

ONE NATION UNDER GOD

One Nation Under God: "In God We Trust"

Aloha everyone, I'm Mark if we haven't met, and today we are kicking off a brand new series called, One Nation Under God. In this series we will be talking about the **Government Sphere**. Dun-dun-dun!

For those of you who are new to the Church, we used to do a series every summer called Blockbuster Lessons from the Movies, anyone remember that series? It was a fun series where we'd take some of the biggest movies that year (*Top Gun & Jurassic World*) and use them as modern-day parables to teach Biblical truths. As a movie-goer I used to look forward to that series every year! But some Pastors, started complaining saying, "I'm not a movie-goer, I only like sports, there's no good movies out." So this summer we're talking about GOVERNMENT and POLITICS, you're welcome! You'll have to wait until next summer to hear my message on *Thor: Love and Thunder*.

In all seriousness, I am extremely excited about this series because our aim is to come away from this time with a Biblical Perspective on what is happening in our nation. Our gospel is not liberal or conservative, it is not republican or democrat, it's not even American! The message of the Kingdom is not of this world so please hear my heart – My prayer is that this series would not offend anybody, my prayer is that this series would offend everybody! Seriously! I'm praying that all of us would be challenged in the way we engage Government and the way we **Own our Roles** as Christians living in America. I want to encourage you to lean in to what the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. Don't worry about the person to your left and to your right, or if that person leans left or to the right! Focus on what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. Amen?

In Week 1, I will give you a road map of everything we will cover throughout our series and we'll talk about **Giving God Control** in the **Government Sphere**. Next week, we'll commemorate Independence Day and Pastor Theresa will help us view the birth of our nation and the work of the founding fathers through a Biblical lens. In Week 3, we shift to **Owning My Role** as Pastor Earl shares a Biblical perspective on our personal rights and freedoms and the role each of us plays as believers today. In Weeks 4 & 5, you let us know which of the hottest topics facing our nation you wanted to hear about and we will be tackling them from a Biblical standpoint as we return to the panel format to hear about how we should respond to some of the toughest issues today. In those two weeks, you will register for a whole chair but you'll only be using the edge of it because these panels will have you on the edge of your seat! And in Week 6, we will conclude our series with a vision to **Make Life Whole**. The only thing missing from this series is a fun catchphrase. "Shalom-ie my Homies" was a classic. I miss it already.

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Give God Control

This week, as we kick off our series, we begin where we always begin – **Giving God Control**. But what does that look like in the **Government Sphere**? The answer seems more obvious when it comes to, say, the **Individual Sphere** or the **Family Sphere**, but how does God take control of Government? Is that even something we should contend for?

Remember, when we first introduced the different spheres of authority we said that God is sovereign over them all. In Matthew 28:18, when Jesus said, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me,"* He wasn't just referring to the individual heart or the Church – He meant everything in heaven and on earth.

"For in Him was created the universe of things, both in the heavenly realm and on the earth, all that is seen and all that is unseen. Every seat of power, realm of government, principality, and authority—it all exists through Him and for His purpose! He existed before anything was made, and now everything finds completion in Him," (Colossians 1:16).

Jesus has laid claim to every inch of creation and as Christians we have been mandated to bring the whole of creation (including government) under the influence of His Kingdom. Our citizenship is not first-and-foremost in the United States but in Heaven and we know that one day we will live in a world where Jesus is both architect and King. In the meantime, we find ourselves living in a world designed by fallen man and the authorities of this world don't always reflect the things of God. How should Christians view human governments? What does the Bible say? Some of this language is not original to me. I found a very insightful article written by Pastor Paul Carter and published by The Gospel Coalition.

1. Human Government is Generally Helpful - Hold Them in Honor

In scripture we see that God is the **Author** of Government.

"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God,"
(Romans 13:1 NIV).

God is the **Author** of Government. As **Author**, God has given the **Government Sphere** the **Authority to Protect**.

OG Discussion Question: *Have you ever thought about the origin and purpose of Government? Do you believe the Government is generally good or harmful?*

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² "Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers 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 you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience," (Romans 13:2-5 NIV).

The Bible says that God, in His Divine Wisdom, instituted government for the good of mankind and that those in authority are God's servants for our good! God is a God of order so He established Government in order to protect peace and stability so that mankind may flourish. Societies require extensive cooperation and collaboration – roads, infrastructure, hospitals, etc. So God gives the Government **Authority** to facilitate such an environment. When people disrupt that peace and stability the Government has been authorized to carry out judgment. With this understanding, Paul says that our general attitude toward Government should be one of obedience, support, and honor.

⁶ "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor," (Romans 13:6-7 NIV).

When Paul says the authorities are "God's servants," the word he uses is 'leitourgos' in the Greek. This is a word generally reserved for Church officials and is even the word Paul uses to describe himself as a minister of the gospel. In Paul's mind, there was no mistake that those God places in authority are there to enact His will just as a Pastor or Minister would. Perhaps this is why Paul wrote,

¹ "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth," (1 Timothy 2:1-4 NIV).

OG Discussion Question: Have you ever thought of Government Officials as servants of God? How does that affect the way you view them?

The Bible says that the institution of Government was established by God. God established the Church, God also established Government. Those who serve in positions of authority are servants on His behalf. God even uses wicked rulers to accomplish His will.

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"Now I will give all your countries into the hands of My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him," (Jeremiah 27:6 NIV).

The kings and authorities Paul wrote about in his letters were some of the worst Caesars Rome had ever known. Therefore, a Christian's general attitude toward Government should be one of obedience, respect, support, and honor. We should make petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving for those in Government because those in authority are ministers of God.

When was the last time you offered up prayers and thanksgiving for those in Government? Do your conversations, your posts, and your thoughts reflect honor toward those in authority? I'll be the first to admit I need to repent in this area!

2. Human Government is Thoroughly Fallen - Hold Them Accountable

Although Government is generally a force for good, it is subject to the fallen and sinful nature of this broken world. It will reflect the qualities, values, and interests of those in power (for better or worse). The Bible says we should obey the laws and authorities established by governing officials, but what happens when those laws contradict God's Word? As Christians, we have a responsibility to obey God above all else and to hold the Government accountable when they abuse their power.

Once, as Paul and Silas were ministering, a mob formed against them and brought them before the authorities and magistrate. Giving into the pressure of the crowd, the authorities had them beaten and imprisoned without due process. Later they tried to sweep it under the rug and release them quietly but listen to Paul's response,

³⁵ *"When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."*

³⁷ *But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."*

³⁸ *The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city," (Acts 16:35-39 NIV).*

OG Discussion Question: What are some ways Christians can hold the Government accountable and contend for righteousness in our country?

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As Pastor Carter writes in his article,

"It is not rebellious to question the legality of an action or decision by the civil magistrate. It is not seditious to question the equity or fairness of a new piece of legislation. That is our duty as citizens and that is part of our responsibility to our fellow man. An abuse suffered by us today will be suffered by someone else tomorrow so Christians cannot retreat from their engagement with civil authorities. Wherever abuse is spotted, it must be named and called into question. Never in a disrespectful way, never in a self-interested way and never in a violent or anarchical way - but it can be done, and it should be done."

As Peter and the apostles responded when commanded by authorities to stop preaching the gospel, *"We must obey God rather than men,"* (Acts 5:29).

So our general attitude toward Government should be one of obedience, respect, support, and honor. We should make petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving for those in Government. However, we also have the responsibility to hold our government accountable and we must ultimately obey God when the laws of the land contradict His Word. In the weeks to come, we will go even deeper into understanding our rights, freedoms, and responsibilities. So human government is generally good, we should hold them in honor. It is also thoroughly fallen and we should hold them accountable.

Human Government is Occasionally Malevolent - Hold Fast

Those who read scripture also know that there are times when earthly governments become directly intent on opposing and persecuting the people of God. Often times these nations are portrayed as various beasts. Revelation 13 talks about a "beast" that is given power from "the dragon" to wage war against the saints of God. Daniel 7 depicts different governments as various beasts including lions, and leopards, and bears, oh my! These nations include Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome and they each oppressed the people of God. So as Christians we must be aware of when a nation goes full beast mode! Jesus says that this will happen again in the last days before His coming.

⁹ *"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come,"* (Matthew 24:9-14 NIV).

When a nation goes beast mode there will be increased wickedness in the land. Many will fall away from the faith, Christian will betray Christian, and the love of many will grow cold. The Bible says when this happens – hold fast. Stand firm to the end.

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OG Discussion Question: We know that our Government is 'Thoroughly Fallen' but do you believe it is 'Malevolent' toward Christians? Why or why not?

In closing, the Bible is clear about how Christians should view and approach Government. The Government is generally good and we should hold those in authority in honor. We also understand that Government is fallen and it is our duty to hold them accountable. Occasionally Government can become a force of darkness that opposes the Church. In these times we must hold fast. But there's one more important way to view human government – temporary. God gave the Prophet Daniel divine insight into the kingdoms that would emerge throughout history. Remember he saw the statue made from different elements representing the kingdoms of this world. Then a rock was cut out, not by human hands, and it struck the statue leaving not a trace of it behind. The rock became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. This rock that descended from heaven would replace every earthly kingdom leaving no trace behind. But it would become an everlasting kingdom that would endure forever.

The day is coming when Jesus will once again establish His Kingdom upon the earth. There will be no trace of the former nations of this world. As citizens of heaven we will live in a world governed by a perfect King. There will be no more injustice, corruption, or inequality. Until that time we continue to live as Christ commanded and we pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is heaven."