

November 27 Su Reading 331 — Romans 13:1-8 — Authorities are Ministers of God

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.* ² *Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.* ³ *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,* ⁴ *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.* ⁵ *Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.* ⁶ *For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.* 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.* ⁸ *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

Good Government — Do you happen to be living under a local, regional, or national government that you feel is not godly, not seeking the overall good of the people, or is not honest? That has been a worldwide problem for centuries. In fact, Paul lived under the Roman government that controlled the Mediterranean World. That government put Jesus to death and would also execute Paul. In the first six verses of today's passage, however, six times God indicated that He approves of government: it is "*authority ... from God, and ... instituted by God*" (v. 1); it is "*what God has appointed*" (v. 2); it "*is God's servant ... the servant of God*" (v. 4); they "*are ministers of God*" (v. 6). In some places in today's world where there is no government, there is usually civil war between tribes, anarchy, and/or chaos. It reminds me of William Golding's 1954 prize-winning book, "The Lord of the Flies," where a group of British boys get stranded on an otherwise uninhabited island, and their attempt to govern themselves resulted in moral tragedy. Yes, there are bad governments, but we are to "*be subject to the governing authorities*" (v. 1) as long as they don't try to force us to do things that are said by Scripture to be against God's will. Some biblical examples were the midwives who refused the Pharaoh's order to kill newborn male Hebrew babies (Exodus 1); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image (Daniel 3); and Peter and the apostles who disobeyed the Sanhedrin's command "*not to teach in this name*" (Acts 5:28). They gave this reason: "*We must obey God rather than men*" (v. 29). God is the ultimate ruler, and He will rule again on this earth in the future, but in the meantime, He has put governments into place for our general good.

We have used this song once before, but without this appropriate verse that fits well with our reading today. Unfortunately, there is only piano accompaniment for this video.

[What Does the Lord Require - YouTube](#)

Rulers of earth, give ear!
Should you not justice know?
Will God your pleading hear,
While crime and cruelty grow?
Do justly; love mercy;
Walk humbly with your God.

— Albert F. Bayly (1949)

²⁵ *Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages* ²⁶ *but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—* ²⁷ *to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

Doxology of Praise — Paul closed this important book of theology with a doxology that wraps up many of the subjects about God he wrote about throughout the book. He reminds us of five major qualities and actions of God. The first is God's ability: "...*him who is able to strengthen you*" (v. 25). This ability to strengthen is channeled primarily through the "*gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ*" (v. 25). Applying yourself every day to reading God's Word is strengthening you in your faith. The second is an action of God: "*the revelation of the mystery*" (v. 25b). This discloses things that would never be known without His revealing it to us. The gospel disclosed the purpose of Jesus' coming, the Messiah predicted in the OT. We would not have otherwise known that the Messiah was to be the final Paschal Lamb that would be sacrificed to pay the penalty for our sins. Thirdly, all this was done "*according to the command of the eternal God*" (v. 26). God's commanding action suggests that it was given at the perfect time, as Paul wrote earlier, "...*at the right time Christ died for the ungodly*" (Rom. 5:6). The fourth attribute in Rom. 16:26, "*eternal*," is coupled with the third action, "*command*." The reason God could predict events that would happen hundreds of years after they were announced shows the eternity of God. He has not only always existed, but He knows all of human history into what is still in the future. The last quality of God, here, is His wisdom: "...*the only wise God*" (v. 27). He knows everything, forwards and backwards, and from the heights to the depths.

Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise - YouTube

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

—Walter C. Smith (1867)

³ *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,* ⁴ *since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,* ⁵ *because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,* ⁶ *which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,* ⁷ *just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.^[fn] He is a faithful minister of Christ on your^[fn] behalf* ⁸ *and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.*

⁹ *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,* ¹⁰ *so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;* ¹¹ *being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all*

endurance and patience with joy, ¹² *giving thanks^[fn] to the Father, who has qualified you^[fn] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.* ¹³ *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,* ¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

ESV Footnotes

(1:7) For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *sundoulos*, see Preface

(1:7) Some manuscripts *our*

(1:12) Or *patience, with joy giving thanks*

(1:12) Some manuscripts *us*

The Process of Salvation — This is a great passage that summarizes how God brings us to salvation. It starts with God and His grace, when we hear “*the grace of God in truth*” (v. 6). We don’t earn our salvation; He initiates it with His love and grace to us. This truth, however, is only *offered* to us; it must then be understood as the second step toward salvation, so that we can “*be filled with the knowledge of his will*” (v. 9). God does that as well; He teaches us His will through the message of His Word that is presented to us. We take the third step by accepting this message and “*being strengthened with all power*” (v. 11), as His Spirit comes to dwell within us. The next step is being declared righteous and accepted, when He “*qualified you to share in the inheritance*” (v. 12). It is all God’s saving action; all we had to do was accept the gift He offers. The final step in this process of salvation summarizes what He has done: “*He ... delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*” (v. 13). It is His work, again: He “*delivered us*” and He “*transferred us*.” By His grace, He offered the gift of salvation; by His power, He strengthened us from the inside; and in His justice, He qualified us to be accepted into His family. What a great salvation!

Salvation Belongs to Our God - YouTube

Salvation belongs to our God
Who sits upon the throne,
And unto the Lamb.
Praise and glory, wisdom and thanks,
Honor and power and strength
Be to our God, forever and ever, Amen
— Pat Turner (1985)

November 30 W Reading 334 — Ephesians 1:3-12 — The Purpose of His Will

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,* ⁴ *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love* ⁵ *he predestined us^[fn] for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,* ⁶ *to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* ⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,* ⁸ *which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight* ⁹ *making known^[fn] to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ* ¹⁰ *as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

¹¹ *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,* ¹² *so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

ESV Footnotes

(1:5) Or *before him in love*, ⁵ *having predestined us*

(1:9) Or *he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known...*

Praise of His Glory — What a passage! We could spend a whole week in these verses thinking about the attributes and actions of God. (Next year, we will concentrate on the many things it says here about the Son.) Three times in these verses, God's purpose is mentioned: Through His purpose, we were chosen (v. 5), adopted (v. 9), and given an inheritance (v. 11). What stood out to me as I meditated on this passage, however, is that God's ultimate purpose for all of this was for "*the praise of his glorious grace*" (v. 6), and "*the praise of his glory*" (v. 12). Although we benefit by God's purposes, His supreme purpose is to point attention back to Himself. Does that sound selfish of God? I don't think so. The reason He points everything back to Himself seems to me to be mostly because He knows how little we really understand and appreciate His greatness. He is infinitely great, powerful, and wise. We have only glimpsed a portion of the magnitude of who He is. He is worthy of our praise of His glory.

[Fill Thou My Life, O Lord My God - YouTube](#)

Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God, in ev'ry part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim Thy being and Thy ways.
Not for the lip of praise alone, nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up of praise in ev'ry part.

— Horatius Bonar (1866)

December 1 Th Reading 335 — Ephesians 2:1-10 — Rich in Mercy

¹ *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins* ² *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—* ³ *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body^[fn] and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* ^[fn] ⁴ *But^[fn] God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,* ⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* ⁶ *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* ⁷ *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* ¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

ESV Footnotes

(2:3) Greek *flesh*

(2:3) Greek *like the rest*

(2:4) Or *And*

The Gift of Salvation — This important passage strongly emphasizes the fact that salvation comes from God as a gift, and that it is not something we have earned: It "*is not your own doing*" (v. 8) and it is "*not a result of works*" (v. 9). Why is this so important? Because, except for born-again Christians, just about everybody who believes there is a heaven in the future, thinks that the way to get there is to deserve it by doing enough to please God. To them, the entrance requirement is good effort; however, God's only requirement is faith. Twice, it is repeated in this passage that it is "*by grace you have been saved*" (vv. 5, 8), but verse 8 adds that it is also "*...through faith.*" That has been God's

only requirement since Abraham. Salvation is a gift: “...*it is the gift of God*” (v. 8). What is going to be remembered “*in the coming ages*”? (v. 7a). It will not be our efforts or even our faith; it will be “*the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us*” (v. 7b).

[Amazing Grace - YouTube](#)

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

— John Newton (1779)

December 2 F Reading 336 — Ephesians 3:14-21 — All the Fulness of God

¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,* ¹⁵ *from whom every family^[fn] in heaven and on earth is named,* ¹⁶ *that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,* ¹⁷ *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,* ¹⁸ *may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,* ¹⁹ *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

²⁰ *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,* ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

ESV Footnote

(3:15) Or *from whom all fatherhood*; the Greek word *patria* in verse 15 is closely related to the word for *Father* in verse 14

Indwelt and Empowered — All three members of the Trinity are mentioned in this great passage: the Father (v. 14), the Holy Spirit (v. 15), and the Son (v. 16). All of them indwell every Christian. Here, it shows that “*his Spirit [is] in your inner being*” (v. 15), and that “*Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*” (v. 16). Jesus showed that the Father also indwells the believer: He promised His disciples that, for those who love and obey Him, “*my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*” (John 14:23, emphasis added). We are indwelt by the full divine Trinity. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians, and us, however, is for something more. We are already indwelt by God, but Paul prayed that we might also be empowered by Him. We are “*to be strengthened with power*” (Eph. 3:16) and have that “*power at work within us*” (v. 20). When we are both indwelt and empowered by God, we are “*filled with the fullness of God*” (v. 19). This is the God of almighty power, “*who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think*” (v. 20a); it is the same “*power at work within us*” (v. 20b). Part of knowing God is knowing the amazing power He has placed within us.

[Fresh Wind - YouTube](#)

We need a fresh wind, the fragrance of heaven.
Pour Your Spirit out, pour Your Spirit out!
A holy anointing, the power of Your presence.
Pour Your Spirit out, pour Your Spirit out!

— David Ware, et. al. (2021)

¹ *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,* ² *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,* ³ *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Over, Through, and In All — We have another expression of the Trinity in this passage: “...*one Spirit ... one Lord ... one God and Father*” (vv. 4-5). All of those statements emphasize the overall theme of unity. God is one and the Church is one. For Christians, every aspect of God is always working on their behalf. Verse 6 shows not only the unity of God the Father, but also three of His other characteristics. First, He is “*over all*,” emphasizing His sovereignty. He is not only the Creator of all, but also the Ruler of all. Because of the free will of man, not all that happens is what God desires, but He is still in control of the big picture. He is guiding history. God is also “*through all*,” pervading His whole creation. All that the world calls “nature” is the active involvement of God. In the Son’s connection to Creation, Paul wrote that “*in him all things hold together*” (Col. 1:17). God not only put all that He created into place, but He continues to maintain it in all of its changes. Thirdly, God is also “*in all*.” Some ancient manuscripts have inserted the word “you” or “us” here, indicating that this “*all*” refers to the Church, the Body of Christ. God certainly does indwell each member of the Church, which brings us together and keeps us together in unity.

[The Church’s One Foundation - YouTube](#)

Elect from ev'ry nation,
yet one o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation:
one Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
with ev'ry grace endued.

— Samuel J. Stone (1866)