

Sermon 7-1-18 Honoring Our Government Romans 13:1-2

Dear Citizens and Friends of our Nation:

When the great inventor of the telephone, Alexander Graham Bell, prepared his epitaph on his gravestone, he wrote:

Alexander Graham Bell

Inventor-Teacher

Born Edinburgh, Scotland - March 3, 1847

Died a Citizen of the USA, 1922

Rather than listing his numerous inventions and honors he listed as his most cherished accomplishment that he was a citizen of the United States of America.

Soon we will remember the birthday of our nation on July 4th.

- Some of us will attend 4th of July parades
- Some of us may attend concerts with patriotic music
- Most of us will probably take in a display of fireworks or two

Why?

Why remember the birth of our nation? And what does our celebration of the birth of our nation have to do with our Christian faith?

Part of the answer is found in God's Word before us in Romans 13.

- God calls us to submit to the government
- God calls us to remember that government has been established by Him
- God wants us to honor our government.
 - God says in Romans 13:4 that the government is His servant
 - God says in Romans 13:7 that we are to give the government respect and honor

Theologians have long understood the role of the government in the life of a Christian and how honoring the government is connected to our faith in the Lord.

- The government cares for the bodily welfare of people

- The church cares for the spiritual welfare of people
- Both the government and the church are divinely sanctioned
 - Government is called God's Left Hand
 - Church is called God's Right Hand
- Both demand our support

We as Americans are fortunate to live in a nation which allows us to live in freedom.

We celebrate our nation not only because God has established its authority but also because we cherish the freedoms we have and remember the men and women of the past who fought and died for those freedoms.

In one of his letters, John Adams, our 2nd president wrote: "You will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom! I hope you will make a good use of it. If you do not, I shall repent in heaven that I ever took half the pains to preserve it."

If it were possible, how many similar words would one hear coming from the graves in countless battle fields!

We are here to honor our government and praise our Lord for the gift of government so that we may live our lives in peace and order.

Martin Luther said: "God wills that we honor the government as his minister, through which he bestows valuable blessings upon us...If you knew that someone had saved your child's life you would be heartily thankful to him. Why are you not thankful to your government which daily protects you, your wife, and children from murder? For if the government did not check the wicked people, when would we be safe? Therefore when you look upon your wife and children, you should bear in mind: these are God's gifts, which I may keep by means of the government. And as you love your children, so you should love your country."

The Apostle Paul in Romans 13 makes it clear that the government's authority has been established by God. Vv1-2

God establishes the government for the sake of order.

- anarchy is not God's way. "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace." I Cor 14:33
- The church thrives under law and order.
 - it thrives when there is peace and freedom to worship when and where we want
 - it thrives when there is peace and freedom to worship how we want

God's will is that we obey the State

* God is the authority behind the authority of the State ie 4th commandment

* God command us to "submit" to the authorities

- submit means "to line up under willingly"
- to refuse to do so is sin - sin against God

There may be times, however, when God expects us to be disobedient to the State.

- When the State commands us to do that which is contrary to God's Word
- Acts 5:19-20
- John Muehlhaeuser, a Lutheran pastor who moved from Germany to Wisconsin in the 1840's, was put in prison in Germany for sharing the gospel with people.
- The origin, right and power of the State lies with God.
- Our duty is to submit to it as long as we are not commanded to disobey God's will.

The government is not to be feared.

Paul says in Romans 13:3-5

Those who obey the government have nothing to fear.

Our obedience to the government comes from within as we obey the Lord.

Submit yourselves...

The Apostle Peter says: “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority...whether to the king...or to governors, who are sent by God to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.” I Peter 2:13-14

As believers we are not afraid when we see a policeman, right?

- Unless, of course, he is checking our speed
- But, overall, we see the policeman there to protect us not to harm us

We don’t have to fear the government!

- We have the freedom and right to speak up when we don’t agree with our government
- We have the freedom and right to vote the way we desire
- But we don’t have the freedom and right to rebel in sinful ways against our government
- for to rebel against the government would be to rebel against the Lord
- I will vote and do what I can within the framework of the law to change my government
- And when I criticize my government I must remember to do so with respect and honor

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I Corinthians 4:5ff

Those who willfully disobey the government have a reason to be afraid.
Romans 13:4

God wants wickedness kept in check.

- wickedness left unchecked would destroy society
- fear of punishment does keep the wicked in check
- force is necessary to keep the wicked in check – those who would willfully harm others
- Therefore, we need the police and military

Remember the government is God's servant Romans 13:6-7

- it carries out God's will
- the Greek word "servant" is used for religious duty
- "servant" is a job of priority and honor
- the government acts in God's name and will to keep order and peace

The government deserves our honor and respect

- we may not always agree with everything it does
- we may not always like personally the politicians
- we must always remember that God is the ultimate authority
- I Peter 4:13ff

What should those in government remember: "Rulers should remember that all they receive from the people is public property and not a means of satisfying private lust and luxury."

- John Calvin

The late Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam tells of giving the annual Memorial Day address at the National Monument at Gettysburg. Like most other speakers, he felt the need to conclude his speech by reciting Lincoln's famous address. After he finished he felt all had gone well. That is, until an old, old man made his way forward and remarked: "Son, you made an awful mess of Lincoln's speech." Oxnam asked: "What do you mean? I didn't miss a word of it. Here, look at my notes." The old man replied: "Oh, I don't need your notes. I know it by heart. You see, I heard it the first time around." By now Bishop Oxnam realized that this man had been present when Lincoln originally delivered his words. He

was curious about how his recitation had differed from that of the president. The old-timer explained it this way: “Abe put his hands out over the people like a benediction, and said, ‘That the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, should not perish from the earth.’ You got the words right, son, but you missed the message. You emphasized *government*; Lincoln talked about *people*.”

Prayer

Almighty God, we make our earnest prayer that thou wilt keep the United States in thy holy protection, and that thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplications, we beseech thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

-George Washington, written at Newburgh, June 8, 1783,
and sent to the governors of all the states