

Christian Character shaped by Grace under the world's power

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[0 : 00] This morning's passage is all about Christian citizenship that is shaped by grace as we live together under the world's powers. You might think to yourself, what on earth does a discussion of government have to do with Christian worship?

And people have asked that many times, and they've thought perhaps that these verses are rather out of place, right here in the middle of Paul's letter to the Romans. But, in fact, they're not at all out of place.

Because, as we've seen, the whole of these chapters, 12 and 13, are about worship. They're about bodily worship. They're about what it means to be a living sacrifice, offering to God every single aspect of our lives in our daily life and work.

Individually, Paul says, worship means having character that's shaped by God's grace. Corporately, he says to us very clearly that it means having a church life that's been shaped by the grace of God.

And publicly, also, worship means that our citizenship must likewise be shaped by grace. And that's what the middle part of these chapters is all about.

[1 : 18] Real worship means a life of submitting to God's providential rule over our lives among the people of the world. That's what we looked at last time at the end of chapter 12.

But also, submitting to God's providence as we live under the powers of this world, too. And that's part of the expression of the life of genuine love that we're called to live, says Paul.

The love that fulfills the law of God. This passage about government here is hemmed in, we shouldn't forget, by all of these commands about what it means to love.

And it flows right into what Paul says about the dawning of the new age, the new day of Christ's coming kingdom. Now, that might be a reason why Paul feels it's necessary to give attention, therefore, to the powers of this present age.

He said right at the beginning of chapter 12, didn't he, that we're to live not conformed, no longer conformed to this world, but we're to be people who are transformed for the age to come.

[2 : 24] So it could be that some of the Roman Christians were thinking, well, if we belong to Christ's kingdom, well, surely we don't belong any longer to Caesar's kingdom. We don't owe him any obedience.

Remember, Paul was writing this letter from the city of Corinth. And we know from his letters to that church that the church there did seem to have some of those kind of extremist tendencies. There's a fancy expression for that that theologians use that means that they had an over-realized eschatology.

Now, don't worry about that term. It sounds like some sort of a disease. Actually, it is a disease, but not for the reasons you think. It means that there are Christians who think that we have everything now, already, in this world.

And forgets the very heart of the New Testament gospel that Paul has repeatedly said throughout Romans, that we are saved in hope, that we do not yet have our full salvation, that that awaits the coming of Jesus Christ.

And therefore, we live still in still sinful bodies, and in a still suffering world, which is under the curse, and will do until that day. And therefore, what Paul is telling us here is that all the earthly powers, all the institutions of this present order are still to be acknowledged by Christians, and indeed still to be rejoiced in by all true Christians.

[3 : 54] Now, that's important, because all through history there have been fanatics in the Christian church who want to have no more to do with earthly powers and earthly governments. That happened in various movements in the early church.

It happened with various sects at the time of the Reformation as well. And perhaps that was a danger in Rome. The Jews, we know in particular, find it very, very difficult to live under pagan rule.

They deeply resented that. There had been revolts in Rome previously because of that very thing among the Jews. And maybe also that was a factor in why Paul was writing. We can't be sure, but to distance Christians from that wrong attitude.

But at any rate, Paul is very, very clear in what he says here. To truly worship, to truly love God, and honour Him as a living sacrifice in all of our lives, means that our citizenship in this world must be shaped by grace.

That to submit to God means submitting to the powers that be in this world, even worldly and pagan powers.

[5 : 04] First half of verse 1 puts it very clearly. It says it all, doesn't it? It's a clear command. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.

That word, be subject, is translated submit several times in this letter. In chapter 8, verse 7, Paul says it's the unregenerate person who does not submit to God's law.

In chapter 10, verse 4, he says it's unbelieving Israel who do not submit to God's righteousness in Christ. But here he says, by contrast, true believers do submit to the lordship of God in Jesus Christ, and therefore will submit likewise to the lawful authority of the state, to the government and its laws and its justice in every level of society.

Which in Paul's day, of course, meant Caesar and the Roman Empire and its laws and rulers. For us, it means our local bylaws, our council, our Scottish parliament, and Westminster.

We are to submit, says Paul, both in principle and in practice. Both submitting to the fact of government, but also to the acts of government. Now, if you look together at this passage, you'll see that verses 1 to 5 deal with the fact of government, the principle, and the reasons of why we are to submit.

[6 : 26] And then verses 6 and 7 give us some practical examples of what that means, actually submitting in action to what the authorities require of us. So let's look at Paul's reasoning.

First, then, the command is plain. We must submit to the fact. We are to be in subjection, says Paul, to governing authorities that are over us and above us in all kinds of ways in our lives.

It's an unequivocal command, isn't it? But he gives two clear reasons for this. First of all, in verses 1 and 2, we are to do this willingly, Paul says, because God is a God of order and not of chaos.

And that's reflected in the whole world that he has created. God rules his created order through structures of order and of authority.

We're to submit to governing authorities because, verse 1, you see, there is no authority except from God. That is, all authority per se is God's doing.

- [7 : 35] And, read on, those that exist have been instituted by God. That is, the actual authorities you live under are instituted by God himself.
- It's God's ordering that human societies should be this way. And we're to recognize that. We're to recognize that we each have a place within the order and structure of authority in this world.
- and therefore we're to submit to it. And that is an expression of our submission to God as creator and Lord. Now, this idea of submission to God's order is something that pervades the whole of the New Testament's teaching.
- If you look back to chapter 12, verses 3 to 8, that we've already studied, you'll see right here in this context, Paul talks about that mutual submission to the proper order that God has given in the church.
- Each one has a place assigned to him by God, says Paul in 12, verse 4. We don't all have the same function. But we're all called to play our part in our place because that is part of serving God.
- [8 : 46] That's how God has instituted his church. And all through the New Testament, Paul makes it clear that that holds also for every aspect of life. Children submit to parents.
- servants are to submit to masters in working life. Christians are to submit to Christian leaders in church life. Wives are to submit to husbands in family life. Just as Jesus Christ, the Son, submits to the Father.
- And that last example, of course, is the foundation of all such submission and order. Which obviously makes it absolutely clear it's nothing to do with value or to do with status, not at all.
- How could it be? God the Son and God the Father are one in glory. But the Son submits to the Father. It's God's order. It's all about right order and right function and right service.
- And a harmonious order for this world flows out of God's own perfectly ordered being. That's what you see right back at the beginning in creation itself in Genesis chapter 1.
- [9 : 53] Isn't it? A perfectly ordered world. All living things are perfectly ordered, each after its own kind. And there's a rightful authority with mankind having dominion over all creation.
- And there's a creation order also of institutions for human beings, marriage and a family order. So a man, we're told, will leave the authority of his mother and his father and will be united to his wife to form a new order in a new family.
- And so on it goes. God is a God of order. Not chaos. And that's reflected throughout his whole created order. So to resist God's ordering of the world is to resist God.
- And God's ordering includes human authorities and government. government. Verse 2. Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.
- And those who resist will incur judgment. Well, of course, because you're against God. Not a trivial thing to resist God. Human authority structures are part of God's good creation.
- [11 : 10] And so it's very serious to refuse that expression of God's sovereignty as creator. Romans chapter 1. Do you remember back to it? It's very clear, isn't it? That the essence of human sin is to avoid God's sovereign ordering of the world.
- It's to reject his created order and turn creatures into the creator. To reject God's sexual order. To reject God's societal order in all kinds of ways.
- And therefore, the essence of obedient faith must be the reversal of that. It must be to submit to God's rule and to God's order as expressed in God's lawfully instituted human rulers.

The governing authorities that are placed over us. Now, there's no escaping from this, friends. Seven times in our verses here in chapter 13, it is emphasized that these authorities are God's authorities.

They're instituted by God. The rulers are God's servants. They are agents of God's wrath. They're ministers of God. The secular powers of the state are God's powers at work in this world.

[12 : 27] And we've got to be clear about that. That will be so until the Lord Jesus comes again. Christians don't escape from this world into some sort of sacred society where there's only a religious rule, not at all.

No, we are, as Christians, members of two worlds. We are members of a sacred society, that is, the church where Christ rules directly through his special revelation in the gospel.

That's the arena of special saving grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we're also members still of secular society, that is, civil society. We are citizens still of this fallen world.

But Christ still rules in this fallen world. but indirectly, as it were, through his grace, which is common to all, through the grace in the created order itself.

The Bible is very clear about what we sometimes call God's common grace in that way. His gracious care, his providential care for everything that he's made.

[13 : 32] We sang in the psalm, the Lord is good to all, his mercy is over all that he has made. Jesus said the same, God makes the sun shine on the evil as well as the good.

And just so, God blesses all of humanity with a rightful order of human affairs, of governing authorities, what we call the secular state or secular society.

Don't get confused with secularism. Secularism is saying that this world's authorities are all that there is, there is no God, secular humanism and so on, that denies God altogether.

No. But Christians, yes, are called to recognize the legitimacy of secular government as being good and as being a blessing from God to us.

Verse 4 says, a blessing for all. Now one day, of course, when Christ comes to consummate his kingdom, then the sacred society and the secular society will become one forever.

[14 : 36] But not yet. And so still, we are to submit to the providential ordering of God's world as he has ordered it.

We worship God truly by being good citizens in a secular society. So that means that if we harbour in our hearts anti-authoritarian attitudes, then that's not good.

It's against God. Kicking against rightful structures, lawful authorities is resisting God, says Paul. It'll incur judgment. We need to take that seriously.

It's about the fifth command, you see, to honour parents. It means that that right attitude to governing authority begins in the home, in our youth. We're to learn it there. We're to carry it, though, into the whole of our lives.

It's God's order. You don't like that? Now, Paul says, you're resisting God. And that attitude will lead to judgment. Now, don't resist.

[15 : 38] Submit gladly, says Paul, to God's gracious ordering of the world because it is God's ordering and it will be the way of blessing. We're to thank God for governments, for senior management at work, for headmasters at school, for the police speeding cops on the roads, for the traffic wardens, or possibly not for traffic wardens, for planning departments, for all kinds of other things that it's so easy for us to deeply resent.

Think how much worse things would be if none of these things were there. Because, of course, the world that we live in is not still just the world of God's creation, is it?

And that's the second reason that Paul gives why we're to submit willingly to God's ordering for governing authorities. Not only because God is a God of order, but because God is a God of mercy, as well as judgment, in a world that is now under the curse.

God restrains this cursed world from worse sin and worse evil through governing authorities. The chief purpose of governing authorities, Paul says, in the world is to mitigate the expression of the results of sin and evil and rebellion against God in the heart of man.

It is to restrain and punish evil. Verse 3, rulers are to be a terror to bad conduct. Verse 4, he's the servant of God who bears the sword, that is the right, to legally use force and punishment, even indeed capital punishment, to carry out God's wrath on wrongdoers.

[17 : 30] That's what Paul says here. See, what he's saying is that what we as private individuals must not do, according to chapter 12, verse 9, we must not take private vengeance.

What we must not do, the state not only can do, but must do. Because that is what God requires of human authorities. To punish evil.

To bear the sword. Now, you might take immediate exception to that. You might be saying to yourself, well, that cannot be right because surely no state, no government is perfect. And many of them are far less.

Many of them are very bad indeed. So surely the kind of thing Paul's saying there could only apply to a truly Christian state, a truly Christian government, if there could ever be such a thing.

Well, no. That is absolutely not what Paul is saying. The authority that Paul is speaking about here to the Romans was Nero's empire.

[18 : 33] And that is about as far from a Christian holy state as you could possibly get. Now, the reality is that because no authority exists, ultimately, except for God's institution of it, in his providence, all authorities are his servants to restrain evil and promote good.

That's what Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, wasn't it? It's the God in heaven who put you on that throne. That's what God himself said through Isaiah about the Persian tyrant Cyrus.

He is my servant, said God, even though he doesn't know who I am. And Paul knows full well personally how corrupt and venal and imperfect the rule of Rome was.

He had experienced its beatings, its prisons. And yet, he is clearly saying that Christians are to submit to Roman rule because it is God's servant against evil and for good.

Indeed, the Pax Romana was a great servant of the gospel. Its roads, its law and order, its common language and so on, easily hindered the spread of the gospel.

[19 : 45] But Paul is not simply saying, look, there are more advantages to this than disadvantages. That's why we should accept it. No. He's saying, these authorities, whatever they are, are God's chosen vessel to restrain evil and promote good in our earthly lives.

Notice, by the way, that is what he says the chief purpose of all government is to restrain human sin, to be a terror to evil conduct and to promote what is good. That does mean, doesn't it, that it's a great hindrance in governing if you think, as many deluded Western liberals think, if you think that man is basically good, you'll have all sorts of wild delusions about thinking that your government's there to be creative, manipulative, to make sure that things can only get better and better by unleashing the basic goodness of the human heart.

You really will be on a hiding to nothing. No, says the Bible, the chief need in a fallen world, a world of sin and evil and rebellion in the human heart, the chief need of government is to restrain and punish evil.

Because that is God's chief expression of mercy in this world. He restrains evil from becoming so bad that we would utterly destroy ourselves and our societies and our planet and everything if we weren't restrained by God's mercy through governing authorities.

That's why even bad governments are so much better than no government at all. Think of the so-called failed states that we hear about in the media and the chaos that you have there.

[21 : 24] Somalia, chaotic inland and even worse chaos off the coast with all the piracy and so on. No government. Afghanistan as it has been so often and Iraq for so many years.

Peter the Apostle says exactly the same thing in his first letter which was written absolutely in the context of severe persecution of Christians by the state and yet he can say to them be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution whether the emperor is supreme or governor sent by him to punish evil and praise those who do good.

1 Peter 2 verse 13. Even corrupt dictatorships will generally speaking punish drug trafficking and murder and theft and so on and all the sort of things that if they're not punished make any kind of ordinary life absolutely impossible.

And rulers have to do that or else there'll be total chaos and anarchy and private vengeance and vigilantism and utter chaos. So what we cannot and must not do in taking private vengeance in our own hands rulers must do for verse 4 he is the servant of God to carry out wrath on the wrongdoer.

And so not being Christian and not even being perhaps particularly morally upright doesn't delegitimize the government nor does it give the Christian believer the right to flout the government's laws.

[22 : 55] However imperfect however impartial three times we're told that such rulers even Nero's Roman rulers are God's servants God's ministers carrying out God's merciful restraint on worse evil which would otherwise lead to even worse chaos the sheer hellishness of a world that would be the result of totally unrestrained human sin.

God is a God of mercy he restrains evil even in the world that has rejected his rule and rebelled against him. A few human beings and few human societies are nearly as bad as they would be without that providential restraint of God that he exercises through his merciful provision of governing authorities which however imperfect they are are restrainers of evil.

Sometimes throughout history we have had glimpses haven't we of what the whole world would be like if all that restraint was lifted. If the holocaust of Nazi Germany or some of the genocides that we've seen Bosnia as is in our newspapers again.

But in his mercy the governing authorities of human society have restrained evil to a greater or lesser extent. Secular governments and all the facets of secular society are God's servants for good.

We must be confused about that. Sometimes we are as Christians just because people are not Christian. Just because according to the Bible they are spiritually dead in their sins.

[24 : 42] That doesn't mean that they are absolutely morally dead. All humans bear God's image still although it's vitiated by the fall. Humans have a moral conscience it's not perfect as it is with us.

Romans chapter 1 is very clear. People have enough knowledge through nature to know God to know what is right and wrong. People have natural affection to do good and to love and to care and so on.

That means of course that non-Christian people and non-Christian society and non-Christian institutions can do a great deal of good even to us as Christians. We might feel as though we're a little bit above that but Paul says no.

Once again your pride must be humbled. That's his message again and again through this letter isn't it? Look at verse 4. The secular state and its authorities are God's servants he says for your good as Christians.

Now that could mean that they're there for our good in the sense of enabling us to live quiet and peaceful lives by keeping law and order and so on. That's certainly what Paul asks us to pray for in 1st Timothy chapter 2.

[25 : 54] But it's more likely here that it means to help us to be good to do good and do right as opposed to doing wrong as he speaks about in the next verse. In other words the governing authorities are instituted by God to help Christians to do good to be good to behave well and to honour God in our lives as good citizens.

The governing authorities are God's servants to help us worship God through our life of good citizenship. I wonder if you've ever thought that Mr. Alex Salmon's calling is to be a worship leader to help you to live and serve and worship God.

And that's what Paul's saying. Yes it is. He is. See we are sinners aren't we as Christians? We need still God's law to help us to love God properly.

We saw that in the passage that follows in chapter 13 verse 8 and following. To love God says Paul is to obey his commands and as Christians we have God's commands through the special grace of his gospel his word to us.

Well also Paul says here as Christians we need the law of the land in just the same way. And we have that through God's common grace to help us to be good citizens and to please God.

[27 : 14] God if the government didn't set a speed limit of 30 miles an hour you wouldn't just drive at 40 miles an hour as you do in a 30 zone you'd drive at 60 wouldn't you? How much more likely then for you to injure somebody or kill somebody or maim a child crossing the road and dishonor God as well as damage and hurt others.

But you see we have police we have courts we have government who are servants of God for our good to stop us doing that. Don't you need that? That's why Paul says we are to submit to governing authorities and in doing so we submit to God's good and well pleasing and perfect will for our lives.

And not only to accept it as a fact but to gladly and thankfully submit to it in acts as evidence of God's great mercy and restraining sin in the human heart our own hearts included.

We are to give thanks for government and judiciary and for the police and also for all the provision of God's common grace in the secular society for medicine for science for teachers for social science for civil service for all of these things.

And we should pray and we should work to do all we can to uphold the goodness of the state and its authorities and to encourage it to be the best that it should be under God.

[28 : 43] To praise all that is truly good and right and just and pure and to punish all that is evil and wrong and corrupt and unjust and impure. Therefore, says Paul in verse 5 to sum up submit to the fact of God's ordained government and authority.

He says, not only, look at verse 5, not only for pragmatic reasons to avoid God's wrath in the punishment that he's given into the hand of the state but also primarily and this is the principle and the principled reason primarily because of your conscience because you're a Christian because you want to honour God for this is his calling.

This is the worship of God to submit gladly and not grudgingly. It's not worship at all, is it, if we submit just grudgingly?

Pay your parking fine gladly. It's worship to God, says Paul. And even parking wardens, you know, if there weren't any of them anywhere, then the whole of the city streets would be utterly clogged always.

You'd never get a space for your car, would you? So we can even give thanks for parking wardens. Be glad when you see the traffic cops on the road. Think how much less safe the roads would be if none of them were ever there or if there were no police or no courts.

[30 : 15] How much more dangerous would the whole of our life be? Government, rulers, state authorities, authorities, God's servants for our good, says Paul, and God's servants to punish evil.

And you submit to that fact gladly or you're opposing God. What about when the authorities are not just imperfect as far as verses 3 and 4 are concerned?

What about they are so utterly perverse, so wicked, so utterly criminal that they do the very reverse, that they promote actively evil and they oppose good? Well, the first thing we have to notice is that Paul doesn't actually address that question here.

It's not his subject at this point and it can't be our subject today either. We need to look at so many other scriptures we'd be in danger of losing the thrust of what Paul is saying here to those of us today here who don't live in that kind of criminally corrupt society.

Suffice to say that Paul's own conduct, as we saw through the Acts of the Apostles, shows clearly that there are times when in conscience he does disobey specific commands of the authorities while still at the same time submitting to the fact that the state does have the authority to punish him for that action.

[31 : 40] It's a conscientious objection. He doesn't overturn the state by his action. It seems the Lord Jesus did exactly the same thing when he stood before Pilate in John chapter 19. He reminds Pilate that the only authority he has came from God and yet he submits himself to Pilate.

And both Paul and Jesus remind the authorities of their proper rule and they call them to exercise it properly. But ultimately of course as Peter himself says in Acts 5 verse 29 the clear teaching of the whole Bible is that if a direct conflict comes we must obey God rather than man.

But that means that when there's a clear command of scripture a clear command of God that is the case. Not just when you say to yourself well I feel that God really wouldn't want me to fill my text form in quite this way and therefore I'll obey God rather than man.

That's not what he's saying. Now if we have a clear command of God and any ruler demands that we directly commit sin of course we must obey God rather than men.

But at all other times which is the vast majority of times in all of our lives we must obey the authorities because it is put there by God. And of course the reality is that most times we want to defy authority is nothing whatsoever to do with taking a stand for God.

[33 : 05] It's to do with sheer self-interest. It's to do with self-will. It's to do with our own sinfulness. Isn't that right? Well I'm speaking for myself at any rate. And that's why in verses 6 and 7 Paul turns to some real life examples in areas that very often if we're honest we're quite tempted to want to refuse to submit to the state authorities.

Not only are we to submit says Paul to the fact of governing authorities but we are to submit to the acts of governing authorities. Pay your tax he says verse 6 for the same reason you pay taxes.

same reason as verse 5. In other words not just out of fear of the vat inspector and his fines but also out of conscience to honour God himself because and this really is very astonishing isn't it?

The authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing. Literally he says the authorities are the priestly servants of God. They are priests whose full time service is this very thing.

It's the same word that he uses in chapter 15 verse 16 of Paul's priestly service of the gospel. That's why he says verse 7 you pay you render quoting Jesus from Mark 12 there you render to all what is owed them just as Jesus said render unto Caesar what is Caesar's all kinds of revenue taxes tribute to the empire and so and all other taxes and all kinds of respect respect and honour to all legitimate authority and all that too says Paul is your spiritual worship.

[34 : 53] All that is what it means to be a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God. Because God is active not just in the church but in the whole sphere of the courts and of civil government of civil service and the whole societal order that we live in in this created world.

So Paul says God ordains ministers of the gospel in his church to lead our worship through the preached word in the church. God also ordains ministers of state to lead our worship through being good citizens of society.

And that's their calling under God for our good in the Christian church. Indeed for everyone's good and God's great goodness.

He doesn't allow evil to utterly destroy this world as his plan of redemption continues. But certainly for the good of Christian believers who surely ought to see this more clearly than anybody else does and rejoice in God's provision of these ministers to help us worship God better, to help us be good citizens, to help us honour him as we live life subject to his providential rule.

Well, that's quite a challenge, isn't it? Perhaps that's why, as one scholar says, the history of interpretation of this passage has largely been the history of attempts to try and avoid its plain meaning.

[36 : 25] But we can't, can we? It's very, very plain. Yes, it's not all that there is to say about this subject. But it does say plenty. And we need to take it seriously.

Let me close with some conclusions. First, part of true Christian worship is to honour and to seek to uphold the authority of government, both in principle and in practice, both as a fact and in submitting to its acts.

Not just grudgingly to avoid trouble, but gladly and out of honour for God, his order, his justice, his servants. Of course, the authorities also have a response, a responsibility to God, even if they don't recognise that, because no authority has its legitimacy just from the way it's formed, not even in a democracy.

No, even in a democracy, the powers that be have their authority truly from God. And therefore, we must pray that the authorities will do the primary thing that God has called them to do, to restrain evil and to promote what is good.

And we as Christians must work to ensure that it does it better and better. In a democracy, that means we must use all legitimate means to seek to do that, including our votes, but more than our votes.

[37 : 47] Persuasion and discussion and public campaigns and all sorts of things. Certainly, Christians will vary in their views as the best way, and what the best way is to get governments to do these things better.

Some might think, for example, that being out of the European Union would help. Some people might think that Scotland being an independent country itself would help. But whatever your politics, we should note that although the Bible doesn't tell us which party we should vote for, it does tell us what our priorities should be and what the principal purpose of government is, that it should restrain evil and promote good.

And that means for Christians, in our voting and in our campaigning, moral questions should be uppermost, not just economic concerns. We shouldn't vote for just what will make me more comfortable, but what will give us a government that more promotes good and more restrains evil.

That's obvious. Genuine love, says Paul, abhors evil. It holds fast to what is good. And that's what real love that's at work in politics and in public life in the state will look like.

And that's what we're to pray for and vote for and work for as Christians. Second, to submit to God in this means in action as well as in fact.

[39 : 12] We're to render all that is owed. We are to pay our taxes and so on. That doesn't mean, of course, we're to pay more tax than we owe, or that we're to encourage abuse and waste. We're also to pay respect, says Paul, to God's ministers of state.

Well, that's a challenge. There's so much cynicism, isn't there, in the media about politics today and among ourselves, and there's some reason for that. But we are to have respect, at the very least, for the officers, because they're God-ordained officers for our good.

If we slander these offices of state, we slander God. Third, we need to remember that God's secular ministers are ordained for our good. And that means that as Christians, we shouldn't hesitate to allow ourselves the blessings of God's common grace.

These are for our benefit, and we can make full recourse to the courts and to all the offices in the ministries of state. Again, sometimes Christians are confused about these things.

Some Christians think, well, I must have a Christian lawyer, I must have a Christian doctor, I must have a Christian architect. But no, says Paul, God has blessed both the evil and the good with the same sun, the same rain, the same medicine, the same food, the same laws, the same engineering, the same technology.

[40 : 34] If I'm flying in a jumbo jet, friends, I don't want a Christian pilot, I want a pilot who can fly the plane. I really don't care too much what his beliefs are, if he can get me up and get me down.

But, you know, it's the same if I'm mentally ill. I want a good psychiatrist, not necessarily a Christian one. Of course, I'm not against good Christian psychiatrists, as you'll understand.

I've spent my life surrounded by them. Actually, that sounds very bad, doesn't it, if you're a visitor? I do in my family. But we are to enjoy the benefits of God's common grace, wherever they are, through the secular state.

That leads to the next thing, fourth. Nevertheless, that means that these also are very legitimate Christian callings. Three times, Paul speaks about these ministers, these servants of civil society, as God's servants, as God's ministers, in a priestly service.

Now, if secular, non-Christian people can serve God quite ignorantly in that capacity, in a ministry of common grace, then how much more can Christian people serve God knowingly and keenly and joyfully, in a true priestly vocation, as an MP, or as a soldier, or as a policeman, or as a judge, or as a counsellor, or as a teacher, or an architect, or a plumber, or a road sweeper, or a parking warden.

[42 : 05] All these are ministries of God's grace, ministries of public life for people's good and for God's glory. And we should honour all such. Perhaps especially those who actually bear the responsibility of rule over us in local government, in national government.

I'm told that in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, it is very underpopulated with Christian people, at least those that will be willing to take a public stand as to what they believe.

Surely that must be a matter of prayer for us, a matter of concern as Christians. Fifth and finally, for someone who is a Christian, involved in lawmaking, or in Parliament, in Edinburgh or Westminster, or locally for that matter, or in a school, setting rules, or as a parent, in the home, or in law enforcement, in the courts, or the police, or in the judiciary, and so on.

To be loving means, of course, not to be brutal and dehumanising, but also says Paul very clearly here, it means not to be sentimental and squeamish and soft, but to be just.

To be willing to serve God by punishing evil, by executing God's wrath on wrongdoing. They do not bear the sword in vain.

[43 : 31] Because God's anger against evil is an aspect of his love for this world, an aspect of his mercy for this world. It's because he loves that he wants to preserve the world.

And because of that, we must restrain evil by all the rightful powers invested in us, in whatever realm of authority and responsibility we find ourselves in.

Whether it's as government, or as a judge, or in a school, or in the home. If a society will not punish crime, there will be chaos.

If in a school misbehaviour is not punished, it will ruin it for everybody. My parents won't discipline children.

And they're hating their children, not loving them. Well, there's a great deal to think about, isn't there, in these verses. Perhaps a lot that surprises us about what Christian worship is really all about.

[44 : 29] Nothing at all about songs, or sermons, or sacraments here. But a very great deal about Christian character, and church life, and citizenship, being shaped by the grace of God, for the glory of God.

So let's leave church this Sunday, ready to worship God on Monday morning, and for all the rest of this week. Amen.