

Bible Study Notes

Power to Change Series:

How Can We Respect Our Authorities??

7/7/20

Passages: (all NRSV)

- Primary:
 - Romans 13
 - 1 Peter 2:11-20
- Other readings
 - Exodus 22:28
 - Matthew 22:15-21
 - 1 Timothy 2:1-3
 - Titus 3:1-8

Hi Folks,

The theme this week continues on the how the Holy Spirit gives us the power to change with this week addressing how it pertains to our authorities.

Human nature is interesting. When we perceive our authorities as supporting our best interests, we are highly supportive. But when the tables are turned, and we perceive the authorities as being detrimental to our position, we become much less supportive. Our responses can range from mild dissatisfaction to, in extreme cases, actions to violently oppose authority!

Most of our readings this week are in the post-Jesus' birth era. This is a period of time when Rome was the absolute world leader. When we look at Biblical passages about respecting authority, we might be tempted to say something like: sure, but they didn't have a President Trump, or President Obama, or Governor Whitmer. Yet the Romans ruled through fear and brutality. The Jewish people were not the "insiders". They were a conquered people. We often think of the cross and crucifixion as a "Jesus thing". Yet in Biblical times the Romans frequently crucified criminals and those who resisted Roman authority. When they did so, they would put those crosses next to highly traveled roads as an example to the rest of the citizenry.

Our reading from Romans 13 is from Paul and is written from his perspective. It is organized into three sections. The reading from 1 Peter was probably not written by the Disciple Peter, but rather one of his followers much later, probably closer to 90 AD. It gives us a slightly different perspective from the Paul writing.

As you study these passages think about these concepts:

- God desires for us to have a joyful life of service and worship to God, free from worry and anxieties.
- Punishment is God's business

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- God is not going to let chaos reign over His creation, even in the face of evil.
- God desires a measure of justice and order in the world
- All societies need some regulation, ordering, structure and authority.
- Chaos and anarchy enable the powerful, the rich and the bullies.
- The present world order is part of God's plan, despite world leaders not surrendering to God.
- Private vengeance can spiral out of control, create chaos, and eat up our soul, allowing evil to take over.

Ultimately, we want to understand how to apply these Scriptures to our lives. How should we respond to what we see as a "bad leader" or "bad cop"? Good leaders are easy! We support and praise them! But what about poor or outright bad leaders? What is the appropriate Christian response?

I suggest to you that fiery words either in speech or postings, name calling, or destructive actions are not God's will for us.

We are so fortunate to live in a country where we can peaceably assemble, express our viewpoints, and vote. Those are ways that we can express ourselves and our opinions in line with our Christian values. Last week we talked about the C-T-R system: "Constructive, Tenderhearted, and Regarding others as Better". We can effectively express our viewpoints using that system and remain true to our Christian values.

Romans 13: 1-7

This section is focused on government. We can think of this as a general statement by Paul as he saw things at this time. This was early in Nero's reign when Nero was a "good" leader.

This passage is not intended to be a universal approval of all authority, so we need to apply these concepts as how we see God.

Romans 13: 8-10

This section reaffirms the role of love in our lives and in our actions. We need to apply the concept of "love your neighbor" to those in positions of authority over us. We can pray for them; we can send emails or letters to them in support – or as requests. Ultimately, we can vote for those people who most closely value caring for others. They may or may not be Christian. Our to live by example. Part of how we live out that example is encouraging others to live by caring for others.

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Romans 13: 11-14

This section pulls us back to focus on Jesus and reminds us of the coming of Judgement Day. We need to clean up our lives and be prepared for the day that Jesus comes back and asks us to account for our lives.

1 Peter 2: 11-20

Much of this passage is very similar to the Romans passage. The language and perspective is somewhat different.

1 Peter was generally written as words of hope and comfort. It can be thought of as having a viewpoint of Christianity being meekly submissive. It uses the example of Jesus being humbly submissive in His life as a model for us to follow.

The opening verse talks about aliens and exiles. Peter is referring to Christians living among non-Christians as being aliens. We can see this when we consider our country, today. We seem to be aliens among our neighbors who are not Christians, or at least not actively worshipping as Christians.

The term refugees is talking about the Jews that fled the severe persecutions in and around Rome. In that thinking, we can be seen as being aliens in our country.

Summary

This topic can be hard. We all like leaders that think the way we do and do the things that we approve of. The hard part is when the opposite is the case. Our Christian values and teachings can help us make a difference in our world by how we respond to our leaders.

More on Sunday – Enjoy!

Pastor Jerry