

How are we? Are we good? Okay, if you have your Bibles, let's go to Romans 13. While you're turning there, I want to just kind of explain a little bit about how we put together the month of January every year for us. For the last couple of years, several years, we've taken the month of January, and what we wanted to do is increase and lean heavily on prayerfulness and to really preach and teach on matters that would push us towards prayers, being more prayerful, to attack things that are really kind of large that we don't really have a shot of denting or overcoming without a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

Really, in the month of January, it's going to be different topics. Now unless there's some sort of huge, cultural shift in my time together with you...I would say the next 30 or 40 years, but I learned a couple of years ago I don't really have control over that...but as long as I'm with you, here's what you can be assured of. There are two things I will always address in the month of January. I will always address life and where life begins and how we define life and how we as believers in Christ should look at the issue of life. So as long as you're here with us, if I'm the pastor, at some point in January, close to our Roe v. Wade, I'm going to address this issue of life.

Then a second one you can be assured I'm almost always going to discuss...again, unless there's some sort of just unbelievable shift in our culture and how our culture functions, how our society sees...I will almost always press on the need for the body of Jesus Christ to be a place that is extremely diverse in every way diversity can be seen and experienced. That is, socioeconomically...there should be millionaires sitting next to homeless people...and specifically around the issue of race. We must be a place that is not homogenous, regardless of location. We must be a place that celebrates God's creative beauty in our ethnic backgrounds.

Within each of us ethnically, God has created a type of ethos that is much better when brought under the headship of Jesus Christ so we can all celebrate it with one another. Just to ferret out some illustrations about that, by and large, African-American and Latino cultures are far greater at celebration than white folk are. Thank you. *Far* better at celebrating than white folk are.

What we want is really to bring the different aspects of ethnic culture under the headship of Christ and celebrate what the apostle Peter called this *new people* that celebrates all the intricacies of what is good and right among different ethnic groups with purged out those things that are not, and that we might

celebrate Christ in all the ways he would deem us to celebrate, knowing full well that every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth will be with us in glory.

What I'll try to do, not only on that weekend as close to Martin Luther King Jr. Day as I can, but really throughout the year, you will find me most often trying to increase ethnic IQ. I'm going to point to history that's outside of what I've experienced broadly Anglo-Evangelicals are aware of. I will point often to the slave trade. I will point often to the Civil Rights Movement. I will point often to pastors/theologians you might not be aware of who contributed greatly to what you're now experiencing. If you're a different ethnicity than the Anglo one here among us, you're getting a crash course in whiteness just being here. So thank you for that.

Outside of that, then the other weeks are kind of free weeks for me to prayerfully consider what we might talk about in our time together. What I've picked up on, when we were building out this month several months ago now, was that really in my lifetime, we live in a day and age where in the political arena, there is more hostility than anything I've experienced in my 38 years of life.

Now I have been told that in the late 60s and early 70s, it was far more hostile, but when you're 3, you're not really dialed into politics. I pray your 3-year-old isn't now. I pray you're not, "Man, this economy, when you get to be my age, son, is going to be an albatross around your neck, and you can thank Obama for that." I'm hoping you're not doing that. I'm hoping you're letting your boy play with Legos, letting him be a child.

It just seems like there's such hostility and...listen...a sinful, ignorant, wicked rhetoric that's dominating the two-party system. What I thought would be helpful (we'll find out tomorrow when I check my inbox whether or not that was true) is for us to look at what the Bible says about government, how the Bible says we are to interact with government, look at government, and see government in our day and age. That's my plan. It's for us to simply look at what the Bible says about government. I know many of you are like, "This is not smart," and I know.

So with that said, let me lay my cards on the table so you completely understand my background and maybe by knowing my background, you can see where maybe... I don't want to leak into the text. Does that make sense? We have to get me out of the text and we have to just let the Bible be the Bible. I want to give you my background so in case some of me leaks into the text, you can go, "That's you leaking into the text."

I am a military brat who grew up on military bases in the time period that was the end of the Cold War, which means that not only in elementary school did we have fire drills, but we actually had to go out in the

hallway or get under our desks in case the Russians dropped an atomic bomb on us. It was only years later that I thought, "That's ridiculous. This bomb is going to drop. It's going to liquefy 700 square miles. 'Quick! Get under your desk!'" Did you ever think about how ridiculous that was? "Quick! Into the hallway!" Literally, we had these drills we had to do, the atomic bomb drill.

Then every movie I loved growing up was US propaganda against the Russians. You remember where you were when Drago killed Apollo Creed. We had to handle our business, so we put on American flag shorts. Did we take steroids? We didn't take no steroids. Russians take steroids. We go out and train naturally in the barn, climb up the mountain. That's how we train. On December 24, Christmas Eve, in Russia, in front of their ruling party, we knocked that fool out. Not only do we knock him out, but even the leaders of Russia, the USSR, stood and applauded our boy, Rocky Balboa. Why? Because we're better.

I remember where I was when I saw what would happen if the Russians and Cubans got together and invaded the United States via Mexico, pushed up right up to the Rocky Mountains, and got stopped at the Rocky Mountains, forcing high school students into the woods to wage guerrilla warfare against the occupying force. I also learned in that movie that a wolverine is like a badger only smaller and more ferocious. This is *Red Dawn*, the first bad movie, not the horrific remake that was made, but the really bad movie that the horrific remake was remade after. Just objective evidence that Hollywood has run out of ideas.

You aren't human if you don't remember where you were when Maverick inverted his Tomcat over the MiG, got within two or three meters so the Goose could take a picture, and only to roll off and make the Russian MiGs bug out and go home. Later on, Maverick, with a new RIO, because Goose had gone home to be with the Lord, got in a dogfight with a group of Russian MiGs who were trying to destroy a disabled aircraft carrier of ours in the Persian Gulf.

I could do *The Hunt for Red October*. Think about how many... This is what I grew up in, being on a military base and having almost all of my favorite movies really extol the excellencies of the United States of America and vilify other countries, and in fact, even make it plain they wish they weren't in the USSR...they wish they were Americans. Even the Kremlin wanted to be a part of the States. That's kind of what I grew up in. In that environment, a deep kind of patriotism takes root, and in many ways, I never really outgrew that. I love this country of ours. One guy clapping in the back. I'm not trying to get your applause. Let me finish before you applaud.

You and I operate in a type of liberty that is so excessive that we're completely unaware of it. Like, do you know what I'm not feeling right now? Fear. I'm not feeling fear at all. No one's coming through these doors. No one's coming to arrest us or oppress us or push hard on us because here we've gathered under

the banner of Jesus Christ. That's not coming for us. That is not what our brothers and sisters are feeling all over the world. In fact, in many places we go to do pastoral training, we have to keep the groups small, because if the groups get big then it brings attention from governments that in turn lock up, imprison, beat, kill, hold.

If I do get arrested, here's what I know. I have to be charged with something. They can't just hold me. They have to charge me. Do you know what else? They have to give me a trial by my peers, although, again, if you are aware of history in the United States, this idea of trial by peers can be somewhat comical. But I, when all is said is done, have to be charged and have to be tried. They can't just put me in prison and not deal with me. Our government cannot.

You and I walk in, live in a liberty that is so much like the air we breathe, we can't hardly fathom how much liberty we actually have. In fact, if you were to read our founding documents, they are some of the most spectacular writings ever produced by man, whether that's the Declaration of Independence, to the Constitution, to the Bill of Rights. These are philosophically, intellectually brilliant documents, and surprisingly in our day, and maybe even ironically, moral...moral.

So with all of that said, let me say this. I love this country, love living in this country. I think she is one of the greatest things the Lord has ever given in his common grace to mankind, but I have not put my hope in her. I have not put my hope in this democratic republic. I have not put my hope in these leaders. I've not put my hope in that Declaration. I've not put my hope in that Constitution. I've not put my hope in that Bill of Rights.

See, here's what seems shocking to most Americans. The United States of America is not the apex of what God is doing. In fact, if Jesus tarries, then the United States, like all countries before it, will have its lines redrawn, its laws changed, and its leadership structures dismantled. Now that seems like, "No. Don't do it, Chandler." Some of you are already getting angry.

We have a right to carry in the state of Texas. You already kind of got your hand on it. In the end, we are not what God was after. Now has God used the USA? Absolutely he has. Has God truly "shed his grace on thee"? You couldn't argue that he hasn't. He absolutely has. But to put your hope in anything other than the saving work of God in Christ is an exercise in futility that will eventually betray you.

Just for humility's sake, did you know the Roman Empire reigned the known world for 1,500 years? What do we turn, like 237 this July? And already there are some cracks in the floor. Huh? I mean, it's hard for us to imagine we're not going to be *the* dictating, determining superpower in the world, and yet, without that

title for even a hundred years, it's waning. Is it not? See, God is up to something much bigger than "My country, 'tis of thee."

So how are we then, as believers in Christ, to rightly and appropriately look upon government? My hope today is maybe to bridge some gaps and to, when all is said and done, bring us to a posture of humility in which we can interact in many ways with a president we disagree with and with a government that seems to be moving in directions that seem hostile to what we believe, to bridge that gap and have us be a more prayerful people who are better citizens of the United States of America. Let's look at it. Romans 13, starting in verse 1:

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience." Now listen to this. **"For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing."** Verse 7: **"Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."**

We're going to talk a lot about verse 7 near the end of this message, but for now, this text is pretty clear. He makes one simple argument and then begins to defend the argument. So the argument is that you and I, as believers in Christ, with God as our ultimate authority, are still, according to the Word of God, to be subject to a government, whether it is secular or not. Are you tracking with me? I didn't say, "Do you like that?" I said, "Do you understand that?"

The man who is writing these words, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and Peter, who is going to write these similar words in 1 Peter, to believers in Christ are writing at a time that is far from Constantine. In fact, both Paul and Peter will be killed by the Roman Empire, the empire right now they're saying, "Be subject to rulers and authorities," the government that Peter would say, "Honor the king." Then you and I, as believers in Christ, are to be subject to governmental authorities, even if they are secular and unbelieving.

Then he starts to state his case. Why? Because governments were put in place by God. That's his first thing. God created the United States for his purpose. Our system of government, our three branches of the

government, our balance of power, our judicial system, like all the democratic republic as we know it, the Bible says God put in place. He built it out. He gave it to us as a gift of common grace.

The second reason he says to be subject to government authorities is not just that government is given to us by God as a sign of common grace, but really, it starts to be common sense here. He starts to basically say if you rebel against governments, they're not going to like that. Isn't that what he says? Aren't governments going to lash out at those who rebel against them? Isn't that what the text said? That we are in no danger if we are doing good.

See, this is Paul's appeal to those of us who are believers in Christ to be good, law-abiding citizens, to participate in the life of the nation and to be obedient unto the laws of the nation. This is Paul's plea. This is the command of the Bible for us, as believers in Christ, to be subject to governments because God has instituted governments and because, by being law-abiding citizens, we can work alongside our governments and not then be the target of our governments to be stamped and crushed out.

He uses the word *conscience* near the end of this, in verse 6. I'll try to help you understand conscience. A man who is guilty of embezzlement from his company, a man or woman who is... Let me do this. I don't think most of us have embezzlement in our blood, although I'm sure some of you are here today. Let's do a better one.

The guy who's going 60 in a 45 is not driving with the same kind of peace that a man going 45 in a 45 is going. The man going 60 in a 45, if he sees a police officer, will get a bit "Oh no"-ish. But if a man going 45 sees a police officer, he'll simply check his speed and then just keep going. He will not slow... If he's wise, he will not slow down and go 20 in a 45 because there's a police officer present.

If you are an embezzler, if you are a thief, how well do you sleep if when all is said and done you know you're operating in a way that's illegal, in which the government has said, "If you do this, this is how we will respond. You will be arrested. You will go to jail. You will"? If you know you're guilty, how's your conscience? How are you sleeping? So the guy who has embezzled a million dollars, he might have a really nice bed, probably one of those Sleep Number deals that's just perfect for him, but he's not sleeping well. He's not sleeping well. You're a thief. These are issues of conscience that don't exist if you are a law-abiding citizen.

Then he also in this text says, "Hey, in rebelling against government, you might just find yourself rebelling against God." See, one of the things you'll pick up in Scripture over and over again is that God's greatest hate is anarchy...just outright anarchy. Government is given to mankind as a common grace to all mankind

to hem in and create borders and fences for the wickedness in our hearts. The Bible is pretty clear. If anarchy reigns, we'll burn the earth to the ground.

God gives us government to really put parameters around how wicked we'll try to operate. That a government will lean in a stop that nonsense. If you don't believe me, drive 110 on the way home, firing your pistol out your window. Just test my theory. Maybe I don't know what I'm talking about. Maybe this is me leaking into the text. No, it'd pretty clear. Hey, good behavior doesn't have anything to fear from its government; bad behavior does.

Then here's the thing I think we need to talk about, and this is where I feel like there's this huge divide and this argument about what's coming in the future and how things are going. If you're a thinker (here I am talking about these things), you might be thinking, "Well, Matt, didn't this country begin out of rebellion against a government? Now I'm not an expert on history, Matt, but I believe what happened is there was some taxation without representation going on, and we got our muskets. Surely, there *is* a time to rebel. Surely, there *is* a time to not be obedient to government. Surely, what you're saying is not universal about all governments." I would say, "Yep, you're right," so let's put some parameters around that.

The Bible makes it clear (I'll give you some text here shortly) that when a secular government forces by law or by force the people of God to be disobedient to God, our role is one that refuses to acquiesce. I need to say that so you can hear it like it needs to be heard. When a secular government, by law or by force, tries to dictate to the people of God that they be disobedient to God, we are not to acquiesce and we are to pay whatever penalty comes with that civil disobedience. Even in that place, we are not to be grandiose and big-chested about it but rather to walk in humility, compassion, and grace, but actively rebel.

Let me give you some examples of this. Really, you'll even find God, in these types of settings, raising up men to lead his people out of tyranny. Moses. Was Moses not raised in Pharaoh's household, educated in the laws of Egypt, high up in the command of Egypt, and was it not then Moses who was raised up by God to lead his people out from under Egyptian tyranny and to destroy the Egyptian army and to see dead the firstborn among all Egyptian families? God raised up Moses to do this.

We could do Daniel. We could do Samson. Wasn't Samson just pretty much an Israelite terrorist? He totally suicide bombed the temple and killed a ton of Philistines in so doing, and God had raised up Samson for that role. You'll see this in Exodus 1, 1 Kings 18, Esther 4. What does Esther do except go contrary to the laws of the land in order to save God's people. Daniel 3. Matthew 2. Hebrews 11 has a whole list of them. God will raise up and condone civil disobedience to a secular authority that seeks to either by law or by force make God's people disobey God.

Now one of the places you can see this best in the New Testament is right after Pentecost. Peter and John are preaching the gospel. Tons of people are getting saved. Peter and John are arrested for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are threatened and told, "We don't want you preaching, teaching, talking about Jesus of Nazareth anymore."

Peter's response in Acts 4:19 says, "**But Peter and John answered them** [this court], '**Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge...**'" The court finds them guilty, beats them, whips the skin off their back, and what we read is Peter and John leave rejoicing they were able to suffer for the sake of the Lamb.

One of the things that oppression does is it kind of burns out the chaff, doesn't it? If this is a cultural game to you, you just want to be seen as a good person, you don't have the deep roots of the gospel in your heart, this type of opposition thins the herd, if you will. But they leave singing and rejoicing they were able to suffer for the sake of the Lamb. They go right back out, after that singing, that *Les Miserables*-like musical, right into preaching the gospel again, and they're arrested again in Acts 5.

Once again, they're told, "We told you to quit preaching." Here's Peter's response with the apostles in Acts 5:29, "**But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'**" So here's civil disobedience. You will not by law or by force push us, force us, to be disobedient to our God. It's in that place that rebellion against government authorities not only happens often but is heartily approved of in the Word of God.

Now with that said, it's not time... Let me just say this again. I'm trying to keep my inbox to a minimum here. With that said, I do not believe it's time in the US for us to start militia training, but I do believe there are some cracks in the foundation right now we need to be mindful of and that we need to keep our hearts attuned to. There are cracks in the foundation of religious liberty, of being forced by our government to do things we would deem biblically as untenable.

I think probably the most public picture of this right now is the Hobby Lobby situation. Hobby Lobby, if you are not aware, has refused to participate in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as ObamaCare. The reason they have refused, told our government they will not do what they have been legally forced to do is because there are birth control options on that plan that are abortive in nature. So Hobby Lobby, who takes the position that life begins at conception, feels they are being forced by our government to murder children in the womb.

They simply said, "We're not doing it," so they're currently being fined \$1 million a day by the federal government. Now I don't know how this one ends. I don't. It'll roll to the Supreme Court, but I don't know

how this one ends. No little Chick-fil-A day thing we did last year. There isn't enough jam-up-that-parking-lot and buy-a-new-painting-easel action to recoup a million dollars a day, so I have no idea how this one ends. I want to be mindful. I want to be watchful.

Last year, New York State decided it was unconstitutional for schools to host churches in the city, and so they kicked churches out of the schools all around the five boroughs. Now again, the reason it's not time to form our militia is that it worked through the court system, was deemed unconstitutional, and the churches moved back into the schools. But I'm saying we do need to be mindful here.

So how are we to interact in a culture in which there are starting to be fractures at the base, but the Bible calls us, yea commands us, to be good citizens? Well, we're good citizens, which means we're informed and we participate, and the second thing is, we pray. Let me ask you a question, because I know where I am in the country.

That little verse 7 is pretty key for the day and age that we live in, that we are to show honor to whom honor is due and respect to whom respect is due. So namely, the Bible's charge on you and me would be to respect the position, maybe not agreeing with the political position. Are you tracking with that? Let me help you with this.

You and I, as believers in Christ, need to cease with the ridiculous rhetoric about the president of the United States. I find some of his political positions to be deplorable, but he's the president of the United States, and the Bible would say you show respect to whom respect is due, you show honor to whom honor is due. I literally have to wonder how many of you participate far more in posting stuff on your Facebook and forwarding rhetoric to your friends rather than being prayerful for this man who will mark and shape our culture and our public opinion more than any other man in the United States of America.

See, what the Bible would call you to and what the Bible would call me to, on top of being good citizens, is a ferocious prayerfulness over those who are leading our great nation. Let me read you some of those.

First Timothy 2, starting in verse 1: **"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."** Jeremiah 29:7: **"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."**

As God blesses a city, as God blesses a state, as God blesses a country, the people of God, living in that state, living in that city, living in that country, are blessed by these blessings. Second Chronicles 7:14: If you have a background in church, you'll know this one. **"...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."**

This is the drumbeat for those of us who are believers in Christ to honor the powers that be, to respect positions of authority, and to be prayerful for them. So how we're going to end our time together today is to pray for... I'm going to take, across all our campuses, kind of the federal block. I want us to pray for the president of the United States, our US senators, and our governor. Then I'm going to pray, and our campus pastors will come out and they'll pray for our local mayors. Then we're going to celebrate that our hope is found in Jesus Christ and not in this country.

If you can't celebrate that, your allegiance is to the wrong land. You have really pledged your allegiance to what is transient instead of pledging your allegiance to what is not transient, but eternal. So I want us to spend some time praying for a few men. I've had a slide made for us so you can just see their faces. I want us to pray for President Barack Obama, and our two United States senators, John Cornyn and Ted Cruz, and then Governor Rick Perry.

Here's how we do that here. We can either get in groups of two or three, however you came. You can pray by yourself. If you're not a believer, and this is all really weird to you, I would just like to throw out that you came to church. Surely, you had to know that at some point today we were going to pray. If you're not comfortable praying, that's fine with me. You can look at me and just hope, or you can just pray to whatever higher power you believe in, or again, just stare and think for awhile about these men.

But if you're a believer in Christ, let's pray for these men. Let's start for the president of the United States for the next four years, President Barack Obama. I want us to pray wisdom for him. Let's pray. Let's pray wisdom for this man. No one will shape public policy like this man will. I want you to thank God for him. If you don't know what to thank God for concerning this man, how about this. Fifty or sixty years ago, this man would've been unwelcomed in restaurants in this area, and he's now president of the United States. That is God shedding his grace on this country that has such a rich history of racism and bigotry.

Let's pray for wisdom for this man. Let's pray for his marriage with Michelle. His daughters. Let's pray for his relationship with Christ. Let's pray for his advisors. Let's pray for courage for this man. Love him or hate him, you have to admit you have no concept of the complexity of his position. Maybe you need to seek forgiveness from God, repentance for your hatred towards, your prayerlessness towards, your lack of seeing this man through the lenses of the gospel. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit would convict him of his

own sins as the Holy Spirit convicts us of ours. That God would use this man in a profound way in the life of our nation.

Let's pray for our state senators, John Cornyn and Ted Cruz. Again, I don't know how well you were paying attention in government class, but these two men hold an unreal amount of power to shape public policy. Let's pray wisdom and courage for them, that they would know how to play well with others, that they would know how to play the political game in order to push through the Senate the things God would see as right and good before him.

Finally, let's pray for our governor, Rick Perry. There's the federal level and then there's the state level, and much of what is passed at the federal level is worked out at the state level, and so let's pray for our governor. He claims to be a man of God and a lover of Christ, and so let's pray wisdom for him, courage, that he would work well the complexities of government.

Father, I thank you for these four men. I pray a prayer of blessing on all four of them. I pray a prayer of protection over all four of them, God, that you might guide them and shape and mold them, that you might point them in directions and grant them the courage it'll take to be all you would have them be in this season. I pray you would give us wisdom, that you would let us be informed men and women, not prone to buy into rhetoric we regurgitate to other people we've heard from others, but that we might pay close attention, God, to all that is going on as well as we can.

I pray we'd be good citizens who love you, good citizens whose allegiance is solely upon you, but also, God, understanding government as a tool in your hand, that we are also to be subject to until that time they require us to legally be disobedient for you. So Father, I pray you would grant us courage, if this gets stormier, to be men and women of God, steadfastly with our roots in you. Help us, Jesus. We'll need it. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.