

October 11, 2020 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam – The Christian and Government – Political Affiliation, Advocacy, Service

*Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the king as the supreme authority or to governors as those who have been sent by him to punish those who do what is wrong and to praise those who do what is right. For this is God's will: that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. Do this as free people, and do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but use it as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13-17)*

In the name of our crucified, arisen, ascended and ruling Savior, Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters.

With chapter 12 of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul by inspiration begins the practical section of that letter. The first verse is very similar to the two verses which precede our text this morning: ***“Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to God—which is your appropriate worship.”*** Based on what he had been writing about (justification and sanctification), Paul goes on to give some very up-to-date advice for living as Christians in a sinful world. 20 verses later in Chapter 13 he writes about the relationship between Christians and the government he has placed over us. Those verses were one of the Scripture readings last Sunday.

In his introduction to the People's Bible Commentary on 1 Peter Pastor Jeske writes: *“The letter called 1 Peter is magnificent inspiration for Christians who struggle. It helps us lift our eyes from our light and momentary troubles to the great destiny that our loving Father has prepared for those who love him.”* This morning as we continue with our The Christian and the Government series, Peter's very practical advice urges us to:

### **Honor God with Your Citizenship**

Peter writes: ***“Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the king as the supreme authority or to governors as those who have been sent by him to punish those who do what is wrong and to praise those who do what is right.”*** The very first word ***“submit”*** sets the tone. We are familiar with “submit” from St. Paul's description of God-pleasing marriage relationships: ***“Submitting to one another in reverence for Christ.”*** Submitting is yielding one's will to someone or something else. The submission of citizens to human authority placed over them by God is proper and God-pleasing. How well have we (I) been doing that? When I am driving down the highway and lift my foot when I see patrol officer, there is submission – I slow up. But should I have been over the speed limit to begin with? How about those tax returns? Are there some “oopses” - “I forgot that”? Our inability, yes our failure to fully and completely submit to the human authority over us condemns us before our Creator. Thankfully we can look to Jesus, our Substitute and our Savior. You heard him in last week's Gospel reading: ***“Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things are God's.”*** His perfect submission to human authority is our righteousness. God sees us a holy because he was holy in our place. Jesus' sacrifice pays for the guilt of our failures to submit to human authority. Here is the reason and the strength for us to honor God with our citizenship by submission to the human authorities whom he has placed over us.

It is very instructive for us to remember that the Emperor in Rome at this time was none other than Nero. Yes, that same Nero who so cruelly persecuted Christians. Yet Peter emphasizes submission to the “supreme authority.”

As we dig deeper into Peter's practical advice for Christian citizenship we hear him say in verse 15: ***“For this is God's will; that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.”*** In the Kingdom of the Church, God rules through his Word, but in earthly kingdoms he rules by reason. When we honor God with our citizenship and obey God's will the foolishness of those who choose their own way is revealed. With our God-pleasing attitudes displayed and our God-pleasing actions carried out we are a blessing to the people and times of our lives. Peter also says that we are to: ***“Do this as free people, and do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but us it as servants of God” (v. 16).*** You've heard of diplomatic immunity. Foreign diplomats cannot be prosecuted by the country in which they are serving. So we frequently hear of the diplomatic unity being abuse and diplomats being expelled from certain countries. Our citizenship as Christians does not allow us to carry on with an evil heart and/or mind. Isn't that exactly the point that John the Baptist made when he talked to the tax collectors and the soldiers in this morning's Gospel lesson. He told them to stop carrying out their public service with selfishness and greed and to do their work with compassion and respect for their communities. We will always remember that our Christian citizenship is to always be carried out in

service to our Savior. He has freed us from the condemnation of sin and death, so that now we are free to serve him in every aspect of our lives. I am reminded of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: ***“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”*** Through my God-pleasing citizenship I can have opportunities to share the message of salvation with those who don’t believe in Jesus as their Savior. That’s the implication that Paul also talked about in the verse of the day from 1 Timothy.

The final verse of Peter’s instructions about our Christian citizenship has four imperatives: ***“Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” (v.17)*** There are many ways that we fulfill these commands in order to honor God with our citizenship. These are all ways to show respect to our fellow citizens. The most common way to carry out our citizenship is to use our right and privilege to vote. We hear that often these days, don’t we? Make it your practice to vote in every election you have the right to vote. In the last presidential election less than 60% of eligible voters actually voted. I don’t think that that is very good. God has given us this blessing to choose our leaders. Many people in the world don’t have this blessing, so make sure to use it, before God let’s it be taken away. Absentee ballots make it easy to vote, even when there is a pandemic raging. I helped my mother with her ballot on Friday and will drop of her ballot as well as Karla’s and mine on my way home this morning. This is honoring God with our citizenship and it is honoring our fellow citizens.

Peter also urges us to ***“honor the king.”*** We can carry this out in a very significant way by doing what St. Paul urges us to do in today’s verse of the day: ***“I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those who are in authority.”*** How often? How intensely do you pray for our elected and appointed leaders? What about those who belong to the other party? Or those whose positions and policies are different than yours? Here is very personal and very powerful way to use your citizenship to honor God.

Serving in the military honors our fellow citizens. To give one’s time and energy and to be willing to go into harm’s way so that the blessing of freedom is protected and preserved clearly honors our fellow citizens and reveals our good citizenship. May God bless those who serve and their families.

Participation in the political process by attending public meetings, by advocate for policies and candidates, by displaying campaign posters, and other such activities is still another practical way to use your citizenship in a way that honors God. Perhaps the most challenging act of citizenship is to run for office, to serve in government in an elected or appointed position. This may open one up to criticism, perhaps even ridicule, as one carries out his responsibilities guided by Biblical morality. But clearly we need in government today individuals who are guided by Scripture rather than whatever the current wave of morality might be. Consider how you might honor your neighbor through this use of your citizenship.

Through Peter’s words here in chapter two we are encouraged to participate in civil government through political affiliation, advocacy, and public service. Rejoice in your citizenship in God’s spiritual kingdom and your future residence in heaven. Use your citizenship in an earthly country to honor God with your citizenship.

Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.