

Sermon Series – Reformation 500 Themes

The Two Kingdoms – Church and State

Text: Romans 13:1-10

¹Let 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. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For 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, ⁴for 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. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay 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.

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The 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." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Theme: A Christians We Have Dual Citizenship

There are some people in this world, who have citizenship in two countries. For instance, my sons are both Canadian and American because they were born in Canada, and I got them American citizenship as their father. As Christians we are a lot like that. We are citizens of this world because of where we are born, and we are citizens of heaven through our relationship with God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ. We actually have a dual citizenship.

I. That dual citizenship often brings some tension.

It does throughout the Bible. The Scriptures are clear that we are to submit to the governing authorities. In the Old Testament it was often the prophets, who anointed the kings of Israel and who told the people to obey the king whom God had chosen. In our text Paul writes, "*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established.*" Peter writes in his first letter, "*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right.*" (1 Pt 2:14) When asked whether we should pay taxes, Jesus said, "*Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are Gods.*" When He was questioned by Pilate, Jesus said, "*You would have no authority over Me if it were not given to you from above.*" (Jn 19:11) I think that the best example of submission to the government is when Paul and Silas were falsely arrested in Philippi. When an earthquake opened the jail cells, Paul convinced all of the prisoners to stay.

On the other hand, there are some harsh words in the Scriptures for the government when it battles against our Lord and His people. The prophets in the Old Testament did not mince words with the kings when they would become proud and conceited or lead the people away from God. Peter and John told the Sanhedrin, *"We must obey God rather than men."* In the Revelation to St. John God the Roman government is even called, *"The throne of Satan,"* (2:13) because the Devil used it to try to destroy the church.

Luther struggled with this tension during the Reformation. In many of his early writings he saw the Kingdom of Christ, the Church, to be good and the kingdoms of this world to be of the devil. It was almost a Platonic idea that the spiritual is good and the physical is evil. But he evolved on this issue. He came to understand the teaching of the two kingdoms of God. Both the church and the secular are gifts of God; although the gifts of the church are the only ones which will last forever. Both are good gifts of God. However, in this fallen world, neither is perfect. While Luther believed in the distinction between the church and state, he did not believe in the separation of church and state. That concept came many years later.

II. God blesses us through both kingdoms.

His greatest blessings come through the Church. Through the church God gives us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We hear the Gospel that Christ died and rose for the forgiveness of our sins. We receive that forgiveness when we believe the words of absolution, that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ, when we are baptized in His name, and receive His Supper. It is through faith alone in Jesus Christ that we are saved. These gifts are the only gifts which are eternal. Everything on this earth will pass away, but God's love for us in Christ will last forever. But this salvation is not just a personal transaction between God and me. The church is all who believe in Jesus. We become a fellowship of forgiven sinners. We are one in Christ. We love each other and care for each other in Christ. Because we are sinners the church is not perfect in this world. Each of us at Benediction has our failings. We are not the perfect church. No church is. We all live by the grace of God and patience and forgiveness for each other.

God also blesses us through earthly institutions. Paul writes that a major duty of the government is to protect its citizens from those who do wrong. God has ordained the government to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right. He also encourages us to pay taxes, which fund all sorts of functions, such as the building of our roads and other infrastructure, the care of those who are poor or the military, police or fire departments. Through the government God brings peace and order to society. No matter if we like the current mayor, governor, legislators or president, we are called to give them respect and honor. Again, none of them are perfect. There are things that they do or say, which are wrong at times. It is good to voice our displeasure, especially in a democracy like ours, but we should also remember to pray for them as Paul admonishes us in 1 Timothy.

III. Christians should be active in both kingdoms.

We especially was to be active in our Lord's Church. It is very easy to lose our citizenship in the kingdom of God. That happens when we lose our faith in Christ. We begin to set our hearts on the pleasures and riches of this world. Rather than loving our neighbor, we harm him for selfish gain. We neglect our Lord's Word and Sacraments. Before you know it, God and the gifts that Christ won for us are not very important at all. It's important that we hear God's Word, receive His Supper, pray, serve one another in love, and that we fix our eyes on Jesus as our Savior. We never want to lose the eternal gifts that Christ won for us by shedding His innocent blood on the cross.

We also want to be good citizens in this world. At the time of the Reformation there were several Radical Reformers, such as Thomas Münzer, who began to preach rebellion against the princes. Luther agreed with many of the grievances that the Peasants had, but he warned them strongly not to rebel. Those who didn't heed his warning paid a high price. A huge rebellion broke out. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed in the Peasants' War. Luther took a different tract. He used the government to his advantage. They protected him from being burned as a heretic. He received His salary from the government. He encouraged the princes strongly to establish Christian Schools in their provinces. He would admonish the princes harshly at times, but it was the princes and other politicians, not the theologians, who boldly presented their confession of faith to the Emperor in the Augsburg Confession in 1530. He ended up working with the government as much as he could.

That is an example for us today. In the early history of our Lutheran Church in America, and it continues today that Lutherans are not very active in the political affairs of our country. There are two big exceptions, when the state tried to shut down the Lutheran and Catholic schools in the late 1800's and when abortion was legalized in the 1970's. But there have not been many Lutheran statesmen. As Christians we are called to be good citizens in any way that we can, by serving in the government, military, police or other emergency services. We want to be good parents to our children. We want to be dependable workers and citizens that will be commended by those who govern as an asset to the communities that we live in.

The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is helpful as we navigate our way through this world. We have dual citizenship. We are citizens of heaven through Christ, but that citizenship also causes us to be good citizens in this world, as we respect the governing authorities and love and care for each other as God has loved us in Christ. Amen.

*Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
Sept 10, 2017*