Submission to Governing Authorities

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[0:00] So, Thursday next, there's something happening. You may have seen it on the news.

Anyone tell me? I'm hearing the word election. Yes, yes, I know, I know, I've barely been here five minutes.
It's my first time preaching, and I'm already bringing up politics. What can I say? I'm a glutton for punishment. Don't worry, Clive. I'm not going to tell you who to vote for.
That's not my place, and this certainly isn't the most appropriate place for me to do that. But I think it is worth talking about, because I, and I think many others, have been starting to feel fairly disillusioned and frustrated with how things are going politically in this country and around the world at the moment.
And I've increasingly been feeling like something needs to change, or maybe we even just need to scrap the whole thing. And then I read these words from Romans 13. Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities.
[1:11] Hmm. What do we do with that? Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

So what do we do with those words when politicians lie to us, or when vital public services are cut? How about when we look abroad at places like North Korea or Saudi Arabia, and we see the appalling things that those governments do to those in their authority?
How do we look at all that and believe what Paul is writing here, that these authorities are established and instituted by God? Particularly given that he's writing to people in Rome, possibly under Nero, who was renowned for being an absolutely appalling leader.
I mean, was he mad? What was Paul thinking here? Well, let us not forget whose words it is we are reading here. Paul was a servant of Jesus.
Jesus, who for our sake was arrested and killed, despite being innocent. And Paul himself spent a lot of his ministry being arrested, imprisoned, beaten, for preaching the good news of Jesus.
[2:30] So let's not accuse Paul of being naive enough to think that all authorities are good all of the time. Because he'd be very aware that they're not.

But he would be very aware that these governments won't be in charge forever because Jesus is coming back. And then the whole world would be under his authority.
He says it at the end of today's passage, verse 11. For the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.
The night is nearly over. The day is almost here. Every day when we wake up, we are one step closer to the day when Jesus will return.
So let's keep that in mind as we explore this scripture together. So let's look again. What does Paul say about governments? Verse 1.
[3:32] Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.
Consequently, whoever rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. So governments exist, in general, because God wants them to.
They exist because they do things which God considers necessary. Things which I believe will be done when Jesus returns and when we live under the rule and reign of God.
What will that kingdom look like? Peace. Yes? Justice. People united together under the common will of God. Well, at its best, that is what government is for.
Verse 4 says this. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason.

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[4:38] They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. So, governments exist to care for their people and to bring about justice. And to bring about justice.

That's that sword of wrath to bear, to right the wrongs that have been done by those under their authority. Therefore, verse 5, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also as a matter of conscience.
submit to authority as a matter of conscience. Part of following Jesus is believing that these things which government does is important.
Not necessarily because we believe strongly in the actions of our government, or in the policies of a particular party, but because we long for the day when the rule of law will be replaced by the rule of the Lord.
Because we believe that our existence isn't just about getting whatever we want and doing whatever we please. Rather, it's about looking beyond ourselves and working together to see God's will being done on earth, as it is in heaven.
[5:52] Governments affect the lives of whole nations, and so they can only operate by forcing us to look beyond ourselves. And this, verse 6, is why you pay taxes.

I can see I'm getting more popular by the second. This is why you pay tax, verse 6. For the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing.
Give to everyone what you owe them. If you owe them taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honour, then honour. If our lives were all about me, me, me, me, me, then tax makes absolutely no sense.
Why would I take my hard-earned cash and give it to someone else to spend on other people? I'd use it myself for my own benefit, surely. But of course, that's not what life's about, and it's not what God wants for us.
Paul hits the nail on the head in verses 8 to 10. I'll just read verse 8 for you. Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another. For whoever loves others has already fulfilled the law.
[7:05] This ultimately is what governments exist for, although they may not think of it in such terms, to encourage us to love one another, to force us to look beyond ourselves to the needs of others.

I don't know if you've ever looked at your payslip, at the tax deducted from your salary, and thought, that's love that I'm paying out there.
Strange. I know to think about it that way, but it's true. It's an act of love. You're giving something away so that it will do good for others in the form of schools, hospitals, infrastructure, paying our public servants, whatever you may think about them.
You can probably think of countless other things that I haven't mentioned. Doing our part in paying for stuff that benefits others, that's showing love for your neighbour. And not only that, it shows that we value these things.
What we spend our money on is an indicator of what we value, what we think is important. Think about the things you spend money on for a moment.
[8:19] Food, heating your house, clothes, treats for yourself, for the people that you care about. I'm sure many people in this room also give money to Christchurch through your bank account or in the basket on that little space age gizmo that we keep plugging.

I'm sure you do that because you believe in the work that Christchurch does in seeing God's will done and the gospel proclaimed in Clevedon and beyond. Maybe you also give to charities for similar reasons because you believe that the work that they do is important.
Well, Paul encouraged the Roman church to pay tax and in doing so, he encourages us to put our money where our mouth is and really value the work of our government.
But that doesn't just mean sitting there and applauding everything that they do. No, no, it's far more exciting than that. To really believe in and value a government, we must long for it to be the best that it can possibly be.
And for Christians, that means having a government that points to the coming rule and reign of God when Jesus returns. So, when we see our government failing at that, when we see injustice, when we see the needy not being served, when the voice of hatred is louder than the voice of love, what else can we do but act?

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[9:46] Let's hold those in authority to account. Call for them to act with justice and righteousness. Not because we hate our government, not because we're frustrated with our government, but because we long for them to submit to the, because we long to submit to our government under God.

Because we want people in authority to be people worth submitting to. So let's call out for them to be the best they can be and above all, let's pray for our leaders as well.
Pray that they would govern wisely with justice and honour. Pray that they would know Jesus as their Lord and seek to do his will. We have an Advent election coming up.
A time now when the church looks, celebrates the coming of Jesus and looks for his coming again in the future.
Will we see God's kingdom coming this year? And will we see God's will done on earth as it is in heaven? Amen.

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