

The Gospel Applied: A Church shaped by the gospel - loving our government

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[0 : 0 0] Well, in just under two weeks' time, on Friday the 23rd of May, we're going to have the opportunity to vote. We're going to decide who will represent us on our local councils and who will represent us in Europe. So, who are you going to vote for? And more importantly, what will be your attitude to those who are elected? I'm not going to tell you who I'm going to vote for, if you want that conversation with me afterwards you can. But God's Word is very clear about how we should respond to those elected to rule over us. Look at verse 1. Everyone, that's all people, and in the context especially those within the church, everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. You see, the church that has come to believe and experience the gospel will work itself out in love to those elected to rule over us. Because all of what we've looked at so far in Romans, in the first 11 chapters, is all about the gospel,

God's mercy, God's kindness, God's goodness to us. And when that gospel filters into our lives, it begins to shape us into a loving church. So, in chapter 12, verses 9 to 21, we looked at this last week, it's all about love for each other. So, in verse 10 of chapter 12, be devoted to one another in brotherly love. And then when we move into chapter 13, verses 8 to 14, the next section on, it's all about love for the world. So, in verse 8, we read, let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. So, there's this great theme of love. And sandwiched in between is Romans 13, verses 1 to 7, which is all about the governing authorities. And the implication is, is that we should love those who are in authority too. Because the church that has come to believe and experience the gospel will work itself out in love for all kinds of people. And here this morning, it works itself out in love to those who are elected to rule over us. So, this love is expressed in three ways. First, loving submission to the governing authorities. Look at verse 1 again. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. Submission is not easy. We don't like the idea of submission because it implies that we're living under the rule and authority of someone else. But submission isn't a bad thing. It's a good thing because it's part of

God's order and design for our lives and for the world. So, he gives us actually three reasons why we should submit. Here's the first reason. We submit to our governing authorities because they are established by God. So, look at the, let's read verse 1 again. Everyone must submit themselves to the governing authorities for or because there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Now, you and I are going to vote on the 24th of May and whoever gets the most amount of votes are going to be elected. But whether that's Seamus McGrath of Fianna Fáil or Fiona Cairns of Sinn Féin, behind their election stands the rule of God. In other words, those who are elected only have authority to rule as God allows it or as God permits it. Let me give you an example of this. So, keep your finger there in Romans 13 and jump back to Daniel chapter 4. It's on page 888. Daniel chapter 4.

It's on page 888. Daniel is a great book in terms of kings and those who are in authority in God and how God rules over these things. And in Daniel 4 we're introduced to King Nebuchadnezzar who was the most powerful ruler in the world at that time. He had the empire of Babylon. He was very, very powerful and he's very proud about his rule and authority. So, in verse 30 of chapter 4, as he surveys and he looks out upon his vast kingdom, this is what he says in verse 30, is not this the great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?

But no sooner does he boast about his rule when God reminds him who is in charge. Verse 31. The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven.

[6 : 02] This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar. Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven from the people and live with the wild animals and eat grass like the cattle seven times. So, that's after seven years will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High, that's God, is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and he gives them to anyone he wishes.

You see, so whoever is elected, we need to know, and more importantly they need to know, that their position of authority is given to them by God. He gives and he can take away.

Go back to Romans 13. So, if all authorities have been established by God, that means, verse 2, consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. You see, we mightn't like our present government. You mightn't even like who gets elected on the 24th of May.

But if we are people who believe the gospel and experience the gospel, if it's worked down into our lives, then that means we won't be a rebellious people against the governing authorities.

[7 : 45] Instead, as an expression of our love to God, we will lovingly submit to those who are in authority. So, that's the first reason why we should submit.

They are established by God. Here's the second reason. We submit to our governing authorities because they are appointed to keep order. So, look at verse 3, chapter 13, verse 3.

4. For, or because, rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.

Do you want to be free from the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. Now, imagine what it would be like if we lived in a nation without rulers.

Well, that's anarchy. And that's what parts of Ukraine are experiencing right now. A nation or a country without rulers in charge ends in chaos and disorder, violence and death.

[8 : 52] It ruins people. It ruins communities. So, God in his goodness has provided leaders to keep order and to establish peace.

You see, authorities are only bad news for those who reject it, but for those who lovingly submit to the authorities, it is good news because, look at verse 3 again, the beginning, rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.

So, if we want to enjoy a good life, if we want to live in a peaceful, ordered society, if we want a caring and a good community, then, look at the end of verse 3, do what is right, and he, that is the rulers, will commend you.

So, we submit, secondly, because they are there to keep order. The third reason he gives, we submit to our governing authorities because they are God's servants to do us good.

Look at verse 4. For he is God's servant to do you good, but if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing.

[10 : 10] He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. I don't know if you've ever considered that those who will be elected to our local councils or to the European Parliament are not just politicians, they are God's servants.

That's what it says here. They are God's servants to serve the people. They have been appointed by God to establish and uphold justice.

You might remember back in chapter 12, we were encouraged as a loving community not to seek revenge or to want to repay people.

Instead, we are called to love our enemies. So, look at verse 19 of chapter 12. It says, Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath.

Sorry, this is Romans 12, verse 19. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, it is mine to avenge. I will repay, says the Lord.

[11 : 22] On the contrary, instead of looking for revenge, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. Now, while we're called to have a certain attitude and love for our enemies, on the one hand, and God is saying, on the other hand, that when he returns, he will bring his ultimate justice.

But in the meantime, in between, God has provided a means for bringing justice today. And his servants, the governments, the rulers, those in authority, are the ones to bring that justice.

So, that's why it says at the end of verse 4, of chapter 13, he is God's servant, an agent of wrath, to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

That's why we have a justice system. That's why we have courts. That's why we have laws. God has provided servants to protect people from evil, to punish those who do evil, so that it may be good for us.

So, governing authorities have been established by God. They're there to keep order. They're there to do good.

[12 : 37] Therefore, look at verse 5, therefore it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience.

We lovingly submit, not out of fear, as in, well, if I do something wrong, I'm going to get caught and be punished. That's part of the motivation.

But more importantly, because of conscience. God has made it clear to us in his word. This is part of his good design and order, that there would be people elected, people that would rule over us.

And the church that has come to believe and experience the gospel, will work itself out in loving submission towards those who are elected to rule over us.

So that is the first way we show our love. We submit to those governing authorities. Now, I'm sure, as we've gone through this first section, it's raised all kinds of questions.

[13 : 44] Which brings us to the next big idea. There is a loving exemption from governing authorities. Look at verse 3 again, the beginning of verse 3.

It says there, for rulers hold no terror for those who do right. Is that true? What about the beginning of verse 4? For he is God's servant to do you good.

Is that always true? I mean, what about the people who live in North Korea under the brutal regime of Kim Jong-un?

Are they to submit to the authorities? What about all the people who live in all kinds of corrupt governments around the world?

What about Christians who live in a situation where they're not allowed to preach the gospel or go to church and meet with others? And what about us?

[14 : 49] I mean, the news has just been plastered at the minute about some of our elected politicians who've lied and cheated. And what about our whole justice system at the minute? It's a mess.

Well, the command seems very clear in chapter 13, verse 1. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. But we must also remember that those who have been placed in authority over us do not always use their God-given authority for good.

The world is full of leaders throughout history and even now. People like Mugabe of Zimbabwe or Assad of Syria who abuse their authority inflicting great suffering and pain on their people.

So does that mean they are to take verse 1 and say, I must submit to them? Well, there are times when we are exempt from submitting.

Rulers have been put in place by God to bring justice and peace, to punish evil and to pursue good. But here's the crux. Where their laws are contrary to God's laws, we are exempt from submitting to their authorities.

[16 : 15] Where their laws are contrary to God's laws, we are exempt from submitting to those authorities. Let me give some examples. We need to go back to the Old Testament for this.

First, as far as possible, as far as possible, we should submit to our governing authorities. Look back to Jeremiah chapter 29. Jeremiah was the prophet who had made it clear to the people from God that God's people were going to go into exile, into a foreign land, under a foreign ruler.

And that ruler was, we've already met him already, was Nebuchadnezzar. They would be placed under a foreign rule under Nebuchadnezzar.

But look at what God says to the people. How should they respond in this new situation under a new leader? Verse 4 of chapter 29, this is what the Lord, God Almighty, let me start again, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. So get on with life as normal.

[17 : 54] Verse 7, also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord, for it. Because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

Now this is a foreign land under a foreign leader. But yet, they have been called to lovingly submit to their new leaders and to do what is right.

Not to start a rebellion, but to do what's right. However, move on to Daniel chapter 3.

It's just a little further on. Daniel chapter 3. When laws are in defiance of God, we are exempt from submission. So in Daniel chapter 3, we actually get a picture of what it was like for these people who've been carried into exile to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar.

And we meet three people who you've all heard of, I'm sure, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So here's three people who've been carried off into exile under a new leader.

[19 : 06] And while they're in exile, King Nebuchadnezzar made a law that said to the people, I'm building this big statue, 90 feet tall, made of gold. Perhaps it was in an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself and people were to bow down in worship to this idol.

And if they weren't going to do that, they would be thrown into the fiery furnace. That was the law. Well, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew God's law that only God should be worshipped.

He should be number one. The priority. And look how they respond. Chapter 3, verse 16. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it and he will rescue us from your hands, O king. But, even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

They were exempt because it was against God's law. Now, I don't think Ender Kenny has any plans on setting up an idol or an image of himself and calling everybody to bow down to him.

[20 : 38] but our government is seeking to set up laws that are contrary to God's laws. There is a push for same-sex marriage.

There is a push towards abortion. And each of these stands in contradiction to God's design and God's good order for life.

So, as Christians, we need to make a stand. And while we are living in this country, in this nation, under the governing authorities that we have, as far as possible, we should always submit to our governing authorities and do what is right and best for the country and for the people.

But, where laws are in opposition to God's law, we are exempt from obeying them. It doesn't mean to say we start up a rebellion.

But we are lovingly turning away from those earthly rulers and submitting ourselves to God's law.

[21 : 49] So, what will it look like, then, to actually submit to our authorities today in this country? Which brings us to our third big idea, our loving expression to our governing authorities?

Look at verse 6, back to Romans 13, verse 6. So, here's a very practical example of working out of how we express our love towards those in authority.

Verse 6, this is also why you pay taxes. Oh, taxes. Yes, taxes. For the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing.

Taxes are nothing new. And we're not immune to taxation in this country, and there's certainly a lot of talk about water tax coming up to the elections, isn't there?

I wonder what your view is on the water tax. Are you going to join in with the other rebels in some parts of Cork who've gone and attacked the meter installer?

[23 : 02] Or park your car over the little hole where the water meter is so they can't get at it? That would be a good idea, wouldn't it? Or do you verbally abuse the politician, or when you're with a group of people, talk about them behind their back?

Well, as a community of love, we are to express our love to the governing authorities by obeying their laws and showing their respect.

Verse 7, So, this is what it is. If you want to show your love to the governing authorities, verse 7, give everyone what you owe him. If you owe taxes, then pay your taxes.

If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honour, then honour. You mightn't like paying tax. You might think it's too much.

You mightn't have even voted for the present government, but as we have seen, they are God's servants, appointed by God to do good, and so we express our love by paying our water tax, by paying the property tax, and we speak respectfully of our leaders, and I have to take that to heart because I don't always speak respectfully of our leaders.

[24 : 21] I mightn't agree, but I must be respectful. So ask ourselves, does God's law forbid paying taxes? No, it doesn't.

So pay it as an expression of love. Does God's law forbid speaking disrespectfully? Yes, it does. So speak well as an expression of love.

And we're going to have an opportunity to put this into practice. I guarantee that all of you, over this coming week or the next two weeks, are going to be in conversation with someone about water tax or about the government and the elections.

And everybody is going to be saying what they're going to do. Oh, I'm not going to pay that or oh, I'm not going to vote for them and oh, they're useless and they're stupid and they're no good. Here's your opportunity to give your voice.

What are you going to say? That authorities are good. I've had some great conversations with the guys who've been knocking on the door. And being able to remind them and saying, do you know what I'm speaking on this Sunday?

[25 : 27] You can direct them back to the same passage. And you can say you're praying for them because we take it seriously that they have been placed there by God and so we'll pray for them.

And as you speak with people, don't fight against the government. Show your loving expression to them. God's love for his people.

You see, in Jesus we see the ultimate leader, the supreme authority over all people and over every nation. God's love is the one who came as a servant for us.

He came to bring us and to do good for us. He came to bring peace. He came to bring order. Jesus came to bring justice. But here's how he's different.

He didn't come with a sword. Look at verse four. He didn't come with a sword as an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

[26 : 35] Instead, Jesus came to take the place of the wrongdoer. He came to take the place of people like you and me who rebel against God's authority, who speak ill of those who are in authority over us.

And on the cross, Jesus takes the place of the wrongdoer. For you and for me, he dies in our place. He is the one who came and took the sword that you and I deserve so that we might be set free, so that we might live a life of love, because we are people who have been richly loved by God.

You see, the church that has come to believe and experience the gospel, who have come to see what Christ has done, who came to serve us and give his life for us, the expression of that will be loving those who have been elected to rule over us.

Let's pray together. As we pray, let's remember that God's word does command us to pray for those in authority.

authority. So let's now pray for those presently in government and for those who will soon to be elected to our councils.

[28 : 10] Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you for our country, for this nation. We thank you for those who you have put in place to rule over us.

us. We thank you for all the good things that we enjoy because of their leadership. And while there is so much that we may see fault in or see wrongdoing in, Father, please help us to support and submit to all that is good and right, trusting that behind every leader stands our heavenly Father who rules over all.

And Father, would you please help all those who are in government right now and those soon to be elected, that they would be people who stand for good, who condemn evil, who pursue what is right, who protect the vulnerable, provide for the most needy, and give to those who are most in need of health, and those who are in most of need of housing and finances and support.

Raise up leaders who will do this in a right way. Raise up leaders who will bring justice to our nation, who will live lives of integrity and honesty, who will not lie and cheat and steal, but do only what is right and good.

And Father, we pray for ourselves. Please help us to show our loving submission to our leaders, to speak well of them, to pay our taxes, not as a grudge, but as a loving expression, because you have richly loved us.

[30 : 12] we pray for our land, for our nation, and for ourselves. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. Well, let's turn to the screen again as we sing, from heaven you came. Here is a song about our great leader, the Lord Jesus Christ, who didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give his life that we might live.

Let's stand together as we sing this. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.