

This will no doubt be one of the most controversial sermons that I preach, not because it is not Scriptural, but because it is not cultural. As predicted in Scripture, the latter days will usher in a spirit of lawlessness. (2Thessalonians 2:7-8) Lawlessness is an anti-authority spirit and it has crept in to even the most conservative aspects of our culture. It has always been an aspect of human society, but as we draw closer to the end of the age it is dramatically on the rise.

To understand what the Bible means by this, we must first renew our definition of sin. What is sin? The first thing that comes to most Christians' minds is sexual sin. We may think of the Ten Commandments since we just went over them. You might even think of the one thing that you struggle with, your own personal weakness. But at its core, sin is disobeying God. It is rejecting His authority and right to tell us what to do. (Ephesians 5:6)

The earliest examples in Scripture are usually the defining ones. Look at Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They had everything. To be free, they needed to have the opportunity to disobey. They could not choose to walk with God unless there also was another choice, a choice to disobey Him. He only gave them one command. Like all commands, the command was for their good. (Genesis 2:16-17)

They had everything man could want, the perfect spouse, the perfect environment, and the glorious privilege of communing with God. The serpent cunningly invited Eve to question God's motives and character. He called God a liar by suggesting that God's warning was selfish in nature. (Genesis 3:5) Then he turned her attention away from all she had to the one thing forbidden to her. In doing so she doubted the Word of God. **She made her choice to give in to the spirit of lawlessness.** She believed Satan's lie that in rejecting God's word she could be as God. She chose to reject God's authority and be her own authority.

Adam did as well, but not for the same reason. Adam was not deceived by the cunning of Satan's lies. (1Timothy 2:14) Some believe he simply was unwilling to give up Eve. I think he could see that separation was inevitable if he did not join her, and so he too rejected God's authority to retain the thing he wanted most.

Authority has become a word with negative connotations. Certainly this is because many have abused it. We are repulsed by the misuse of authority for personal gain. But in our disgust for the abuse of authority, we have developed distaste for all authority. Like the first couple, we make choices to reject God's authority because of our own desires. We set ourselves up as our final authority.

Salvation is all about rejecting the right to claim authority over our own life and giving that authority to God, the One to whom it rightfully belongs. (John 14:23-24) Of course we can only do that when we become a new creation by accepting what God has done for us. The early church motto of "Jesus is Lord" was an emphasis on that very theme. The final authority in their lives was Jesus. (Romans 10:9)

Commented [Paul1]: 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 (ESV)
⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.
⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

Commented [Paul2]: Ephesians 5:5-6 (ESV)
⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Commented [Paul3]: Genesis 2:16-17 (ESV)
¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,
¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Commented [Paul4]: Genesis 3:4-5 (ESV)
⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.
⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Commented [Paul5]: 1 Timothy 2:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Commented [Paul6]: John 14:23-24 (ESV)
²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.
²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

Commented [Paul7]: Romans 10:8-9 (ESV)
⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);
⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

So now that we've seen that **the core of sin is rejecting God's authority**, and that the new life in Christ is accepting God's authority, we should define just what is God's authority.

The Scriptures clearly define four areas of authority. Those of you that saw the Truth Project will recognize them, governmental, church, family, and employer. Today we'll look at the first two.

All of the areas fall under divine authority. Let's look at our key passage, Romans 13:1-2(ESV) 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.* ² *Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.* That is quite a warning! The context is civil government, as the text goes on to indicate, but it is applicable to all authority that God places over man. That is seen in the phrase, "*for there is no authority except from God*" God is sovereign. He sets up kings and takes them down. (Daniel 2:21) He has appointed authority in every sphere of life because He is a God of order. (1Corinthians 14:33)

Because I am a product of the 60s and live in the same culture you do, and have suffered the abuse of authority, I know many of you are about to tune out. Please bear with me, because there are important spiritual truths that will bless your life. I will show you them from Scripture. We will discuss the times when Scripture gives us the liberty to disobey authority and when it does not. My hope is that you will submit to divine authority as is revealed in God's word.

I have tried to share some of the points I will share with you this week and the next and find that many Christians have made up their mind and don't want to be confused by the Word of God. That is a choice to disobey. That is taking authority into your own hands and rejecting divine authority. Some say that is my interpretation. It is the clear Word of God. We reject it at our own peril. It will cost us. God gives instruction for our good. (Deuteronomy 10:13)

We are approaching our midterm elections in the USA. The rhetoric is heated and accusations are flying. Where should Christians be in all this?

Because we are in a society where we can have a say, **we should be standing up for godly principles. We should not be attacking individuals.** Many of you have different views of candidates. Please, for the unity of the body, don't attack the individuals, especially if they are in office. Speak of the issues and ask how God would have us vote on the issues. You can agree to disagree on the issues, but stop the denigrating remarks of those God placed in authority, regardless of which party you belong.

God instituted authority and it was His sovereign will that they are in office. This does not mean that they are good people or that they are doing a good job or in any way pleasing to God. It does mean He placed them there for His purposes. Don't resist what God has appointed or you will incur judgment. Is that clear enough in our text this week?

Commented [Paul8]: Daniel 2:21 (ESV)
²¹ He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;

Commented [Paul9]: 1 Corinthians 14:33 (ESV)
³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,

Commented [Paul10]: Deuteronomy 10:13 (ESV)
¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

Consider this. When the Apostles wrote the New Testament they were writing under Nero and Caligula. I don't think it was a coincidence that they lived under two tyrants that history considers two of the worst despotic crazies of all time. That is so that whoever was in power in our own day could not be considered any worse. And what was the condemning passages the Apostles wrote about those evil men? Not a word! Why? Were they afraid? I've been accused of that. Some liberal commentators think that is true of the Apostles. I say emphatically, "No way!" They knew the kingdom of God was the only thing worth dying for and they did die for it. That is not the action of cowards. By God's grace I'll die for the kingdom of God and the advance of the Gospel but I will not lay down my life to resist any earthly authority that God has placed in power. The Apostles knew that to fight political power was not only a distraction, but actually resisting God.

Whenever I talk about this subject, the case of Hitler always pops up, as if something in history could override the Word of God. Don't argue Scripture with history or experience. If you disagree you'd better find Scriptural grounds to argue. God allowed Hitler to be elected by the will of the people for his own purposes. I don't claim to understand the reason. I just know what the Bible declares. (1Peter 2:13-14) Was he worse than Caligula or Nero? Maybe in the sheer body count, but that is only because of advanced weaponry.

Civil authority keeps order. One thing worse than bad civil authority is anarchy. Authorities enforce the law. They keep at bay the spirit of lawlessness. God allows some evil rulers to be in place for His own purposes, and often that purpose is judgment.

The Apostle Paul commands the same submission in his letter to Titus. Titus 3:1-2 (ESV)⁴ *Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.* What a passage for our day! That is Christian conduct.

The next time a Christian emails you slandering any public official, will you have the courage to send them this passage? You know those circular emails that often ask at the end if you will stand up for what is right and pass on their email (their slander of a public official). Please send them back this reference. That takes a lot more guts! The truth of this passage is out of vogue in our nation. In fact, it is getting increasingly popular to personally attack officials and to take up unfounded charges against them. Stick to the issues. Refuse to participate in the personal attacks. Amen?

The next area where God appoints authority is in the church. God had expressed divine authority through the prophets. Since the establishment of the church at Pentecost, the authority rests with the elders of the local church. (Luke 16:16; Hebrews 13:17) **Wherever there was a group of believers, the Apostles appointed elders.** (Titus 1:5)

Elders were not a new system but a reworking of a much older system that goes all the way back to Moses. (Exodus 3:16) We have seen examples of how the elders in Moses time made good decisions and bad ones. Like government, elders are not perfect. Whenever man is involved, there is imperfection. That does not change the fact that

Commented [Paul11]: 1 Peter 2:13-14 (ESV)
¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,
¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

Commented [Paul12]: Luke 16:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

Commented [Paul13]: Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Commented [Paul14]: Titus 1:5 (ESV)
⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

Commented [Paul15]: Exodus 3:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt,

God placed them in authority and that they represent His authority. It is no wonder that much of the church of today often rejects the elder structure, as there is a tendency to reject all authority.

Some prefer the leadership of a single pastor, but in the New Testament, pastor was an interchangeable term with elder and there were always elders (plural) in every church. (Acts 14:23) The single pastor system developed later. This was partly due to the fact that one had to be educated to read the Scriptures in their original language and partly to practical ease of letting one man make the decisions. The plurality of elders means that they are all equals and can keep one another in check. It can be a slow process of coming to unity.

Can even this system go wrong? Of course, especially when we ignore the requirements for elders given in Scripture, but again, it is better than chaos. It is God's design and therefore the safest form of government a church can have. It is God's design for the church until His return. Hebrews 13:17 (ESV) *17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.* Just as we are to submit to governing authorities in society, we are to submit to the elders of the local church.

Jesus describes the way that the elders should lead in Matthew 20:25-28 (ESV). *25 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

They are to lead as Jesus led, by serving the congregation. That means to pray for you, share Scripture that can help you in your spiritual growth, teach classes, and encourage you. On rare occasions it also means discipline of someone that is troubling the flock or teaching false doctrine. It can mean making some tough decisions about doctrine or associations the church will have or not have. They should be led to their conclusions by prayer and sensing the leading of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:2-3)

We don't like the word "submit" because we would like to do things as we think best. When we do so, whether in regards to government of society or of the church, we reject the fact that God placed them there. Ultimately we reject God's word that has told us to submit. When that happens, we hear what the word says, but we refuse to do it, and like Eve, we make our own interpretation of God's character and motivations. We deceive ourselves into thinking we know best and come up with reasons to play god. (James 1:22)

I sometimes hear a member of the body of Christ tell me that the Holy Spirit is leading them differently. They do not want to submit to the decision of the elders. They take the subjective voice of the Spirit over the instruction of Scripture that is clear and direct. Our hearts can deceive us. (Jeremiah 23:26) Will the Holy Spirit contradict His Word? Please take to heart this guidance. **The subjective voice of the Spirit never trumps the clear, objective, written Word of God.** (1Corinthians 14:29) Submitting to

Commented [Paul16]: Acts 14:23 (ESV)

²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Commented [Paul17]: Acts 13:2-3 (ESV)

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Commented [Paul18]: James 1:22 (ESV)

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Commented [Paul19]: Jeremiah 23:26 (ESV)

²⁶ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart,

Commented [Paul20]: 1 Corinthians 14:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

God ordained authority is submitting to God. The rare exception to submission is when doing so would directly contradict a command of God. More often, rejecting God's leaders is just the desire to be the leader.

We have seen in an incredible string of coincidences the coming of the Tabernacle to exactly time with our study in Exodus. I was extremely concerned that I communicate exactly what God was saying. Those incredible coincidences are a comforting confirmation that God is indeed leading. I'm sorry more of you weren't here to hear the final message on the Tabernacle. Please listen to it on-line.

Well, the coincidences continue this week with the subject of authority. Let me quote to you a section from this week's women's Bible study on the Tabernacle. I had no idea that it was in the study this week when I was led to preach on authority. I can say with conviction that the Holy Spirit is crying out to those who have ears to hear. Listen to what the Spirit says to our church!

Bezalel was one of the two men assigned to do the design work on the Tabernacle. His name means "In God's shadow". Here is the quote: "Bezalel worked well under authority. Notice in Exodus 36:1-7 that Bezalel not only worked well under God's instruction but also submitted himself to the earthly authority God had designated – Moses. Authority is an important issue to God and one we struggle with deeply. We may not mind being under God's authority at times, but we often resist human authorities God places over us. Remember, God is sovereign. If you are where God has placed you – whether at home, on the job or at church – He has established the authority over you to work His glory in you! And while He expects us to submit to our authorities, He also empowers us for the difficult task." **Beth Moore, *A Woman's Heart*, pp 64-65** Please hear the Lord's heart! Submission is not easy, even to godly leaders, but God empowers us for that difficult task of humbling ourselves and working together in unity.

Next week I'll address what we are to do when authority runs amuck. What if you believe the Spirit is leading you in a direction contrary to His established authority? We'll also look at what the Bible says about employer and family authority.

Questions

- 1 What is sin?
- 2 Where does earthly authority come from?
- 3 When it comes to politics we should address the _____ not condemn the _____.
- 4 What did the Apostles say about Nero and Caligula?
- 5 Have you been living Titus 3:1-2?
- 6 What is God's authority in the local church?
- 7 Why should we submit to their leadership?
- 8 How are they to govern?
- 9 Go over the quote from Beth Moore.

