

Intro: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)*

That you may be thoroughly equipped for every good work, we turn to the God-breathed words of Romans 13:1-10 -

Text: Romans 13:1-10 *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Theme: "TRANSFORMED BY THE MERCIES OF GOD"

- I) With regards to our attitude towards the government
- II) With regards to our attitude towards our neighbor

Grace and peace be multiplied to each one of you in and through Christ Jesus the Lord, dear fellow redeemed -

Two weeks ago we took a look at the words of Romans chapter 12 and considered how we have been transformed by the mercies of God. Like the Transformer toys that go from a pick-up truck to a robot, the Holy Spirit has transformed our hearts and minds. No longer do we live for self, but we present our bodies as a living sacrifice unto God. No longer do we seek to serve only self, but we seek to serve one another, using the gifts God has given us. The mercies of God as seen in Jesus Christ have transformed us.

In Romans 12:2 we read, "***And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***" As the redeemed children of God we renew our minds - we no longer look at the world around us the same. As we move into the thirteenth chapter of Romans we see that this transformation affects not merely our personal and congregational life. Let us consider this morning how this transformation changes our attitude about the government and our neighbor differently. May God be with us and bless us.

I. GOVERNMENT

In a nation with such freedoms as our own, there are many different voices about the government. After the election in 2000 and the mess that followed there were some bumper-stickers that you may have seen which read, "Not My President" and "Don't Blame Me, I Didn't Vote for Him." Such bumper-stickers revealed who that person did - or at least who he or she did NOT vote for. Since the War in Iraq began there have been countless protests in the United States against our government and against our President. This is a freedom we are afforded by our nation's constitution. We have the freedom of speech. We can speak our mind about our government and not be afraid of being punished by the government for it. Some people take that freedom and use it for good - others for vile purposes.

The general consensus in America today is that the government is basically a necessary evil. The government has to exist to protect the homeland and pave our roads. Government is fine for most, as long as it doesn't interfere with their lives and so-called freedoms. The minute the government interferes with what I do to my body, the moment I think unfair taxes are levied, the moment a law is passed which I don't like, then I have the right to rebel against my government. Our nation was basically founded on this. Both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars were waged because of such things.

But when someone rebels against the government - whether it be in word or deed - who is that person truly rebelling against? The Apostle Paul makes this clear in our text. He writes in the last part of verse one, "***The authorities that exist are appointed by God.***" God is the one that always has been and always will be in control. Every governmental authority that has ever existed is there because God put it there. God put Pharaoh in Egypt as His instrument of blessing during famine. God put Joseph second in command to Pharaoh to protect the decedents of Abraham and the seed of the Savior. God later had Pharaoh in Egypt to demonstrate His power and judgment as He brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt.

We heard in our Old Testament lesson that it was God who put wicked King Saul into office as king over His people. David knew this. Even though David was the rightful heir to the throne over Israel, David would not rebel against God's anointed king. It was likewise God who put Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon to punish the nation of Judah who had rebelled against Him and were practicing idolatry. This God did once again to protect the seed of the Savior - to preserve His people and keep them from slipping into total paganism.

And at the time of the Savior's birth God had established the Roman Empire and the Pax Romana - or the Peace of Rome. At the time of Christ and shortly thereafter, there was a general peace in the Roman empire. There was a relatively good road system in place. A road system that would help in the spread of the Gospel throughout the known world at that time.

As David knew that God had placed Saul as king over Israel, Jesus too knew who put Caesar and Pontius Pilate in authority at His time. Though Jesus as the Son of God was the ultimate authority over all men and every government as the King of kings, Christ never rebelled against the Roman government. We heard in our Gospel reading that Christ commanded His people to render or give to the government the things that are owed them - in that case He was talking about taxes. Even when being whipped, crowned with thorns, and crucified unjustly Jesus did not rebel against the governing authority - even though He had the power and authority to do so.

Having been transformed by the mercies of God, we do not view the government as the world views the government. We view the government - whatever governing authority that is

ruling over us, whether it be capitalist, socialist, or communist - whether a Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, or Independent be in office - whether the man or woman we voted for was elected or not - that government and that authority is appointed by God. We give the government what is due it. We gladly pay our taxes knowing that the government is God's minister - His servant unto purposes that may be unknown to us. Joseph certainly did not know how God was using Egypt and Pharaoh to serve His people. Nor did the captives in Judah. So we obey and serve the government for conscience sake, knowing that God ordained it and He is in control of it. Transformed by the mercies of God we view our government much differently.

II. NEIGHBOR

Imagine for a moment that the love of Jesus was as fickle as our love for our neighbor. "Well I HATE so and so because of what she said about me." Or, "I can't STAND to be around him, he's so annoying." The world teaches us to love those who love us and hate those who hate us. Imagine the horror if Jesus' love was like that. Imagine that Jesus only loved those who loved Him! Would Jesus love us? How many times have we ignored Jesus? How many times have we been ashamed of Him? How many times have we failed to defend Jesus? And we expect Jesus to just love us anyway? We know we wouldn't hang around people who treated us like that!

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Mt 5:43-48) Thankfully the Triune God is not as fickle with His love as we are. God causes the sun to shine on those who hate Him and He sends rain to the farmers that ignore Him.

Jesus didn't just tell us to love our neighbor as ourselves, He clearly showed that He loved His neighbor as Himself. When the lame and sick were brought to Him, Jesus healed them and taught them even though He Himself was at times tired and hungry. When it was clear in the Garden of Gethsemane that it was the Father's will that He bear the weight of the sin of all men, Jesus went willingly forth. When Jesus knew there was no other way for us to go to heaven unless He died on the cross, Jesus laid down His life as a ransom for us all. When nails were pounded into His hands and His feet, He prayed to God the Father, ***"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*** (Lk 23:34) Jesus did not just talk about love for neighbor, He demonstrated it - He showed it by dying on the cross.

Paul says that love is the fulfillment of the law. Every commandment God gave was grounded in this, ***"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** Every person in this world, not just our friends, not just our family, EVERYONE is our neighbor - even our enemies. Love them, God says, as you would have them love you! This, again, is something that goes contrary to what the world teaches. But we don't care what the world thinks. We have been transformed by the mercies of God. We have seen the love of God demonstrated in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us! (Rom 5:8) We have seen the Lord of Life lay down His life for His enemies - for us! ***In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son***

to be the propitiation for our sins. (1Jn 4:10)

Therefore the only debt we have to our fellow man is a debt of love. This is a debt that can never be fully paid, so we keep loving as we have been loved by God. We love our neighbor as we would want them to love us, even though they may not deserve it - we certainly do not deserve the love and forgiveness of Christ! We love our neighbor and help them to keep a happy and healthy marriage, instead of trying to commit adultery with his or her spouse. We love our neighbor and help them to protect and improve their lives, rather than hating and trying to take his or her life. We love our neighbor and try to help them protect their property and business, rather than trying to take his or her possessions. We love our neighbor and all that God has given them, rather than wishing we had it for ourselves. ***“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law.”***

Having been transformed by the mercies of God, everything has changed for us. No longer is the government this necessary evil, but an authority that has been placed over us by God for our good. We honor and respect our elected officials and the laws of the land, even as we honor and respect our God who placed them there. And having been transformed by the mercies of God, we are no longer limited to loving only those who love us back. In Christ we are able to love every one of our neighbors as ourselves. This is ***“the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*** May He aid us unto this end! Amen.