

## How to Respond to the Government

Titus 3:1-2

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, May 19, 2019

Turn with me to the book of Titus. We don't always think of Titus as an exciting book. In fact, for some of us, if you read it cover to cover, it might seem a little dull - not a lot of stories and things like that. But it's actually an exciting book because it's about church planting. You guys hear about the work in Ireland, you get excited, amen? It's exciting to see what God is doing in the world. And in the book of Titus, this is a book based on church planting.

In fact, if you're joining us for the first time this morning, we're coming to the end of a series (we've still got several weeks) in the book of Titus called the "How to Plant a Church" series, because that's what the book is about. It tells us how to plant a church, how to get it started and off the ground, which is exciting stuff.

And it's even more exciting when you consider where this particular church was planted. If you look in chapter 1:5, it tells you where this church began, where this church started. Paul writes and he says, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." And we read something like that and don't think much about it, but that would have been very exciting and interesting to a first century audience. They would have put their hands on their mouth and kind of gasped because the island of Crete had a nasty reputation. It was not the kind of place you would plant a church. Crete was an island just off the coast of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea. It was actually the meeting point - if you look on a map, it's the meeting point of three continents; Europe, Africa and Asia. So, it was a very traveled place. A lot of people went through there, and with that traffic came a lot of sin. A lot of cities in the world today, if a lot of people come through, they bring their sin with them. Crete was just like that. In fact, they had such a reputation that one historian said there were three evil Cs in the ancient world; Cilicians, Cappadocians and Cretans, and Cretans were the worst. They were the bottom of the barrel. I mentioned before, some of you grew up in a home where your parents said, "You're acting like a Cretan." That's a 2000-year-old reputation these people had.

And yet the Lord planted a church there, He started a work of God on the island making this some exciting stuff. Anybody who read this in the first century would've said, "Paul, you're writing this letter to Crete? I mean, seriously? And you're saying there's churches," if you look in verse 5. There's one in every city. What in the world is going on? What a wonderful work of God. The famous missionary C. T. Studd once said that, "Some Christians want to live within the sound of the chapel bell." He said, "I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell." This would have fulfilled his wishes. Crete was within a yard of hell. You could see hell from his doorstep. Which made this exciting. I mean this is amazing to see God plant a church there.

I remember when I first moved to Los Angeles and started attending Grace Community Church, I was blown away by how much ministry the Church had going on, how healthy it was and how bad the neighborhood was. I mean, coming from a little town in Tennessee, I was just blown away by the stuff going on. I remember when I first moved into my apartment, my roommates

told me, “Don't go down that street over there because there's prostitutes working over there. It's not safe. Stay away from that street.” And then they said, “If you see a blank building with no signs on it, no wording or anything, logos or anything, stay away from there because it's a pornography studio. They're doing bad things there.” In fact, I lived a couple blocks away from Van Nuys, California, which at one time was a pornography capitol of the United States. And yet God was working right in the midst of hell. God was doing a work right in a place like that. And you see the same thing happening here in Crete. There's danger all around, crazy things going on, and the Lord was doing amazing work here in the book of Titus.

Paul, tells you why in chapter 2:11, just kind of going through the book here. If you look in chapter 2:11, he tells you why the work of God was going on. In verse 11, it says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.” Paul says, “All this was possible. The Lord could do all of this, He could plant a church in a place like that because of His grace.”

I told you last week, the word “grace” here is *charis* in Greek, which has a lot of meanings. It can mean a lot of different things. It can mean “grace” or “favor” or “mercy”. It can mean “loving kindness” or “goodwill” or “joy in something”. But the way it's used here, it means a gift or something you don't deserve. That's the meaning here in chapter 2. “God's grace has appeared to you as a gift and it's given you something you don't deserve,” which is what the people in Crete believed. That's how they were saved. And that's how churches are popping up all over the world today.

I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but just about every religion in the world says that to be saved, you have to do something. You have to earn it. For instance, the religion of Islam says to be saved, you have to do five things. There's five pillars of Islam. You have to do *Shahada* or “proclamation”. You must profess that there is no true God except Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger. You have to do *Salat* or prayer. Pray five times a day facing Mecca. You have to do *Sawm* or fasting. You have to do *Zakat* or charity, and you have to make a pilgrimage. To be saved. You have to do five things. Those are the requirements.

The religion of Buddhism, same thing. Buddhist teach a noble eightfold path, which includes developing a right view, a right intention, a right speech, a right action, a right livelihood, a right effort, a right mindfulness and a right concentration. But you get the idea, in Buddhism to go to heaven, you have to be right, right, right, right, right all the time. You have to work, work, work, work, work; Hinduism says the same thing, Judaism says the same thing.

But in Christianity, it's a totally different thing because in the Christian religion, God does it all. God earns it for you. God does all the work, God does all the effort. You're saved by grace alone. It's a gift. It gives you something you don't deserve.

The story is told of a man who fell into a pit when a Muslim Imam came by and he said, “I'm sorry you're in that pit. If you could just work yourself up halfway, I could reach down and pull you up.” The man couldn't do it. He was stuck in the pit. Later that day, a Buddhist priest came by and he said, “Dear fellow, I'm so sorry for you. It's such a shame you're in there. It must be your karma. If you're ever going to get out of that pit, or if you ever do get out of that pit, be sure not to fall in again.” That didn't help him either. A Hindu priest came by and said the same thing.

A Jewish priest came by. Finally, Jesus showed up. The Son of God came along with nail prints in His hands and feet and a hole in his side, and He crawled into the pit with him, put the man on His back and carried him out of it. That's what Jesus Christ has done for you. That's what grace did. It carried you out of the pit. You didn't earn it, you didn't work for it. Grace did it all, and that's what the Cretans believed, and that's how the Lord started a church on this island.

And that leads us to the final chapters of this book. I've told you before that the outline for the book of Titus is very simple at the end of the day. It's about leadership and then living. That's the outline for the book. Chapter 1 talks about leaders, the kind of men, elders, you want leading the church. Chapter 2 talks about living; the way you should live the Christian life. And as Paul talks about living in chapters 2 to 3. As he comes to the end of the book, he does this in an interesting way because he just bounces back and forth between life and doctrine. He gives you a little doctrine, tells you how to apply it to your life. He gives you a little doctrine, tells you how to apply it to your life.

And at the start of chapter 3, after talking about the grace of God and the doctrine of it, he tells you how to live with the government. Because let's be honest, that's probably the hardest relationship that you have, amen? I don't care what country you live in. Canada, the US, Ireland, Crete, it's the same thing. He tells you how to live with the state because this is the toughest place to live the Christian life. This is where you need the grace of God the most. This is where you need His help. I don't have to tell you that Christians have always had a tough relationship with the state. In the first century at this time, the church was under persecution from the government. So, that's the most extreme. As Paul was writing this letter, the Roman Empire was imprisoning Christians and killing them. Paul himself would die at the hands of the government. Later on, you see the same thing happening in the middle ages with the Protestant Reformation. We put the Reformers as heroes today. In many ways we should, but the government put them to death. The government persecuted them as well.

Today, by the grace of God, we don't have persecution as much in Canada, not physical persecution. But you see a lot of Christian values being ridiculed and mocked by the state. I don't have to tell you that. You see certain issues like the right of life and the sanctity of marriage talked about in a way that's just offensive. It's amazing to me how tolerant Canada is and how intolerant some of the leaders can be.

So, in light of this, Paul asked a question, what do you do when you see that happening? How should a Christian respond to the government? That's a real practical question, isn't it? What do you do when you see your values being mocked? What do you do when you see your leaders ridiculing your faith? This is a question that's been talked about for centuries.

In the fourth century, the famous theologian Augustine wrote a book called "The City of God" in which he said there have always been two cities in this world, the City of God and the City of Man - the government of God and the government of man. And he said they will always clash. It's inevitable. They will always butt heads. But when they do, Augustine said, a Christian still has some obligations to the state. Even when they don't see eye to eye, he said a Christian still has some responsibility to the City of Man. But what is it? What is our obligation to the government? And that's what our passage is about today.

If you're taking notes this morning, in Titus 3:1-2, I want you to see three responses that a Christian should have to the government. Three responses that a Christian should have to the government. That's our passage for today. It's pretty simple. As Paul is writing this final chapter and going back and forth between life and doctrine, life and doctrine, he says a few words about the government because that's the toughest relationship that many of us have. It's one of the hardest places to live the Christian life. I've lived in two governments now - the US and Canada. And being in ministry, I have had friends serving all over the world. So, I hear stories about how difficult it is for many of them to follow the Lord in some of the places they're in. Some of them, they can't promote their ministries for fear of persecution. One of them I met recently at Shepherds' Conference, he's having to leave the mission field in China because of the government's coming after him and his ministry there. When that happens, Paul writes something here that's universal for all of those situations. Whatever country you're in, he says this applies to you. That's the beauty of the Word of God. You don't have to change it when you switch countries. It's the same everywhere. And he gives us three responsibilities we have to the government here. That's what our passage is about today.

And the first one is this, we should be subject to the government. And I'll explain that to you. But the first thing he says is that we should be subject to the government. We should obey and follow it whenever we can. Now, there will be times when we can't, but whenever we can, we should obey. We shouldn't fight all the time with our leaders, we shouldn't make life difficult for them.

And if you read from chapter 2:11 on down, Paul says it this way, just to give you the context for this - chapter 2:11, he says,

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. 15 These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

### Chapter 3

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient.

Just a little background for this, Paul starts off chapter 3 with the phrase, "Remind them," which takes us back up to chapter 2, the last verse of chapter 2, where it says, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." In other words, Paul says, "They already know this stuff Titus, I've already taught it to them or someone has. They know they're saved by grace. They know they don't deserve it, and they know they're supposed to be subject to the government, but you need to remind them because they're going to forget." We all have spiritual amnesia from time to time. You guys read something in the Bible, you say, "Oh, that's really good," and a week later you totally forget whatever it was. Paul says, Titus needs to remind them. Matthew Henry says Titus is the people's reminder. He's kind of like a divine posted note going around the island of Crete telling these people what they already know. And

one thing you should tell them, he says, is "...to be (in verse 1) subject to rulers, authorities, and to be obedient."

Just to walk you through that, the word "to be subject" there, it's one we've seen several times in the book of Titus. It's the word *hupotasso* in Greek, which is a compound word from *hupo*, "under" and *tasso* "to put." It means "to put yourself under someone", to willingly follow their authority. It's a common word in the Bible, you see it a lot. But it means you choose to follow. You're not forced to follow. The government doesn't make you do it at the point of a gun. You willingly follow them from the heart.

He also uses the word "obey" in the passage, which is self-explanatory. And if you notice, Paul says you should do this with the rulers and the authorities. That's another way of saying with the local and federal authorities. "Rulers" refers to the federal government. The rulers from Rome is the idea there. Rome was the federal government at the time. Cesar was the emperor. And "authorities" refers to the local government, the guys who were in Crete. And either way, Paul says, "Whether it's federal or local, whether it's the people in Crete or the people in Rome, you need to follow them. You need to submit to what they say."

And this is helpful to talk about a little bit because of all books of the Bible, to put this in, this was probably the hardest place to write this, because the people of Crete were not a very submissive people. They were about as submissive as a rattlesnake. They were very independent, fiercely independent, they didn't like the government. They were out on an island, they were all on their own. You can imagine they didn't like being told what to do. I've been told some people in Canada move up to the Yukon Territory so they can be all alone. Well, you'd go to the island of Crete and people would come through there, but you were still kind of isolated by water. One author who lived at this time named Polybius said, "The Cretans were constantly involved in insurrection, murder and war. For this reason, they didn't want to be told what to do." And you can add to this, that the church at the time in the first century had developed a reputation for being rebellious, not intentionally. But the church at this time wouldn't sacrifice to the gods. The first century church refused to worship the emperor. They just wouldn't do that. The early Christians talked about a risen King. You can see the implications of that. A King who was coming back. What does that mean if you're the emperor? So, Paul says here, "Titus, you got to remind the Cretans not to rebel. You have to remind them not to actually go against the government."

Now, let's say it this way, they need to stand on their principles. They need to obey God rather than men. If you want to write Acts 5:29 down, that's a great verse for that. Peter says that to his authority, "We obey God rather than man. We follow the Scripture first and we're not going to make sacrifices to the emperor or the gods. We're not going to worship the emperor. We are going to talk about a risen King." "But as we do or as they do," Paul says, "Tell the Cretans to be subject to rulers and to the authorities and to obey."

And just to give you some Biblical perspective on this, here's some passages as to why you do this. Romans 13:1 says, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except that which comes from God, and those which exist are established by God." That's a tough verse, but writing to the church in Rome (Rome was a very wicked place as

well) Paul says, “The government has been established by God. He created the institution of the government.” That doesn't mean He likes what's going on in every government, but the idea of government itself is not wrong.

Romans 13:2 also says, as a result of this, “Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” And Paul doesn't mince words here, but he says, “To resist the government as an institution is to resist what God has ordained. Is to resist what he has created. And if you do that, there will be condemnation.”

One more verse, Romans 13:5 says, “Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but for conscience' sake.” Paul says, “You need to submit to the government for conscience' sake, out of a sense of obligation to God.” Now, this doesn't mean there isn't a time to protest through the proper channels. There is, there most certainly is. And it doesn't mean there's not a time to vote in new leaders or to disobey or as a Christian, to run for office. If you want to read a great story, read the story of William Wilberforce as a believer and what he did in England through the political system. There's a time for all of that. There's a time to disobey, but Paul's point here is that it's not all the time. Some Christians protest the government all the time, don't they do? I don't have to tell you guys that. They do it every chance they get. It's like a hobby horse with them.

I knew a guy in the States some time ago who hated our former president, and I mean he hated him. He couldn't stand him. So, that every other word out of his mouth was an insult or a snide remark. Anytime you talk to him, it was just like a revolving door. “Can you believe the president did this? Can you believe the president did that?” It was as if he sat around all day watching TV, waiting for something to go on or rant on. Paul says believers shouldn't do that. You shouldn't sit around all day waiting for your leaders to mess up, because the government has been established by God, it was created by Him as an institution.

And not only that, but skipping ahead a little bit in Titus, if you look in Titus 3:3, putting this in its context, verse 3 (just a few verses down) says, “For we also were foolish ourselves.” Isn't that interesting? Paul says, “Here's why you should have this perspective toward the government - because you were once as foolish as those lost politicians are. You were once as lost.” But verse 4 says, “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Paul says, “God saved you when you were wrong, God forgave you when you were foolish. He was kind and merciful to you when He didn't have to be, so why can't you be kind towards your politicians? Why can't you forgive them and pray for them and witness to them, and ask them to come to Christ?”

It's amazing how much hatred as Christians we can have toward our politicians. It's amazing the kind of things we can say about them, like they're the scum of the earth. Paul says, “They're not the scum of the earth, they're the mission field.” Amen? They're the ones we're trying to reach. They are just like we were before salvation, and we should remember that and be gracious to them.

The story is told of the time George Whitfield was watching a man on his way to be executed for a crime. He was on his way to be hung by the authorities. And as the people were throwing rocks at him and rotten vegetables and cursing at him, George Whitfield turned to a friend and he said, "There but for the grace of God go I." Friends, can you say that this morning about your politicians? Can you say, "There but for the grace of God go I? I was just as lost as they are. I was just as dead to God. I was just as wrong and He saved me. And now I pray that God would save them." That's the first response that Christians should have towards the government. We should be subject to it. We shouldn't be fighting with it all the time for this reason, because we should look at them as we once were, as lost and dead to God. We should also praise God for the believers that are in government, amen? There are Christians serving in the halls of government, and we should praise the Lord for that.

Which brings us to a second response that we should have towards the government and that is this, we should be ready for every good deed. Paul says, we should be subject to the government, which is a tough command. It's not always easy to do that. But he builds on that, he gets more practical here and he says, we should be ready for every good deed. Our submission should make us ready to do good to the government and not evil. We should be ready to be a blessing to them.

He says it this way in verses 1 through 2, he says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, ready for every good deed and to malign no one." I don't know about you guys, but when I see some of the things going on in government, sometimes the last thing I want to do in my flesh is every good deed. I want to say, "You can have my taxes, but you're going to have to come calling for it." Or, "I'll obey, but you're going to have to pull me over and talk to me first, officer. That shouldn't be the speed limit." Paul says, you should be ready for every good deed.

If you notice the word "ready" here gives the idea of anticipation. You should be prepared for good deeds toward the government. Don't be caught off guard by the opportunity, be waiting for it. Whatever it is, paying taxes, following the law, stopping at a red light, Paul says, you should do it to be a blessing. The New International Version says, "Be ready to do whatever is good for them." You should say, "Is this good for my leaders? Okay, I will do it."

And then on the flip side, the verse says, "Remind them to be ready for every good deed and to malign no one." That phrase literally means speak evil of no one or blaspheme no one. Paul says, "Don't go around talking bad about your leaders. Don't go around saying, "Can you believe the president did this? Can you believe that the prime minister did that? What an idiot? What a moron?" Paul says, "That shouldn't be the tone of your conversation."

And here's why, again, I want to keep going back to this. Verse 3 says, this is why you do that, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, but when the kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us." You could say this way, to look at this from another angle. Paul says here in the flow of this passage, he says, "You need to do this. You need to be ready for every good deed, malign no one, because there's something greater going on than the government here. There's something greater going on than politics, and that is the salvation of souls - the lives of people." The Lord is drawing people near to Himself in Canada, in Ireland, in the US. He is saving sinners from hell, and the last thing you

want to do is interfere with that with your bad attitude. Amen? The last thing you want to do is interfere with the work of the Gospel, with your bad choice of words towards your leaders.

It's interesting, if you study the book of Acts, you read the names of several politicians, several political leaders, and just about every time you do, you see someone witnessing to them. Isn't that neat? Listen, that was a terrible government. That was awful. That was the kind of government that killed people just because you didn't like them. And you read about men like Felix, the governor of Judea and Festus, the Procurator of Judea, and King Agrippa. And every time you read about them, someone is witnessing to them, someone is telling them the Gospel. They're not yelling at them, they're not insulting them, they're not watching them and waiting for them to mess up. They're trying to lead them to Christ. Here Paul says, "You want to make it easy to do that. You want to make it easy for your politicians to come to Christ. Stand on your principles, protest when you need to, vote in new leaders as you need to, but you do it in a way that makes the Gospel attractive to lost men."

Several years ago, a friend of mine invited me to pray for the House of Representatives in Illinois. And I don't know if you know much about politics in the United States, but Illinois is one of the worst States in the country. I mean, there's even signs on your way out of Illinois going into Indiana that say, "Illinoid, Come to Indiana." And I'm like, "Well, I hope that's on the Indiana side of the border." It's had more governors thrown in prison than any other State. Three out of the last five governors or six governors from Illinois are in prison right now. So, a lot of jokes have been made and there's a lot of opportunity for saying things.

But a friend of mine invited me to go pray for the House of Representatives. And when I went to the office to do that, the secretary asked me to sign a document saying I would not offend anybody with my prayer. Kind of caught me off guard. She asked me to sign something saying I would not be divisive. And I was about to say, "Well, I can't do that because I wouldn't know what to ..." I mean if I say God exists in my prayer, I offend half the people in the room, I divide them. And if I say God doesn't exist, I offend the other half. So, please tell me how I'm going to pray and not offend anybody in Illinois? I was about to go into this long speech and sermon and that kind of thing. And she just looked at me with an impatient expression (I think she was having a bad day) and she said, "Look sir, just don't be a jerk." I said, "Okay." And it was fine. I even had a representative come up and thank me for the prayer.

But I mention that because a lot of Christians are ruining their testimony today by simply being a jerk. It's not what they say, it's how they say it. It's not what they pray or what they talk about, it's just the tone. We need to have a tone that reflects a God of love, not a God of hate toward our leaders. Erwin Lutzer, the former pastor of Moody Bible Church in Chicago, in Illinois, once said that,

Politics cannot offer permanent solutions because politics are based on a flawed view of sin and society. One of their premises is that if you elect the "right" representatives who will pass the right legislation you will have the "right" society. But we know that is not true. It is not the way it works.



We have forgotten that the reason the world will never share our values is because it does not share our Christ...

The cross must always stand alone, unopposed by competing loyalties in our minds. Its message must never be sacrificed on the altar of our political agenda, or affected by which party we put in office. Of course, politics have an effect on our lives, but right laws cannot make right people. Our message must be more radical than any government policy can be. It is a message that must penetrate the depth of the human heart.

Isn't that well said? I've heard Francis Schaeffer say, "You can put the Christian flag and the Canadian flag or the American flag on stage with you, but you need to remember that your loyalty is ultimately to the Christian side of things." And when this other flag comes and goes and waivers in its beliefs, and that kind of thing, you still hold the cross first and foremost in your mind. That's what saves sinners. That's what changes society.

Which leads to a final point Paul makes here, one more response to the government. Just to review these other ones. First, he says, you need to be subject to the government. Don't fight with it all the time, don't make life hard on your leaders. Obey from the heart whenever possible. Secondly, he says, you need to be ready for every good deed. You submit with a readiness of spirit, with a willingness that honours Christ.

Which brings us to a third response Christians should have to the government, and that is this, we should show every consideration for all men. That's the last one that Paul puts in the list here. But he says, we should show every consideration for all men. Amen? Paul says, "If all men can be saved, you should show consideration for all men." Amen? It just makes sense. If the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men, then you need to act like it toward the politicians, toward people in positions of authority. They are the "all men" here. And if you read all of verses 1 through 2, Paul writes, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, and showing every consideration for all men."

This is an interesting passage because it's almost like Paul is saying, "Look, Titus, I know the Cretans, I know the kind of reputation they have and they don't like the government, they don't like authority, so let me be very specific here." If he just stopped with saying, "Be subject," the Cretans might say, "Well, I'll be a subject, I just won't kill them with a sword, I'll throw rocks at them. I'll be subject. I just won't hit them with all my heart, I'll just hit them with half my heart." Paul goes into detail as to what this means, and in verse 2, he says they need to be peaceable. That word is *amachos* in Greek. It means "not fighters" or in the King James, "not brawlers". Paul says, "They need to stop brawling with the authorities." Civil revolt and rebellion was a common problem in the first century, especially in this place. Paul says, they need to stop that.

He also says, they need to be gentle towards their leaders. That's very different from the Cretans' mindset. They were not a very gentle people. Paul says, they need to change there too. And then he says, they should be showing every consideration for all men. Some of you have an English Standard Version, it says, "Be courteous towards all people." You see the word "all" there. This is for everyone. Treat everyone with dignity and respect. Treat everyone with kindness and

mercy, even those you disagree with, even those who stand up in front of parliament and say things that you just can't believe any human being would say that from a platform. You're still courteous towards them.

And here's why, again, in verse 3, coming back to this, "For we also were foolish ourselves, disobedient, enslaved to lust, but when the kindness of God appeared, He saved us." I can't emphasize this enough. It all goes back to that. This is the reason you do this. This is the reason you show this consideration and you're peaceable and gentle and obedient and all these things, because God saved you. That's so important to Paul, that he puts it in the verses above this in verses 11 through 15, and he puts it in the verses below this in verses 3 through 7. It kind of envelops this one command like a cloud. Paul says, "You were saved by grace. You were saved by mercy when you didn't deserve it. You were saved by a gift. You were saved by the kindness of God. Jesus climbed into the pit and put you on His back and carried you out." He said, "So the least you could do is be gracious toward others. The least you could do is show mercy to them. That's the only thing that makes this possible." It all goes back to grace. It all goes back to mercy. It all goes back to seeing yourself as God sees you as a humble, forgiven sinner.

Friends, let's be honest, this is one of the hardest, greatest problems we have with the government. We are proud. We are. We don't want to submit to anybody. We don't want to be told what to do. We don't want to see some of these foolish things and say, "That's my representative or that's my leader." And not only that, we think we're better than we are. We say, "If we were in charge, everything would be fine." You guys don't look at me like you don't know what I'm talking about. "If I was a leader, everything would change," and Paul says here, "No, it wouldn't. Have you forgotten what you come from? Have you forgotten what you once were you were? You were foolish too, you were disobedient, you were deceived, enslaved to lust, and you couldn't even save yourself." So, you need to be patient towards those who are lost. You need to say, "There but for the grace of God go I." At a dinner party with a distinguished guest, a politician wants to try to humiliate William Carey, the great missionary to India. He tried to embarrass him by saying, "Mr. Carey, I hear you used to be a shoemaker." It's a very humble possession, isn't it? "How did you like helping people with their feet?" To which William Carey replied, "Yes, I was a shoemaker, but I wasn't very good at it." Friends, we could all say that about our lives. We could all say that about our deeds and our righteousness and our good works. We weren't very good at it. We were a miserable failure when God saved us. We were sinners, we were wretched, we were lost, and yet, He showed us grace. He gave us something we don't deserve, and now we can do the same for others.

Will you do that today? Will you show your politicians grace? Listen, I'm not saying you don't disagree with them and I'm not saying there's not a time to be vocal about that. I'm saying you need to disagree with them with grace. Will you do that? Will you commit to all these things in this passage?

Listen, let me make this real simple for you. If our leaders change, our nation will change. Amen? If the politicians change, they'll take care of the laws and the policies and the business of this nation. The question is, do we believe that? Do we make their salvation our highest priority in this discussion? Will we follow the example of Paul and the men of the New Testament and

witness to our leaders, and pray that they'll be saved? Let's pray for that now. I can't think of any better way to close and to pray for the salvation of our leaders.

Father, as we come to a passage like this one, it's a humbling one because I don't think there's anyone, myself included, who hasn't said some things we probably shouldn't have said about our leaders. Even if we've said things we should have said, we've said it in a way that we should not have said it. Oftentimes, we are sinful in how we respond. Lord, we pray a prayer of repentance for that this morning. We pray for Your help in learning how to apply this difficult passage, this tough stuff from the lips of Paul. And tied into that, Lord, we do pray for our leaders.

I've talked with people here in the great nation of Canada who have said this country has turned 180 degrees in the last 50 years. It's a totally different place in many ways. And Lord, our leaders are the ones who have steered it that way, but we also know that you're a God who saves sinners and you're a God who saves nations as you save sinners. We pray You would do that for Canada.

I pray that for the other countries we've talked about this morning, for Ireland. Lord, I pray the Gospel would go out to all these communities that don't have a church. I pray that the Irish people would be open to hearing the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I pray that for the United States as well. That's a very different place than what I remember growing up.

You are a God of mercy, You're a God who saves, and we pray You would do that this morning. And as we think about that, Lord, would You be honoured in the Lord's Supper. We pray this in Christ's name, amen.