

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! Several things are happening this year! We've already completed taking pictures for our new Directory; we're preparing for some big anniversaries next year with the Reformation (500 years) and our church building (100 years); Lent is coming along quickly with Easter before April; and we even vote for a new president. This month, we'll be looking at a topic very close to home for that last one: the duties of the Civil Government and its Citizens.

April 15/ November 8/and 2017

Since the time of the kings in the Old Testament, all nations have had kings or emperors or government of one kind or another. "Everyone (then) must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established...Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, pp.36-37)." In 1 Samuel 8, Israel demanded an earthly king like that of the other nations around. "And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them'...So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before chariots (Here's the draft for the military.). And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make implementations of war and the equipment of his chariots...He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards

and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants (Here's paying taxes—April's coming!)... (1 Samuel 8:10-15).”

Yet God in His omniscience had already planned to give Israel a king. If we go back to Genesis 49:10, Jacob tells his sons, ““The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”” In referring to the “scepter,” Jacob refers to one belonging to royal authority, that is, a king. So it is that all peoples everywhere have government; and all government is from God.

“(R)ulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Rom. 13:1-4 (Small Catechism, p.37)”

Already Luther has begun telling us what to do as citizens, and now he continues in the section “Of Citizens.” First he repeats what I pointed out earlier; the right of government to require taxes. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. Matt. 22:21” With Romans 13, Luther points out that it is not only out of fear that we should be motivated to do this, but also by conscience.

Next Luther reminds us with Paul's words to do as we do every Sunday morning, praying for those over us. “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior. 1 Tim. 2:1-3”

Finally, Paul and Peter both encourage us to “be subject to (our) rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good” and to “(s)ubmit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men”—including our president. Today, we are reminded to be subject to the one who is currently over us, while at the same time, following the rules of the land, being prepared to vote for the next president to lead our nation.

As your pastor, I should not tell you for whom to vote; but I can and will encourage you to pay attention to what is being said. Does your favorite candidate’s plan go well with what God commands us to do in the Scriptures, or does he or she speak about leading in ways which go against God’s? While it may be “cool” to have a first president of this sort or that, what we are voting for this person to be is to be a leader. What matters is how he or she will lead, and then, at the very last, whether the person would be a first of some sort or other. Don’t forget, you’ll have to submit to him or her for four years. And if your candidate is not chosen, God is still in control. We know where we’re going through Christ Jesus our Lord, and you will have done your duty to your government, as is good and proper.

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself”...Philippians 4:20-21.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh