

Transcript for Friday Message from Pastor Poock, January 15, 2021

Morning, everyone. It is Friday, January 15th. I've been on a little bit of a hiatus with Christmas and a little bit of vacation going on. So, good to be back and good to present this message to you. First off, I want to apologize. My tooth is still being worked on. Hopefully, in about three months, I'll finally get my final tooth put in there and I'll be done with this long journey. But in the meantime, you might hear a little bit of whistling in my S's and TH's and F's, that don't quite sound right, but we're going to work on it. I had surgery on Thursday and my mouth is still just a little bit swollen. Can't quite get that false tooth back in there, the temporary tooth until we get to the end. So we're just going to work with what we got.

Now, this week has been an interesting time in our nation. We have seen continuous protests in different people, in different situations than what has been going on for the rest of last year. But what really concerned me was the censorship that is being pushed right now. A lot of people saying, if you agree with this person, then they're going to cut you off. Twitter and Facebook, and several other platforms have basically cut off one side of the conversation. Now, I'm not arguing for one side or the other, as far as the political spectrum goes. As you know, if you've been listening to me, both parties and the entire political system are a temporary earthly thing. And that we do have some Scripture that talks to us about how we are supposed to interact with that authority. But the fact of the matter is, neither one of these parties and no government in the world ever has been good in everything. No government in the world has been able to save its people. No government in the world is our salvation and our hope for peace. The only thing that is peace, that gives us a hope of peace is our faith in Jesus Christ and the promise that He will come again to bring us to be with Him in paradise. So don't take this as an argument for one branch or the other or one side or the other. That's not my point. My point is this, Romans 13 says, "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 the 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. For, because of this, you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed 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."

Now, our government, and again, every other government that has ever existed, has failed to live up to the standards that God has placed here in Romans 13. However, just because they have failed to live up to the standards, it does not give us the authority to not be subject to them. Now, that being said, our own government, the constitution has given us the right of protest, the right of free speech, and the right of being able to actually vote for those in leadership. And so, because the constitution is the governing body of our nation, we really do need to follow very closely to what it says. And our founding fathers understood that the most important thing that was needed is the freedom of religion, which then also extends to free speech.

So let's read Amendment one to the Bill of Rights. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof or abridging the freedom of speech or the press or the right of the people peacefully to assemble and to petition the government for redress on grievances." There's a lot packed in that First Amendment and I dealt with this a lot in the military as a chaplain. The question was, "How can I be a chaplain in the military when everybody has this idea of there should be the separation of church and state?" But separation of church and state is not in the Bill

of Rights. But what it is, is that there's a freedom of religion and there's also a prohibition against the free exercise of religion, and then the very next thing is freedom of speech.

Now, the reason I connect all of this together to what's been going on recently is when people start saying that you cannot say certain things or believe certain things about the political system, it's not too many steps longer before they start saying you can't believe what you believe in the Bible, and you have to conform to what we say is right. So the freedom of the speech is paramount to the freedom of religion. I had a friend of mine in the Chaplain Corps who was a Latter-day Saint Chaplain. And while, obviously, we disagreed theologically on many different things, I always supported his right to preach and teach according to his faith and his understanding. And that he had the freedom to do so, even if there were many people that didn't agree with it, or didn't think it was a good thing. I didn't agree with it and I didn't necessarily think it was a good thing either. But if he is not allowed the free right to believe and teach what he thinks is right, then sooner or later, it's going to come to me and I'm not going to have the freedom to say what is right and to preach what is true. The truth has no fear of challenge. If we believe we have the truth then we don't need to be afraid of free speech. There are plenty of people who have different ideas about God, about our government. But the reality is in the marketplace of ideas, when we have free speech, we get the ability to speak, to influence, to hear and to grow together and respect one another. We have lost our ability to respect and honor one another.

And I've seen, and again, both parties and most forms of government right now have failed miserably in this. But we, as Christians, are held to a higher standard and we need to act with honor and integrity and respect. Now, we do have the right to peacefully assemble and to petition the government to redress grievances. So I really encourage all of us to contact our elected officials and let them know the freedom of speech is guaranteed in our constitution. And we will not give that up because we will not give up the freedom of religion. We need to write our officials and let them know when things are wrong and we think they ought to be changed. We need to, as good citizens, exercise our right peacefully to address the grievances and the problems within our system.

But when one side begins to say that the other side cannot say anything, then we begin to have a problem and then we are going to find, in a few years, them saying the same thing about our churches. So let us pray for our leaders. Let us pray for those who are in authority over us, that they might be wise. Let us pray for the courts and the legislators and the president, both the current one and our next one, that wisdom will prevail and that they will understand what they are losing when they limit the freedom of speech and criticism of people that they disagree with. This isn't political. This is not political. This is faith. This is religion.

So let us pray.

Lord God, I pray that you will be with our leaders and our civil servants in the government, that you would give wisdom to our president, both the current one and our next one, that they might continue to serve our nation. And we pray for wisdom for the congress and legislators, that they might seek the interests of our nation and what is best for everyone, not just a few select individuals. And Lord, we also pray for our local government, that they might be active in protecting us and guarding us. And Lord, thank you for the freedom that we have here in America to speak what we believe and to believe it without fear. Help us to hold fast to those freedoms and never allow those who would be over us to silence us, even if that means eventually that we might be persecuted and that we might be put in jail for it. Help us to be strong and faithful to your Word. In Jesus name. Amen.