

RCC in the Word Week of October 8 Titus 3.1

This week, I received in the mail the first political fliers of the season. In full disclosure, I did not read them; I dropped them into the recycling bin right away. As much as we may want to ignore it or deny it, election season is in full-swing. As the nation rages, as politicians fight, as neighbors divide, what is our responsibility as citizens/residents of this nation? More importantly, what is our responsibility as citizens of God's kingdom?

The book of Titus was written by Paul to (you guessed it!) Titus who was a pastor on the island of Crete. Like the other pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy), Paul wrote this letter to encourage the church to pursue both sound doctrine and holy living in order to maintain a faithful gospel witness in the world. In chapter 3.1-2, Paul teaches that doctrine and holiness determine how we respond even to those in authority, specifically in secular government. How are Christians to respond to rulers and authorities? The answer is surprisingly simple and at the same time extremely difficult: submit. The church humbly submits. Paul writes: ***remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities*** (vs1a).

As Christians, we are to subject ourselves to governing authorities (see Romans 13.1-7, 1 Peter 2.13-17). Immediately, we want to add numerous qualifications. Submit to rulers and authorities.... if the leaders are Christians. Submit to rulers and authorities... if the laws they pass are reasonable. Submit to leaders and authorities...if we support their political party. Submit to leaders and authorities...if we like their policies. But, let's face it, the command is straightforward: submit. Paul does not give any qualifications or conditions to our submission. Our church's confession of faith reflects Paul's admonition. *"Because civil authorities are established by God, we should submit in the Lord to them in everything lawful that they require. We should submit not only for fear of punishment but also for the sake of conscience (1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, 24.3)."* Certainly, in a time when #notmypresident trends on Twitter, this Biblical admonition strikes at the heart of our anti-authority culture and at our own resistance to submit.

Although Paul does not qualify our submission in this verse, the Bible does allow for Christian resistance to secular authorities, but on a very limited basis. If (and when) governments pass legislation that violates God's law, Christians are Biblically required to disobey the laws of the land. Obedience to God's eternal, moral law always supersedes obedience to the laws of man. As we are reminded in Acts 5.29: *We must obey God rather than men.*

Paul says we are to submit. But, we do not necessarily have to agree. There are laws in our country that we do not support because they contradict God's law (abortion, homosexual marriage, etc). As good citizens of God's Kingdom, it is appropriate and permissible for us to resist legislation that goes against the standards of Scripture. We can resist these laws through different actions – running for office, campaigning for certain candidates, donating money to candidates, praying for our nation's leaders, peacefully protesting. In our resistance to legislation, we are still called to submit to authorities. This is an interesting tension isn't it? As we live within this tension, we must always remember that our involvement in and engagement with secular government and politics will either advance the cause of Christ or discredit the gospel among non-believers. Ultimately, Paul's concern is that the church will do NOTHING that harms her witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This should be our primary concern, too. Before we protest, before we post a political comment on Facebook, before we argue with our

neighbor, before we volunteer for a candidate's campaign, we should ask ourselves: Will this action help or hinder my gospel witness?

What does submission to rulers and authorities look like? Verses 1 and 2 give practical advice. Be obedient (follow the laws of the land). Be ready for every good work. Speak evil of no one. Avoid quarrelling. Be gentle. Show perfect courtesy toward all people. *The Amplified Bible* puts it like this: ***Remind people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready and willing to do good, to slander or abuse no one, to be kind and conciliatory and gentle, showing unqualified consideration and courtesy toward everyone.*** These behaviors should characterize the people of God in every sphere of life, not just in politics. As we live drastically different from the world, we commend the gospel.

The submission required in verse 1 is impossible apart from the supernatural help of the Holy Spirit. In verse 3, Paul reminds us that at one time our lives were filled with hate and disobedience and rebellion and sin. But, we have been saved according to the mercy of God, justified by his grace and renewed by the Holy Spirit (vs4-7). Our lives have been radically transformed by the gospel of Christ. We now have the desire and the power to submit, and good, godly citizenship provides outward evidence of the inward work of God in our lives. Omniscient God already knows what will happen on November 6. But, no matter the results, let's remember that we have an amazing responsibility and opportunity to humbly submit for the sake of the gospel and the glory of Christ.

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