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Do Christians Have to Obey the Government?

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Series: Lived Out
Romans 13:1-14

BIG IDEA – GOD'S DESIGN FOR GOVERNMENT AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GOOD CITIZEN WITHOUT COMPROMISING YOUR FAITH

Good morning, Two Cities Church. It's getting a little cold outside. We are officially in the "brr" months…September, October, November, December. It keeps getting colder. We want to let you know about something very important on the calendar. By the way, we do not host events that could have been emails, so we're telling you this because it's really important.

If you've ever been to one of our prayer and worship nights (we call them *Multiply Nights*), our Builders Night is a Multiply Night on steroids. We're moving it to Friday night. Guys, if the tenth anniversary video and our tenth anniversary celebration were all about the past, Builders Night is all about the future, so we want you and your family to be here. Donovan and his team are going to be leading us into worship, and I'm going to be sharing with you where we're headed next.

Also, this Friday… Can I hear from all the men? "Ho! Ho! Ho!" Don't be ashamed. That's right. Okay, listen. Men, we have a men's night, a men's gathering this Friday night. Let's go. Are you excited? You'd better show up. You need to bring somebody with you too. We love the men in our city. We all know there are one or two guys you know who fell out of church or are de-churched or unchurched. They need to be here, guys.

I told you before… And I checked the FedEx tracking. The gifts get here tomorrow. I'm giving each of you (I'm not telling you what it is yet; you have to come) something special and individual. You're not going to want to miss it. Listen. We want strong men in this church. Strong men are not the problem; silent, weak, passive men are. So, we're going to be coming together and looking at God's Word.

My goal, literally, is I want to strengthen the men of our church by God's Word to better serve women and children. So, that's what we're going to do. You don't want to miss it. Let's pray. Let's particularly pray for the men, because men need encouragement, and they very rarely get it. As I've met a lot of young men, here's what I've realized: very few men ever get encouraged. All they need is a very little bit of encouragement, and almost no one has ever given it to them. Let's pray.

Lord, we're going to pray particularly for the men in our church. We'll pray for the women with the women's encounter later, but, Lord, we just take a moment to pray for the men…fathers, husbands, sons, brothers. I pray against the spirit of fear and the spirit of discouragement, which makes men focus on their past and be afraid of the future.

I pray that you would bring together men. I pray DNA Groups would come with each other. I pray Community Group men would come with each other. I pray that it would be the right time to do a "Come and see" for men who are far from God but close to us. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right, guys. You can open up your Bible to Romans 13. We're going to come back to Romans 12. We're not skipping it. Today we're going to be talking about God and government. It's interesting. My mom and dad were in town. They were at the 9:00 service. Love them. Dad was in town because I was playing with him in a golf tournament. You play all of these different matches.

Yesterday, I played two different matches, and in the second match, I met this guy. I'm doing the pleasantries. "Hi, my name is Kyle." We're talking about our kids, and when we start talking he goes, "Oh, I know who you are." He said it in kind of a warm way, so I said, "Yeah, hey." He says, "Oh, yeah, we visited your church a couple of times, and we liked it, but then we came one time and you talked about the government, and my wife doesn't want to go back." I thought, "I cannot invite him to church tomorrow."

We're doing it again. I think, in the history of this church, I've talked about God and government two or three times as it has come up, because that's what happens. It's actually a very timely message because on July 4, we just celebrated 250 years as a nation, but we're actually still a really young nation. When Paul writes this letter today, he writes it to the capital city in the Roman Empire, and the Roman Empire lasted a thousand years.

I was in London this summer. There are pubs in London older than our nation. But we all love July 4. Right? What do we do on July 4? We blow things up. Amen? We cook a lot of meat, you buy your half-off mattress, and we say, "Praise the Lord." I want to talk to you

guys about something. I'll give you the "*Reader's Digest*" version. There's a lot of debate on the founding of our nation.

When I was doing ministry at Duke, I took a class at Duke Divinity that was all on this subject, so I actually know a decent bit about this. The question is…*Was America founded as a Christian nation?* The honest answer is it's complex. If you're like, "America was definitely founded as a Christian nation," then you're like, "Look at George Washington and the Declaration of Independence. You know, nature's law and God."

Then, if you're on the other side, you go, "Well, what about Thomas Jefferson? What about Benjamin Franklin? What about the whole idea that in our Constitution, God isn't mentioned one time?" But on the other hand… "Well, yeah, but there are all of these allusions in our Constitution. Guess what? The most quoted other text in our whole Constitution is the book of Deuteronomy."

Here's what I want you to know. This isn't about the founding of America today, but I want you to know this. There's no doubt that America was founded as a nation where Christianity could run free. What we're going to talk about today is what our faith looks like in the public square.

What you're going to hear today is people want your faith to be privatized. They don't mind your faith as long as your Christian faith… I mean, they'll bring their "Love equals love" bumper sticker, and they'll put their rainbow flag in their cubicle, but they would like you to keep your faith in your heart and in your home. They would like you to take your entire Christian faith, and if you could just keep it in two places, behind your eyes and between your ears…

If you'll just keep it right there, everything will be fine. In fact, if you don't, they'll call you a derogatory phrase: a *Christian nationalist*, which is the new term. It used to be the *religious right*. It used to be the *moral majority*. It used to be the *Bible thumpers*. It used to be the *fundamentalists*. There's nothing new under the sun. It keeps being repackaged.

Part of what I'm going to call you to today is it's time to be a real Christian and be a Christian in public. That's all. If you do that, you're going to be called things. I've been called worse than a Christian nationalist. It's fine. So, here's what we're going to do. Why am I talking about this? Because Romans 13:1-7 is the clearest and longest passage in the entire New Testament on God and government.

So, that's what we're going to do. We're just going to read it, and we're going to talk about it together. Let's look at it. Romans 13: ***"Let every person…"*** So, it's talking about you. Look at your neighbor right now and say, "You ain't the exception." There's not an

asterisk next to this verse. Some of you think there's an asterisk next to this verse, and then you flip to the back of the Bible and there's a picture of you saying "exception." There's not.

"Let every person…" That's you and me. ***"…be subject…"*** We don't like *that* word. Don't worry. It just means submissive. ***"…to the governing authorities."*** Imagine Paul writing that in his days. ***"For there is no authority except from God…"*** Every battle is about authority. ***"…and those that exist have been instituted by God."*** We're going to talk about that. Government was God's idea.

"Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed…" But what do you do with Adolf Hitler and Stalin and Mao? We'll talk about that. ***"…and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad."*** Notice, in Romans 13, Paul is not talking about the fallen human reality but the biblical ideal.

"Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be…" Here it is. We can't escape it. Paul is like, "Don't try to escape it. I'm writing it down twice."

"Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this…" Did you know I was going to preach on this today? ***"…you also pay taxes…"*** The IRS, right here in the Bible. Here it is. ***"…for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."***

All right. We're going to do a lot today. Put your thinking caps on. For both of you who take notes, there are going to be a lot of notes today. Listen. Here's what we're doing. First, I want to talk to you about how the state and the church should interact. I'm going to tell you four ways… I mean, this is maybe the only good thing about being 2,000 years into church history. We've tried everything.

The state and the church has been a complex issue since Paul wrote… That's why he's writing Romans. There are four ways you can organize the state and the church. The first three are bad, so when I say these, don't be like, "Yeah!" The first three are bad, so don't be cheering for them, because I know what's coming. Then I'll tell you the fourth one.

The first one (this is bad) is the state controls the church. Does anyone want to live in China? We want to reach China for Jesus, but I don't know if anyone wants to live in

China. Why? Because it's a state-run church. I've been to China twice. The last time I was in China was 2014. It was a long time ago. I'm just telling you, here's what happens. By the way, everything you've ever heard about China is true. *Everything*. Big church, small church, revival, persecution…it's all true, because it's so big.

Here's what happened. China has a state church. One of the things I was told by somebody is in the state church, the Bibles they give you don't have the book of Acts and the book of Revelation. Well, that's interesting. The book of Acts is how you get it started, and the book of Revelation is how everything ends.

What else is interesting is they vet the sermons of the preachers. Could you imagine if someone was vetting my sermon? "It was supposed to be 50 minutes, but now it's 4 minutes. Here are the three things I'm allowed to say." They put a picture of the president of China in the church, and they take out the cross. Obviously…let's just think about this…we do not want the state controlling the church.

The second one. Do we want the church to control the state? The answer is also *no*. We don't want religion to run politics. Islam is very different, but that's what happened in Iran after 1979. Religion runs politics. Let me explain to you why, as a Christian… Because you might think, "Well, why would we not want the church to control the state?" Here's a really simple answer, but you have to think about it: we don't want anybody thinking they're a Christian just because they're a citizen.

This is what happens. We have enough church history to know (this has happened before) when the church controls the state, people think they're Christians just because they're in that nation. This is very important. We don't believe faith can be forced. We don't believe in coercion; we believe in conversion. We would never want to put the church in a situation where it starts to persecute… By the way, when the church controls the state, it leads to a lot of people just saying they're Christians. It leads to a lot of hypocrisy. You don't want that.

Okay, the third one: the state favors the church. Now, that doesn't sound too bad, if you think about it, except that what ends up happening is when the state favors the church (this is well documented), the church becomes soft and fat and weak. Right? What's the old saying? "Don't bite the hand that feeds you." All of a sudden, if the state started giving all this extra stuff to pastors and churches, you'd say, "Well, don't talk about *that* issue. Don't upset *this* person." The church would lose its prophetic arm.

So, the biblical model Paul describes here is the church and the state are partners. They stay in their own lane. Here's what you actually want. Someone famously said this. I don't know who it was. We want as much Christianity in the government as possible and

as little government in our Christianity as possible. They're partners. They have different lanes.

Let me explain how this works. We're going to get back to the text in a minute. I read it to you. I want to get the big framework. God gave three institutions: the family, the church, and the state. This is worldview paradigm shaping. You'll see this gets really practical. We'll start with the family. The family is such an important unit. Think about it. Israel was 400 years without a king. They were never a day without a family.

The government tries to do a lot of things. Guess what it can't do? It can't create children. The family is so important. In fact, for each of these institutions, God gives a symbol. What is the symbol for the family? The rod in Proverbs. That's the symbol for the family. I know some of you go, "We don't discipline Timmy." We know. He's in our kids' ministry. We would like you to take the rod and discipline him.

Think about this. The family is so important because it's comprehensive. It's also the first government and the first church. It brings children into the world and hopefully in 18 years (some of you took 25 years) raises them to maturity and raises them in the fear and admonition of the Lord and, no matter what school they send or don't send them to, is responsible for their education and their spiritual development. It's super important. That's the family.

Then there is the church. What is the symbol of the church? I find this interesting. God gave every one of these a symbol. The keys. In Matthew 16, Peter is given the keys to the church. Now, what does this mean? The role of the church is to preach the Word of God and to make disciples. Why is it only in the church where there's baptism and the Lord's Supper? Because baptism is the way the church tells the individual person, "You really are a Christian." That's one of our jobs, so that people wouldn't be deceived.

I know you think… You're an American. You're like, "No, no. I cried at camp 10 years ago. I'm definitely a Christian." Maybe not. How many other things have you been wrong about yourself about? A lot. So, part of what the church does is come in and say, "Let me hear your testimony. Let me hear how you explain the gospel. Let me see your life. Man, let me baptize you, brother. You're a true believer. Let me baptize you, sister. You're a true believer." By the way, the church is made up of families. The church can't replace the family, and the family can't replace the church.

Then there is the government. We'll get into what it all does today. That's kind of what the sermon is about. Its symbol is the sword. Let me tell you this way. This is another good way to think about it. Churches have gotten this wrong, and then they get in a bunch of trouble, legally and other ways.

The job of the church is to care for the soul, and the job of the government is to take care of the body. Here's what I mean by that. This hasn't happened in our church, but say somebody does something terrible and commits some crime against somebody else in our church. Well, there have been churches in the past that don't understand the role of the church and the government, so they get the families together.

Something terrible happened. Maybe some kid was molested or something like that. Stuff like this has happened in other churches. They get the families together and say, "Well, you know what it says: 'Forgive one another and be reconciled.'" It's like, "Is that it?" No. It's like, "Forgive one another, and this guy needs to go to court and probably go to jail." There's a division of labor between what the church does… I can forgive somebody and still turn them in to authorities.

So, the first thing we have to understand is the role of the church and the state is they are partners. They have different lanes. They have different roles and responsibilities. Now we're going to go back to the text. Now we're going to talk just about the government. Here's what it says. Verse 1:

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."

The first thing we're told is that government was God's idea. Government is not a bad thing. I know, on both sides of the political aisle, especially if your candidate is not in there, it's so easy to hate on the government, but God gave the government authority.

By the way, if you're wanting to know a good definition of *authority*, it's the ability or power to make decisions that affect other people for good or bad. So, the government comes in. In fact, what's interesting is look at what he calls the people who work for the government.

Verse 3: ***"For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval…"*** Look at this. It's speaking about people in political office. ***"…for he is God's servant…"***

Literally, it's the same word that's used of my role: *minister*. The words *servant* and *minister* in the original language, Greek, are the same. So, in some ways, these public servants are ministers. Even if Nebuchadnezzar doesn't know it, he's a minister of the Lord. He's doing God's purposes. Look here.

"…for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience."

So, he talks about government officials. Or, just in general, think about all of the public servants. This would be first responders, police officers, our military. We love all of our first responders. Here we always say, "We stand beside or behind those who stand in front of us."

Now, here's what's interesting about today. Think about Paul's context. Paul's context is Nero. If you don't know about Nero, just write in your notes, "Bad guy." He is a bad guy. He killed his wife by kicking her to death while she was pregnant. Historical fact. He got so mad at the Christians, he covered them in tar and then lit them, while they were alive, to light up his gardens during a festival he was having at night. I mean, we're talking about a terrible guy.

Now, what's interesting about the time *we* live in… There are all different forms of government, by the way. Paul does not prescribe a certain form of government. There's monarchy and democracy and tyranny. There are a lot of different things people do.

Paul is saying that back then, they didn't get to pick their government officials. What's very interesting about our moment in history…very new for Christians…is we actually get to vote in and vote out the people who represent us. That's very unique. Well, Paul continues. Let me go back. I want to read these verses again because I want to show you one more thing.

"For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience."

There are other places in the Old Testament and New Testament that talk about government, but according to Romans 13, there are two main purposes for the government. I think they work. I know they're biblical. How you apply them and live them out we can discuss and debate and disagree on without dividing on. Basically, here they are: *punish evil* and *promote good*. Those are the two things the government is supposed to do.

The first is to *punish evil*. Basically, this is why they're given the sword. Where does government first show up? Well, in one sense, it shows up with Adam and Eve and having dominion, but officially, it shows up in Genesis, chapter 9. So, a long time ago. After the flood, Noah is there, and God basically gives him, as one of the things that establishes the government, the death penalty, a life for a life.

When the government has the sword, it's the ability to use force. The government can take your rights away. The government can put you in jail. The government can fine you, and the government can even take your life, but it's supposed to punish evil. Here's what it's supposed to do: protect people and protect property. That's it. Why is it punishing evil? Because it's trying to create a world in which we can flourish, so it's protecting people and protecting property.

One of the reasons Christians everywhere have always been pro-life from womb to tomb, the reason Christians are so passionate about the unborn… Whenever we do that or go to a pregnancy care walk… A long time ago, when I was in college, I went and did one of those pro-life peaceful protests.

I chose the nicest sign I could. I literally picked up the sign that said, "Adoption is an option." I was like, "This is nice." I just remember that. People were giving me half a peace sign a lot. I'll tell you that. We were on the side of a road, and people were fake swerving like they were going to hit us. That was my first experience of the pro-life movement. I'm like, "This is pretty intense."

The church is not trying to get political. The church is just trying to say to the government, "Listen, guys. You have a very simple job. It's a big job, but it's a very simple job. You are supposed to protect life, and somehow we've made being in your mother's womb the least safe place in America to live."

So, you're supposed to protect people, and then you're supposed to be able to protect property. This goes back to the Ten Commandments. Two of them have to do with property. "Do not steal" and "Do not covet" are two commands that have to do with property.

It's pretty simple. Christians can debate about the death penalty and different things like that, but the government is supposed to punish evil, and they're doing that to create order so that people and property can be protected so we can flourish. Here's the second part. It's supposed to *promote good*.

Now, here's the thing about the government. The government is supposed to *promote* good, but the government can't *make* you good. That's where the church comes in, preaches the gospel, and Christ changes the heart. That's what makes you good. But the

government is supposed to promote good. Now, here's the big debate. I'm just giving you the big debates on this. The big debate is…*What does it mean to promote good?*

Hasn't every politician you've ever met…? It doesn't matter…Democrat, Republican, independent. What do they say as soon as they get into office, as soon as they want to pass some legislation, some bill? What's the classic phrase? "This is for the good of the people." That's interesting. Everything is for my good. That's a big category. I don't know if everything is for my good.

There are two views on this. One view says what this means is the government is supposed to create an environment, mostly by creating order, peace, and prosperity, where you can pursue good. That would be more of a limited government view. The bigger government view is "No, the job of the government is literally to do good. So, here's health care, and here's more and more Social Security, and here's more education."

Again, Christians can disagree, but I want you to know the battle is over what role the government has in producing good. Okay, enough about that. Now I want to talk about *our* role, because there are a lot of questions. So, what's our role? Let's go here. I'll show you this. We'll go back to verse 6. ***"For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing."***

Look. There's always that one Christian guy who doesn't have a license and lives in the woods and doesn't think he needs to pay taxes or something like that. The Bible is so clear we have to pay taxes. Jesus Christ himself… You can just do the Jesus juke on somebody. Jesus paid taxes. He was so poor he had to catch a fish, and there was a coin in the fish's mouth. That doesn't really work for us. You can try it, but there's not going to be anything there. You're going to have to work and then pay.

Here's the interesting thing about taxes. Why do we pay taxes? Because it costs a lot of money to run our nation. As you guys know, we have the Northwest Boulevard property. We paved *that* parking lot. We paved *this* parking lot. I know what it costs just to pave a parking lot, so every time I get on the highway… I'm kind of weird. Most times I'm driving, I'm like, "This road was so unbelievably expensive." I can't even handle it. When I drive to Asheville, I'm like, "I don't even want to know how much it cost to build this road."

Here's the thing. Free always costs somebody something. Somebody pays for free. Taxes are interesting. I remember my first job. I was working at McDonald's. You know, "Do you want fries with that?" That's what I did. I was 15, and I got paid $5.15 an hour, which

isn't a lot of money. This was back in 2000 or 2001 when we rode our dinosaur to work and all that kind of stuff.

Back then there was no direct deposit, at least not for me, and there were no smartphones. You got your check every two weeks, and then you took it to the bank. So, I had this check. I'm like, "I worked *this* many hours. That doesn't equal $5.15 times that." I flip it on the back, and I'm like, "Who is FICA? Who is this guy who's taking all my money?" Right?

Here's what's interesting. Taxes are taken from you. The government doesn't ask nicely; it takes it from you, and if you don't pay them by August 15… You know, that whole thing. What's interesting… I looked this up. The average person in America, based on the average household income of the modern American, is going to pay somewhere between 24 and 34 percent every year in taxes.

What's interesting is taxes are very different than the tithe. The tithe is something God doesn't take from you. He's asking you to bring it back to him as first and best and as a form of worship. Interestingly, he says, "Even though I own all of it, I want you to bring back the first 10 percent," which is actually even less than what the government takes from us.

But there's more than just paying taxes. It has to be a disposition of our hearts. This is where I want to go back to verse 1. He says, ***"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."*** So, I want to talk about being submissive to the government and for how long and to what extent and all that kind of stuff.

Now, whenever you talk about submission… I've been doing this for 10 years, and most weeks of the year I'm up here. Every time I talk about submission, I just know people don't like it. I have to hype myself up before I get out here to tell women, "Wives, submit to your husbands." Like, "Ah, here it comes again. Get ready." And I have to put all of the airbags around it. "I know your husband isn't the greatest guy ever."

I want to talk about submission. It's something that, when I talk about it…let's just admit it…most of you don't like it. I start talking about submission, and you start sweating like Mike Tyson in a spelling bee. You get all nervous, like a cat with water. I want to talk about this. By the way, submission is beautiful. Here's my favorite definition of *submission*: an invitation for somebody else to lead. Isn't that amazing? That's what it is. When a teenager submits to his parents, he's inviting them to lead.

Why don't we like submission? Because we're like our first parents Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve in the garden… What's the issue? What's the heart issue? What's the root issue?

I know they ate the fruit. What's the issue? They didn't submit to God. Do you know what the first ever war was?

I know there are a lot of wars going on right now. The first war was a war in heaven. The first war was a war about government, heavenly government. The first war was a war between Satan and God in which Satan didn't want to submit to the government of God. As you know, it didn't go very well for him.

We struggle with this posture of submission. It's very cultural. Our struggle with submission is more Western than it is Eastern. First of all, we're Americans. You know, "Amer-I-can" kind of thing. We can do it. The culture of the 60s made rebellion seem cool, where everybody thinks their teenager needs to go through a season of rebellion. They don't.

Here's the question. At what point do you say, "I'm not going to submit to the government anymore in this area because they're telling me to do something that's unbiblical and wrong"? In the same way that I would say, "Wives, submit to your husbands…" Well, not if they're asking you to sin.

Here's one of the phrases I hope will stick with you. I'm not a prophet, but we have crazy days ahead of us, I'm sure. All of us do, in nation and government and all this other stuff. Here's the phrase: *you want to be a good citizen until you can no longer be a good Christian*. We want to be the best citizens ever. Most Christians *are* good citizens. We want to be a really good citizen, an A-plus, best citizen, until we can no longer be a good Christian.

Guys, this is a question they had to ask with Adolf Hitler. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who's a complex character, planned to assassinate Adolf Hitler, and he wrestled with it. "As a Christian, should I kill an unbeliever who I know will go to hell? Do I give him time to repent? He's not repenting. Do I try other things?" These are the different things they wrestled with.

Here's what's going to happen. There's something happening in our society right now. If you're new, we're about to get real for a second…*real*, real. There are two big tensions in our society. The first one is easier to talk about. The first one is people today want to talk about… I'm talking about the elites, the secular media, the "experts." You'll notice this. They want to talk about freedom of worship instead of you having religious liberty.

Freedom of worship, in their minds, even though we know worship is all of life… When they say, "Freedom of worship," they mean, "Go ahead and do your devotionals in your home. If you want to send your kids to youth group, that's fine. If you raise your hands in

worship and sing some songs, that's great. That's freedom of worship, but don't bring it anywhere else." We believe in religious liberty.

This is the big thing about religious liberty. This is the second thing I want to talk to you about. There is an unavoidable conflict coming. It's already here. There's an unavoidable conflict coming between erotic liberty, or sexual liberty (same thing), and religious liberty.

Just this week… I didn't say this at the 9:00 because someone after the 9:00 told me about this. I guess just this week, Gavin Newsom in California is passing this new law to make any business organization (maybe including churches; they're not sure) have to do anti-hate speech training if they have more than five employees. You know what that's all about. That's all about the pronoun police.

What's going to happen is… You can't have two highest liberties. The world wants to say sexual liberty is the highest liberty. "I want to be transgender. I want to sleep with whomever I want to sleep with. I want to call marriage whatever I want to call marriage. I want to force you to use my pronouns." I mean, all of *that* stuff.

Then there's religious liberty. Obviously, biblically and historically in our nation, religious liberty is the higher value. I'm just telling you there are some of you… We'll talk about this as we close today too. For some of you, it's time for you to stand out as a Christian at work, and it might be time for you to stand up.

Don't do things at work that make you feel weak. Don't go to the goofy DEI training that makes you feel totally weak inside every time. You're like, "Well, I just won't say anything." Yeah. This is a tip about being brave: it never gets easier to be brave. Right now is your number one time to be brave.

Every time you choose the comfortable thing, it's way harder to be brave. Everyone is like, "Elon Musk is so brave because he's a multibillionaire and was a trillionaire." No. Elon Musk has been brave his whole life. When it finally came time to be brave with billions of dollars, he was brave with billions of dollars because he has been brave his whole life. You do not become brave by being more protected.

This is what happens with everybody. This is what happens to all of the college professors. "I'll say something eventually. I'll say something when I'm no longer an associate. I'll say something when I'm a full professor. Oh, yeah, I will. I'll say something when I finally get tenure." Then they never say anything, because they've been so safe and protected their whole life, they no longer have the ability to say what they think. So, you may need to speak up.

Here's where Paul is ending. Paul is like, "Here's what most of us need to do. Most of us just need to be a better neighbor in our nation." Look at this. Verse 8: ***"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."*** In other words, Paul goes, "There's only one debt you should owe. It's the debt of love, and you can never pay it off."

Let me tell you what this means. This is good for you to know. Let me first define who your neighbor is. I know we all want to say we love people. It's so easy to love random people. "Oh, yeah, I love this whole church, and I love our whole nation, and I love the city of Winston." Do you love your spouse? Do you love your kids? Do you love your coworkers? Do you love your classmates? Love the person in front of you.

Don't just love them in your heart. Some of you say, "Yeah, I really do love them." You love them in your heart. How about you love them with your words? How about you love them with your actions? He says you can never pay the debt of love. Here's what this means. This is so good to know. You can never be too loving.

You know, Stoicism is becoming very popular right now, particularly with young men, because young men are lost, so Stoicism makes sense to them. One of the lines of Stoicism is "Everything in moderation." You've heard that. Well, everything in moderation except for the fruit of the Spirit.

Think about this. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Guess what? What does Paul say after he mentions all of those? He goes, "Against such things there is no law." Do you ever wonder what that means? "What do you mean, Paul, there's no law?" He means you can't max them out. Did you ever go, "You know what? I was too self-controlled. I regret it. Too much self-control there"? No.

You can't be too loving. Now, you can do things you *think* are loving that aren't loving, and that was wrong. Don't start saying, "I want to do the loving thing." Here's what that means. If someone ever tells you, "I want to do the loving thing," here's what they mean: "I'd like to do the easy and comfortable thing." Loving means committed to another person's highest good, which means I might want to upset current Kyle to help future Kyle because I'm committed to him across time.

It ends with this. He says, ***"For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"***

He says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's a summary of all the teaching, which is great. We need a lot of help, so thanks for summarizing all 10 commandments and saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's really helpful. Here's the problem.

On my sabbatical, I read the great works of C.S. Lewis, the compilation, and I loved all of it. *The Screwtape Letters* is a book about an uncle demon. It's fictional. It's a book about an uncle demon writing a bunch of letters to a nephew demon on how to tempt his new Christian convert.

He's all frustrated because the guy meets a good Christian girl, and he's like, "All right." They get married, so the uncle keeps writing these letters. He says, "Now that they're married…" And this is a word for some of you. This is what the demon says: "Now that they're married, the way to make them unhappy is to have each of them focus on being unselfish instead of being loving toward the other person."

He said, "What we've done…" He was talking about the demons. He goes, "What we've done is we've taken a positive attribute, love, and replaced it with a negative thing that's self-focused, being unselfish." How many of you keep a sacrificial scorecard? This destroys me. I've seen this.

"Well, you were gone all weekend, so I had the kids the whole weekend. I hope you know… Look here. Look how unselfish I was." Oh, *that's* why you watched the kids. You watched the kids so you could *watch* you watch the kids. It's this form of self-righteousness. It could be husband or wife.

The husband says, "Well, I guess she didn't notice I came home three hours early from work. Some people asked me to do my hobby this weekend, but I said no. So unselfish of me. I hope she noticed I did the laundry. I'm so unselfish." Somehow, you made that all about you again.

How about you do the laundry because you love her? How about you come home early from work because you love her? How about you don't engage in your hobby because you love her? Do you see the change? If you're becoming bitter and resentful toward people, it's because you're focusing on being unselfish instead of being loving. Now, that doesn't mean you're a doormat. You need to have conversations about all this, but you get what I'm saying.

Here's where Paul ends. Paul ends with the future. Paul ends with the government to come. Look here. ***"Besides this you know the time…"*** Americans are the most time-obsessed people. Until a couple hundred years ago, no one knew what time it was if the church bell didn't ring. Now it's on our phone and on our watch and on every device we have.

"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." What does Paul mean? Paul goes, "Wake up. Jesus Christ is going to return." This is what he's saying. When he

says, "Your salvation is nearer than when you first believed," you're like, "Am I only partly saved? I thought when I gave my sin and self to Jesus, he saved me." Yes, but what he's talking about here is a future and final salvation that happens when you die or Christ returns.

Most people, when you talk about the return of Christ, are like, "Yeah, it's a real thing, but he hasn't returned. It has been a long time. He hasn't returned in a lot of other Christians' lifetimes. He's probably not going to return in mine." Well, guess what? You're still going to die. What's the difference between your death and the return of Christ for you personally? Not much of a difference.

We're all meeting Jesus in less than 100 years, some of us in less than 10. What death is to the individual, the return of Christ is to everybody. Here's the interesting thing. I don't know that there's a better litmus test to diagnose yourself spiritually than to go, "How would I feel if Jesus Christ came back today?"

I heard the story of a missionary couple. They were up in some mountain area, and their vehicle almost tipped over. It basically did tip over. The door opened up. They thought they were both going to fall out of the vehicle or the vehicle was going to flip and go down the mountain. Thankfully, in kind of a miraculous thing, it didn't. They finally calmed down when it was all over. The vehicle is off to the side, and the wife says to the husband, "I was ready."

What an amazing thing to be able to say. Once she finally calmed down… "We almost died. Thank God we didn't die." Then she looks at her husband and goes, "I was ready." Paul says, "Get ready by dressing for another place." Look here. ***"The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness…"*** He's using the language of clothing.

"…and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

A friend of mine was heading to a wedding. Weddings still today in American culture… It's like the last formal event we have. He was actually in the wedding. When you're in the wedding, you have the full tuxedo that matches all of the other groomsmen.

So, he's heading to this wedding. He has his full tuxedo on. He's somewhere in Tennessee or North Carolina or something. He's driving through the mountains, and he realizes, "My car is about to get out of gas. I'm not going to make it to the wedding." So, he pulls into this rinky-dink old gas station, but there are a lot of people there.

He says he gets out at the gas station and starts to pump gas, and he has this realization: "I'm in my tuxedo." He said he looks around, and everyone is kind of looking at him. "Why are you in a tuxedo at a down and dirty gas station?" Then, this is what he said: "I had to realize I wasn't dressed for where I was; I was dressed for where I was going." That's the Christian life.

Here's how you feel at work sometimes: like you're wearing a tuxedo pumping gas and everyone is looking at you like you're weird because you're a generous person or you forgive people or you actually believe Jesus Christ is going to return or you share your faith with other people. I want to encourage you to dress not just for where you are but for where you're headed.

You know what's interesting? Paul ends by telling us… He has this whole conversation on government and our role in it, and then he ends with the return of Christ and dressing for it. Why? Because one day Jesus Christ is going to split the sky, and it's going to be the end of all political parties. It's going to be the end of all forms of government, and Jesus Christ is going to run a one-party kingdom where he reigns and rules forever. Amen.

Now, here's how that started. We talked about submission. Do you understand that Jesus Christ submitted? He submitted to God the Father by becoming a man. He submitted to God again in the garden, saying, "Not my will be done, but your will be done." In fact, our salvation was accomplished through the submission of Jesus. Here's what else is powerful: the way you become a Christian is by submitting to Jesus. Submission is the first step of salvation.

In a minute, we're going to sing and pray. If you've never given your life to Jesus Christ before, I want you to come down to the altar, and I want you to submit to him as Lord and Savior and treasure of your life. But there's another group of you… As I was talking, you know that you have been focusing on being unselfish instead of loving. I want you to get down here, and I want you to say, "Lord, help me to be a loving person and not a self-righteous person who's always keeping the sacrificial scorecard."

Then there's a group of you… You know, we've talked about the church, we've talked about the family, and we've talked about the state. I want you each to find your role in all three of those domains. You may be a single guy, and you come down here and go, "God, get me ready to lead my future wife and my future family."

Some of you may need to get down here and go, "God, I repent. The church is God's plan A to reach the nations, and I've been on the sidelines. Today, Lord, I submit. I want to get on the front lines." Some of you need to run for mayor. Some of you moms need to get on the PTA. You just need to get invested and involved.

So, if you'll bow your heads and close your eyes, I want to invite you forward in a minute. I want to invite you forward to submit to Christ in a new way. I want to invite you forward to trust God, even as we head into an election cycle. I want to invite you forward to say, "Lord, what place am I supposed to take in the family?"

Some men may need to get down here and say, "I'm recommitting to leading my family." Some men and women may need to get down here and say, "I'm recommitting to be deeply invested in the life of a local church," and others just say, "Wherever I am, I'm committing to stand out, to stand up, and if God calls me, to stand against." We ask this all in Jesus' name. Please stand and come forward.