the state, Civic rulers nor government officials had jurisdiction over the Church of God. You can imagine this landed like a lead balloon in the halls of governments around the country and even the world, drawing personal rebuttals from people like Governor Gavin Newsom, who took particular offense to such a position. But more importantly, this statement hit like a landmine in many churches. The mantra coming from evangelicalism then declared that we are to simply obey the government and to love our neighbors by closing the church doors, wearing a mask, and staying six feet apart. The chorus from the pews rang out. Scripture says we must obey the government. Haven't you read Romans 13? Well, whether through misinformation or theological deficit, through hirelings in the pulpits instead of pastors, many of the largest churches in the nation stayed closed for months at the demand of Caesar, and with the approval of many, if not most, congregants. The church beautiful was sucker punched in the nose. And it took some time for her to catch her balance, to put her gloves back on, and to punch back. And we are forever thankful for places like Grace Community Church, to pastors all over the country and in Canada, who we just recently saw two weeks ago, who went to jail for their faithfulness.

After the fog of COVID started to clear as the theological thought leaders of our day began to write, numerous books came out and blogs and podcasts seeking to help and equip Christians and church leaders going forward to better equip us and to help us understand what scripture commands, right? To equip us and to prepare us for when we are inevitably faced with similar situations in the future. At the core of the contention was this festering question, as a Christian, what are my responsibilities to the other God-ordained spheres of life? Scripture orders our lives, not only within the church sphere and within the family sphere, but it also orders our lives in relationship to the state and to the civil and governmental spheres.

So, as we open our text today, you can very quickly see why we must address this. This verse opens, Paul states unequivocally, "remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient".

Let's pause there. Now we're going to look at both sides of Paul's words here. Meaning, we must first look at what this entails. What this does mean. And we must look at what this does not mean. We have two sides of the same coin, but they are all the same coin. Saints, misunderstanding or misapplying either side of this will bring reproach upon Christ and His church. Alright, so let's first set the cadence of Paul's words here. He says to remind them. For our Greek lovers out there, that's given to us in the present tense, alright?

So the literal reading here is "keep on reminding them". He's saying, "Titus, bang this drum". Why? Paul is giving both urgency and repetition here on this, so it must matter. Well, of course it does. Why?

Why must our disposition toward the sphere of government to rulers and authorities be one that does not unnecessarily slander or be disagreeable to the extent we're able? Well, saints, one of two hard attitudes tend to creep in for Christians when it comes to the sphere of rulers and authorities. One is a feeling of anger. of angst, hostility, combativeness, because of how they treat you as Christians, exactly how scripture said they would treat you as a Christian. Historically, down through history, the civil sphere has not been kind to Christians.

The last 300 years of the United States and its Christian sympathies that we are so thankful for is but a small snapshot of history. And it is not at all representative of global history. Historically, we are a driven out and persecuted people. We don't get to meet freely every Sunday morning. And that treatment tends to foster certain heart attitudes. And Paul says, no. You are the only Bible that other person will likely ever read. Anger

and reviling is not becoming of the Christian in this sphere. You are the hands, the feet, the mouth of Christ to these people. How many people would you listen to that are openly hostile against you, that are aggressive and combative against you? Answer? You don't, right? Let's be honest. You don't. You shut down. That's why Paul will go on in verse two that we'll see next week. He says, to slander no one, to be peaceable, considerate, demonstrating all gentleness to all men. So the first reason Paul gives us entreaty is to combat that bitterness that can creep in when we witness the mistreatment of Christians by the state or their overt promotion of wickedness and unrighteousness. How many Christians, when you talk to them about government matters or entities, how many of them is their overall tone or their demeanor one of hostility? I'm guilty of that. I will be the first in line to admit, especially over these last four years, saints, that cannot be. But pastor, they're wicked. Don't you understand that? They're doing this and that and this and that. I'm standing for righteousness here. I'm an American. I'm here and I'm angry. Hang on. Hang on. How many confuse having a gentle spirit, confuse being peaceable and considerate of rulers and authorities, confuse that with having an approval of their actions? Saints, do you want to know why so many conflate the two or feel the need to always fight, fight, fight? Is there a place to pick up your sword? Yeah. But it has become acceptable to be in open hostility to rulers and authorities in our country, hasn't it? Why? Because saints, we see them first as the battlefield instead of the mission field. They surmise that if we are to take back our country for Jesus, politicians in an ungodly state are in the way of that, so take it over!

I'm sorry. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Our battle is spiritual. That sinning politician, that wicked representative of the state is not your battlefield. They are your mission field. And that is going to be tough for some folks to hear. How can that biblical frame of mind saying, this approach Paul is talking about towards rulers and authorities, how can we get that to settle in our hearts and our dispositions? Our natural even inclination and distrust and hatred and angst and anger toward rulers and authorities? It's very simple. by remembering what the call and duty of the church is.

The duty of the church and the Christian is to share, preach, and live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is to plead with hearts to be reconciled to God through Christ.

It is not to take back our culture or take back America for Jesus.

If we can provide a single example in scripture or the early church where believers sought dominion of their lands for Jesus, I would be happy to examine that. But you'll be waiting a while because it's not there.

Dr. MacArthur was speaking about this recently. He'd been on a plane and he was reading a few books and all of them were about confronting our culture. Fight, fight. Affecting and impacting our culture. Frankly, he said, quote, *"That's not our goal. That is not our goal."*

*It sounds like a noble goal, and I'm sure there are people who see certain noble aspects of it, and there may be some. But our goal is not to impact our culture by changing the moral values. Our goal is not to impact our culture by creating traditional values, family values through legislation or judicial process.*

*Our goal is not to make sure that the United States of America adheres to a national policy that equates to biblical morality.*

*That is not our goal.*

*We are not involved in altering social morality.*

*We are not involved in upgrading cultural conduct.*

*We are interested in people becoming saved. That is our only agenda.*

*If we're going to change our culture, we're going to change it from the inside out."* Close quote.

Christians have been spinning their wheels, trying to change our rulers and authorities from the outside in. The church works from the inside out. Scripture calls believers a royal priesthood. You are priests before God. I am a priest before God. We are a nation of priests. And the job of the priest is to bring God before the people and bring the people before God. Full stop.

Again, the good doctor said, quote, *"if people die in a communist government or a democracy, it really doesn't matter if they end up in hell. If they die under a tyrant or a benevolent dictator, it doesn't matter if they end up in hell. If they die believing that homosexuality is wrong or believing that homosexuality is right and end up in hell,*

*it doesn't matter. If they die as a policeman or a prostitute without Christ, they're going to end up in the same place. Whether they die moral or immoral will make no difference in their eternity. Whether they stood on the side of the street with a pro-abortion rights group and screamed for legalizing and maintaining legal abortions, or they were on the other side of the street against abortion and screamed to stop the killing. If they didn't know Christ, they're going to end up in the same place. That isn't the issue. The issue is salvation".*

And the sad reality is that when the church gets a moralizing and politicizing bent, it usually has a negative impact on its evangelization mission. Because listen to this, listen to this, saints. It makes the people hostile to the current system. And they become enemies of the society rather than compassionate friends. If we're going to see our nation transformed, it has to be done from the inside out. That's our agenda. And so we are here to preach Christ and to know nothing among you, to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified. Saints, when that is our frame of mind, we can be kind to the very official who would lop off our heads. Even in the face of unmitigated evil from the state, we can and must still live a life that both makes our gospel message believable, but even desirable. Pick up a Voice of the Martyrs magazine sometime. Countless, countless testimonies from persecuted Christians who look their often state-sponsored authority, who is their captor and their abuser, was able to love that person. They didn't hate him. They had compassion for them. And guess what? In article after article in Voice of the Martyrs, these godless government state men had no idea what to do with these crazy people. Why do they forgive me when I strike them? Why aren't they angry with me when I just burned down their house and destroyed everything that they own? You may be wicked, and you may be an authority in the state, but you're not my enemy. You're not my battlefield. You are my mission field. And because of that, I am free to love you when it makes no sense. I can be gentle and kind when you would expect rage and anger. That's Christ in me. And my life must reflect my Savior. Say, well, Jesus flipped tables. He sure did in the church. Was Jesus' righteous anger reserved for Caesar and Pontius Pilate? For the wicked Romans? For oppressive taxation, the mistreatment of the Jews at their hands? We hardly hear word one about that. Except, give to God what is God's and give to Caesar what is Caesar's. That's it. No. Jesus' anger, the zeal that consumed him was for what? His father's house. It was for the health and faithfulness of the church. It was against those who cloaked themselves in the veil of religion and oppressed people with it. There were political Jewish zealots all over Palestine and Jerusalem. In fact, one of Jesus' disciples was a former zealot, someone who desired to take back Israel, and not by turning their hearts back to Yahweh, but through political means, military means, take back dominion of Israel. And the only thing Jesus did with a zealot was save him, call him, convert him, gave him the gospel, "come follow me. I'm gonna make you a fisher of men". I've got a new battlefield for you. The inner workings of the occupying Roman government were of little concern for Jesus.

It was zeal for his father's house and religious hypocrisy that drew the anger of Jesus.

Saints, if your passion and energy are primarily directed toward the political and not in building up and protecting and supporting your local church. Friend, you have it backwards.

If you have time to write a letter to your local congressman, but not time to make it to Sunday school or serve your local church, you've got it backwards. Paul's entire point as we begin chapter three is that our conduct toward the outside world is to beautify our Savior. It is to demonstrate with visible evidence that we serve a God who saves, who changes lives from the inside out. Keep the outside-in work in its proper place and priority. Looking back again to our text, remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient. Now we've spoken first about what this means to be obedient, right? To be subject to ruling authorities, what this is to look like, and why we are to do it. But as we mentioned, there are two sides to the coin of obedience and subjection to rulers and authorities that Paul is calling for. Not only here, but in prominent places like Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2.14, but in each of these texts, and we don't have time to exegete each one of them, we see that this is a conditional obedience. Since the moment texts like Romans 13 were written, Wicked men in authority have used that text to bludgeon Christians into unqualified and total obedience to government and all ruling civil authorities. The Nazis used to love Romans 13. They would demand that German pastors use it to get their flocks in line. You've heard of Rex Lex and Lex Rex. King over law or law over king. All in that same vain. But scripture shows us that all obedience in all spheres is a qualified obedience. I'll say that again, all obedience is a qualified obedience in spheres. The best way to understand this is to think about it in reference to, we'll keep this very

simple, those three spheres that God has given. We have the church, we have family, and we have civil. Keep it simple. God alone has absolute authority and has created the boundaries and the duties of each sphere. Within the church, God has established authorities. We talked about the sacred desk. We have pastors and elders and deacons. Yes. But, can I as a pastor go meddling your family sphere? Meaning doing the job of the mother and the father. Making sure that your kids bathe and are going to bed on time and eat healthy. Of course not.

Ours is the ministry of word and sacrament. It is the care of souls. And is our obedience, is your obedience to church authorities conditional? Can those authorities in the church either step outside of their sphere or otherwise act in a way that disqualifies them and that disrobes them of authority? Absolutely.

You are under no obligation to obey church leadership that has scripturally disqualified themselves or left their sphere. It is only within that sphere that the God-given authority exists.

So how about the family sphere? The family sphere is for quote, the upbringing and education of children, as well as the nurturing of orderly human relationships in honor, discipline, and love. What a great definition. The family is the basic unit of society, right? And God has given a structure and a plan for the family. He's placed the husband at the head of the family. Scripture has called for the submission of wives to their husbands and children to obey their parents. Now again, see the consistent principle. Is that an unqualified submission by wives and children? Of course not. Just like governments throughout history have abused Romans 13 for their own sinful ends, so have ungodly husbands. And abusive men used Ephesians 5.22 to subjugate their wives and demand obedience. Can a husband live and treat a wife in such a way that disqualifies him from his headship? Yes. The authority of a man's headship resides in his obedience to scripture in the sphere of the home.

A man who abuses his wife, for example, has forfeited the scriptural obedience of his wife. He's outside of the family sphere that God has designed and established with the laws therein. And in that case of abuse, for example, he's now put himself into the sphere of the state, whose biblical role it is to punish evil and protect good. But the wife's not off the hook in that case, is she, in such a scenario? She still has scriptural commands over her life as to how she's to live, how she's to treat an abusive or lost husband. Her responsibilities to her family, her church, her government, all of those still exist.

And here, Paul in our text, we talked about church and family briefly.

Here in our text, Paul is speaking specifically about governing authorities. about rulers over us.

So does our principle change? Not at all.

See how we like our consistent hermeneutic in this church? Oh, we do so love consistent hermeneutics.

Saints, if we understand these principles, if we understand this, it's going to answer a lot of questions in our lives. concerning how are we to live, not only with one another in the church, with one another in our families, but also towards those that God has placed in civil and governmental authorities over us. How do we do all this? It's consistent, the principle all the way through. Paul reminds us to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient. Is that an unqualified subjection and obedience? Well, you guessed it, no.

As an exercise, saints watch what happens when spheres overlap in ways not designed by God. If the government knocked on your door, young mother, and said, hello, I'm here to nurse your baby and make some suggestions for who your daughter should marry, you would say no, right? Your job is to stand outside and guard the home. In my home, in my family sphere, you are outside your bounds, and you actually pose a threat to my family. But outside, by protecting our home while I care for my children, you've now become a blessing. The state, governing authorities, the civil sphere is like a fire. It is purposeful, it is welcomed, enjoyed, and useful when in the fire pit. In fact, it's so desired that people will gather from all around when a good fire's been established. When there's law and order, we want that. That is God's design for it. but let that fire out of its sphere. Let its uncontained fire into your home, family, or church, and it can do great damage.

The purpose of the state is to punish evil, Romans 13. It is to protect the good, and it brings the sword.

Government was first established by God after the flood to institute the death penalty on murderers and establish the value of human life. We see that in Genesis 9.6. And we must obey and submit to legitimate rulers that are giving lawful commands. Whether we agree with those laws or not, whether that person is nice or not, it doesn't matter. We are to obey lawful orders given from inside the sphere of government. Scripture's clear,

saints. We are not rebels. And remember, that submission does not equal agreement. Submission does not equal agreement. It is a qualified obedience. The unfortunate refrain in much of evangelicalism is that, essentially, unless the government tells us to sin, I must obey them. Understand, saints, that our qualified obedience in accordance with Scripture has two sides of the coin. One, yes, is that we will not obey if they desire us to start doing what is wrong, but we also will not obey if they demand that we stop doing what is right. Yep, I need to say that again. We will not obey if they desire us to start doing what is wrong. We also will not obey if they demand we stop doing what is right. We must understand that the church is not subordinate to the state, nor is the state subordinate to the church, but they are all subordinate to the God who made them both.

Scripture very clearly restricts the boundaries of the state. It does not act with unlimited authority. 1 Peter 2:14 tells us that they are there for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do good. Those are the biblical guardrails. Our founding fathers knew this, wrote our constitution, our bill of rights with this in mind.

Saints, when the government told the churches during COVID how and when they were to worship, they were outside of their sphere. Christians will not obey a command to either start doing what is wrong, nor should you obey if they demand that you stop doing what is right. We are under no obligation to obey such a command. And now I pray that theologically we better understand why that is. For saints, it's coming again. I don't know in what way or manner, but it will come again. But that does not mean that we become ungodly in our attitudes and words. Just because the state gets nasty and they do, my command to be gentle remains. My mission field remains. I may have to disobey, but I will do it in gentleness and love.

During Luther's time, there was a local prince who had taken Luther under his wing, so to speak. He had offered Luther his protection from many hostile forces. There came a day when the high king, basically, the government, the church, all wrapped into one big nasty entity, demanded that the prince turn over Luther to be tried for his writings. The prince had been given an order by the government to turn Luther over. The prince's conversation with his right-hand man went like this. He said, Spalatin, the prince said, there are two ways of saying no to someone you believe to be stronger than yourself. The first is to say nothing at all and go on merely doing what you were doing before and pretend that you never heard and allow time and inertia to be your allies. And the second, his helper asked, The second way is to say no in such a kind and thoughtful way that it befuddles them. That is the heartbeat of Paul here in our opening text. Listen for it. This is not a begrudging obedience, a loathsome complaining. Our joyful obedience in this realm is part of our declaration to a lost world. Look at the last part of our text. To be ready for every good work. There's the heartbeat of it, right? That pops out of the top of it and it flows down and it covers the rest of the verse. This is your heartbeat. How then shall we live? Live in such a way that your message is actually believable to an unbelieving world. Ready for good work toward all. toward a wicked government, toward evil rulers, toward our fellow man who can't understand why I don't hate people who oppress me. Rulers and authorities aren't my battlefield. They are my mission field. We are not to be taken away or sidetracked with our duty and call. Saints, you do not have a mandate to change your culture. You have a mandate to preach the gospel and to bid a lost world, to come to Christ in repentance and faith, to speak to hearts, to be ready for every good work. Why? Scripture tells us why. That they may see your good works and glorify your Father who's in heaven.

Saints, I know we live in politically charged times, but you are a people of the book. You're a people of the book. Let the nations rage. Let governments teeter and sway. Obey them in their sphere, lovingly, Paul says, as a means of making our Savior beautiful to the world. Love every man deeply. obey the authorities sincerely and serve God wholly.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, these, once again, are hard words. Oh, Heavenly Father, we look forward to a break. Oh, Lord, you keep hitting us. Lord, we're grateful for it. Lord, we must know, as people of the book, how we are to live? How are we to deal with wicked governments that cause our hearts to mourn over the evil that seems to run rampant so often? How are we to relate to our pastors and our husbands and our wives and children and authorities and rulers that are all around us? Lord, we need answers to these questions. We thank you that your word has given us clear instruction. It's not easy for us. Lord, it grinds against our American grain. But Lord, we are citizens of heaven first. We ask, Lord, that you would submit our hearts to these truths, Lord, that we would



not be like the rest of the world, that we would be so different that people would see the radiance of the ornaments of grace and give you glory.