

Someone to Watch over Me

The teacher put two baskets of treats on her desk, a basket of apples and a basket of cookies. She told the students they could each take one treat. Next to the basket of apples was a sign: "Take only one, God is watching."

As one little boy reached over to take a cookie, the girl next to him said, "Take all you want, God's watching the apples!"

Schoolchildren are under the authority of their teachers. Next come the administrators. Administrators, in turn, report to elected officials. Elected officials answer to the voters. In this week's study Paul reminds us that all of us are under God's ultimate authority.

Monday – God's Authority

"A man with God is always in the majority." John Knox, 16th c. Scottish theologian

1. Please read Romans 13:1-7. What aspects of God's overall authority are discussed here?
2. How do Isaiah 51:11-16 and Psalm 146:1-10 help us to understand the goodness of having God, and not people, in ultimate authority?
3. The belief in God's ultimate authority stems from Genesis 1:1-31. What acts of power and governance do you find there?

Making it Personal: Spend time in prayer thanking him for his ultimate authority, and submit yourself to him.

Tuesday – Appointed Authority

"It is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor." George Washington

1. Please read Romans 13:1-2. Consider people who serve in government or the church. From where do they derive their authority?
2. See Acts 22:30-23:5, where we find Paul submitting to earthly authorities. How is his conduct an example for you in your own life?

Text Insight: Paul quoted Exodus 22:28, which appears to couple the authority of people to God's authority.

Digging Deeper - As you read 1 Samuel 24:1-7, how did David treat King Saul? By that time, David had been told by the prophet Samuel that God would remove Saul and put David on Israel's throne. Why do you think David did not take matters into his own hand right there and then? Close by asking the Lord to help you grow in the attitude that David lived by.

Wednesday – Do Right/Do Wrong

"One that confounds good and evil is an enemy to good." Edmund Burke, 18th c. British statesman

1. Please read Romans 13:3-7. In what ways do these verses apply to those rulers who do not recognize God's ultimate authority? How do they apply to you under such circumstances?
2. 1 Samuel 31:1-13 records a grim day in Israel's history. How did Saul's terrified armor bearer honor his ruler? What did the people of Jabesh Gilead do? What difficulties did they face? Did they do right? Why?
3. In 2 Samuel 1:1-15, David learns of Saul's death. What, other than grief, might have motivated David to respond the way he did?

Prayer Focus: Our leaders face difficulties every day, sometimes matters of life and death and sometimes not. Pray for them to possess wisdom and strength, integrity and compassion in their duties.

Thursday – Day to Day Citizenship

"Just as a servant knows that he must first obey his master in all things, so the surrender to an implicit and unquestionable obedience must become the essential characteristic of our lives." Andrew Murray, 19th c. South African pastor

1. Please read Romans 13:5-7. What are we commanded to do? In what ways is this hard for you?
2. What instruction does Jesus give in Mark 12:12-17 regarding earthly authority and heavenly authority? How can you follow these twin commands?

Text Insight: Herodians and Pharisees were both Jewish groups. Pharisees were highly religious and wanted to be separated from the Roman Empire. Herodians were quite secular and cooperated with Roman authority.

3. In Matthew 8:5-13, how did the Centurion's understanding of earthly authority lead to his acceptance of Jesus' heavenly authority?

Making it Personal: How does your own attitude toward earthly authority affect your relationship with God?

Friday – God's Sword

"One sword keeps another in the sheath." George Herbert, 17th c. Welsh politician and pastor

1. Please read Numbers 22:1-20. What two opposing demands were made on Balaam, earthly (verse 6) and heavenly (verses 12 and 20)?
2. Now read Numbers 22:21-41. What did the Angel of the Lord remind Balaam of in verse 35?
3. Keep the sword imagery in mind (verses 23, 27 and 31 speak of the angel's sword; verse 29 reveals that Balaam is weaponless). With this in mind read Hebrews 4:12-13 and Revelations 1:12-18. What is our ultimate weapon? Why?

Prayer Focus: Pray for God's church (that's you and me and all believers in Jesus) to spread his word, the Bible. It's our powerful authority for living as God wants us to live.

For the Weekend: Jesus and Pilate have an interesting conversation about authority in John 19:1-16. What points do they each make? What can you learn about authority from Christ? Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4 to discover how you can honor God in the way you honor earthly authorities, then take time to do so this weekend.