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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**July 8, 2018**

**Trusting in Him Who Judges Justly**

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**Prayer:** *Father, once again we thank you for who you are, we thank you for the God who provides, for the God who provided the means for us to have a relationship with you. Father, we just praise you and thank you for providing for a place for us to come to offer up corporate worship to you, a place of safety where we can still gather and not fear for our lives and we're thankful for that. And Lord, we pray again for the presence of your Holy Spirit. You have provided your Spirit to give us the ability to understand what is written in your word. So this morning as we open up your word, we ask for the presence and the power of your Holy Spirit, that it may be of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well we've been looking at 1 Peter, chapter 2. Let me just read to you where we've been for the last couple of weeks. This is 1 Peter 2:13-18. It's about submission. *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is*

*God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.*

Now we spent a good deal of time last few times out looking at this whole idea of submission to human authority, and we noted that there were three basic areas of submission that we have to deal with. We have the problem of submission which actually has to do with our innate desire as sons of Adam to rebel, we have the purpose of submission which is to let God's power flow instead of ours, and we have the power of submission, which is this unique life-changing power that flows from God's strength through our weakness. And finally as we mentioned, we have the perfect proponent of submission, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus led the way knowing that choosing the power of love over the power of power itself would cost him his own life. And you know, God expects us as imitators of Christ to follow in Christ's example. And Peter went as far as to command slaves to submit to the authority of their owners, not just the kindly ones but also the ones who were harsh, who were wicked. And we pointed out last time

that Peter wrote this letter to a church that was under the rule of Rome who happened to be under the rule of a homicidal maniac by the name of Nero. And we pointed out how counterintuitive it seems to submit to authority when that authority doesn't seem to be worthy of being submitted to.

Well, after the service Nick came up to me and he asked, I got a question for you. He said, what about if someone in authority is abusing children? Great question. What about if a government official told you to do something that you knew in your heart of hearts was wrong? Well, I told Nick that there is much more to do with this idea of submission that we needed to cover before we get the complete picture because sometimes submission to God's law requires resistance to man's. I told him that Peter who was the author of this text that told us we were to submit to authority, that same Peter defied those same authorities and broke the law on more than one occasion. I mean, but Peter tells us to submit to those in authority. And Paul tells us in *Romans 13: 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.* Resisting authority is like resisting God, according to Paul. And yet Paul and many of God's chosen saints chose to break

the law. I mean think of Daniel. He was expressly forbidden to pray by the ruling authorities in Babylon. Now you remember what his response was? I mean not only did he break the law by praying but he did it very publicly in front of an open window every day.

*Daniel 6 says this, it says: All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for 30 days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked. Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Daniel didn't care who saw him. He was not going to obey this law. He was an obvious lawbreaker, so was Peter, so were the apostles. After being imprisoned for preaching the gospel they were strictly forbidden by the governing authorities to teach, but teach they did. This is Acts 5, it says: And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged*

*you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." They disobeyed the authorities.*

So how are we to understand what God's intent is for us when it comes to submitting to governing authorities? How are we to know which laws we are supposed to submit to and which laws we are supposed to resist? Well we're not left to guess. Jesus actually gave us an answer to this question. It occurred when at one point the Pharisees were trying to trip him up, so they decided they had this trick question they were going to ask him. And we find this trick question in *Matthew 22*. It says: *Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him -- that's Jesus -- in his words. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are*

*God's." When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.*

What Jesus is talking about is what we've been talk about for the last couple of weeks in this series and that is there are two very different and distinct kingdoms: There's the kingdom of this earth, ruled by the ruler of this earth that relies on the power of power itself, and then there's the kingdom of God ruled by King Jesus and it relies on the power of love. And there are also two different realms with these two different kingdoms just as there are two different types of power. And what God is saying is that while we are citizens of this planet, we are to submit to the order of this realm but only up to a certain point. The point where we cease being law keepers and become law breakers is where God's law and man's law conflict. Now God very much wants us to render to Caesar what he is exactly entitled to. That includes loving my neighbor by following every single man made law designed to benefit the general good and it also includes paying taxes. I mean consider that Jesus told the contemporaries of his day to render to Caesar what he was due knowing that Caesar was oftentimes just appallingly wicked. He was still due his taxes. And on another occasion, Peter was approached by the temple tax collectors wanting to know if he and his master, that's Jesus, if they paid the temple tax. Now you also have to understand that Israel was a theocracy,

so being part of that nation obligated you to pay part of the tax for the upkeep of the temple. And we look at scripture, we see Jesus has this marvelous exchange with Peter about this whole idea of paying taxes in *Matthew 17*. It says this, it says: *When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" He said, "Yes."* So he's asking does Jesus pay the tax? Peter says, yeah, I think so. He wasn't quite certain. And he gets approached by them and then he heads home and he wants to bring the situation to Jesus. But if you look at the text you notice what happens when Peter comes in to the house, you see Jesus is already one step ahead of him. It says: *And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free."* Jesus is asking Peter, do the sons of kings ever have to pay taxes or aren't they the ones who receive taxes that are raised by others? Peter agrees that the sons of kings are not the ones who are normally called on to pay taxes. Jesus says: *"However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."* You see, Jesus having established that he is indeed the son of a king, the son of the king of kings and not

someone required to pay taxes says nevertheless, nevertheless not to give offense, nevertheless not to be a bad example, here's how you can pay the tax for both of us. And what follows is a miracle or actually it's a series of miracles that seemed like absolutely nothing given the low key way Jesus delivers it. Jesus just commands a fish to show up and then somehow or other places the exact amount required for a double drachma tax for himself and for Peter in a coin in the fish's mouth and then he commands the fish to allow himself to be caught by Peter. See, Jesus's absolute command of everything from the behavior of fishes to the manufacture of gold coins are on display in a command given so casually that Jesus makes it seem like it's next to nothing. But what Jesus was doing was he was showing respect not just for the secular government of Rome but also for the very same religious leaders who were plotting to kill him. Jesus knew that as well. But when it came to man's laws or even religious laws, Jesus submitted. But he submitted only up to a point. And the point that he submitted to was where God's laws and man's laws conflicted. Jesus was routinely accused of violating the Sabbath because at that point in time the religious leaders had elevated the Sabbath to this new form of religious rule keeping not even remotely resembling the rest that God intended it to be. Once again when God's law and man's law conflict with each other, Jesus will submit first and foremost to God's law.

So how does this practically apply to us? How do we understand what our relationship is to governing authorities? I remember many, many years ago, probably 30, more than 30 years ago, the very first time I decided to go to a protest rally against abortion, a Christian friend of mine was very concerned. She called up and she said abortion's the law of the land and aren't we under obligation to respect the law even if we don't agree with it? Well, I pointed out to her that one of the most basic of God's laws is thou shalt not kill. And now we find ourself in a situation where the state is in direct violation of that law and so we as Christians have an obligation to follow God's law and not man's. We are to submit to governing authorities up to the point where they conflict with God's law and then we are to resist. So you say okay, well, what then? Well, the second part of our response when God's law and man's law conflict is that following the example of others in scriptures, we take full responsibility for whatever consequences may follow. I mean go back to Daniel. Daniel broke the law by praying. What happened to Daniel? Well, he got thrown into a lions' den. Peter broke the law when it came to preaching, he was beaten, he was imprisoned. In fact all of the apostles suffered martyrs' deaths because they refused to follow the laws of man instead of God. You see in essence God says where man's law and God's law conflict, we are to obey God's law and trust him for the consequences even if those consequences are severe. You see, the

key for all issues of authority, whether it's submission or resistance, is trust. And I say all of this by way of introduction to our text this morning which is *1 Peter 2:19-23*. It says this: *For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

Now God identifies in this text two completely different reasons for suffering at the hands of those in authority: One is deserved, the other is not. And I confess there have been times when I've heard a brother or sister complain bitterly about being persecuted for their faith when in reality they were being persecuted because they were acting like consummate jerks. It happens. If your life and your gospel isn't filled with the grace of the gospel, undeserved grace that you and I have already received, then God says whatever pushback you're receiving is not for the gospel's sake but for your own shortcomings. He says: *For what credit is*

*it if, when you sin and are beaten for it you endure? You see what God is calling us to is not suffering for doing wrong but suffering for doing right.*

Have you ever been reviled? Have you ever been cursed out by someone? Have you ever been publicly put down, humiliated, or made to feel like a fool by someone because you love the Lord Jesus Christ? How did you respond? I mean chances are the very last thing on your mind at a time like that is to consider yourself blessed. But hear what Jesus said in *Matthew 5:10*, he said: *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* What Jesus is saying is that true sons of the Father, the ones who have the very Spirit of the living God within them will respond with blessing from a curse because they're following Christ who is following his Father. And the scripture tells us why. It says: *For this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to*

*him who judges justly.* There's a life changing principle in this paragraph. You see, Jesus could bless when cursed and do good when hated because he knew the God of perfect justice had his back. He could let go of any need for vengeance because he knew he could entrust himself to him who judges justly. And "love your neighbors and hate your enemy" was the standard way of doing business in Jesus's day and Jesus is showing us here a better way. He's demonstrating the power of love over the power of power itself, but he wasn't exercising that power in a vacuum. Jesus's strength came from trusting that his heavenly Father would make all things right. And if you truly understand that God will in the end make everything cosmically even-stein, that he really will then you don't have to worry about personally making things even. And you know that freedom goes even further. I mean Jesus said do good to those who hate you, and he did. And one of the very last things that Jesus did before going to the cross was to honor Judas at the last supper. I mean Jesus did good to someone who clearly hated him. And up to the very end he responded to the hatred of Judas by sitting down one last time warning and pleading with him over a meal. Jesus knew perfectly well that Judas after sharing that meal fully intend to betray him for thirty pieces of silver. It didn't stop him from trying. The reason why is *he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* And Jesus not only did good for Judas who hated him in return, he also did good for the masses who showed him

no love whatsoever.

You know, we all heard the story of the loaves and the fishes. Jesus feeds a crowd of thousands with two -- five loaves and two fishes. But there's another slant to that story. It's a story of Jesus doing good for people who have no love at all for him. See, Jesus knew with absolute certainty that many of those he was feeding had no interest in him whatsoever. They were there for the food. Jesus even said so. I mean the day after he goes to the other side of the lake and he finds that the crowds are seeking him out and they're again seeking him out looking for food. And Jesus said to them in *John 6:26*: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set his seal on him."* And Jesus of course is speaking about himself as the food that endures forever. But understand, this crowd is only interested in a miracle that's going to be able to sustain them by feeding them constantly. And they made that clear to Jesus. In *John 6:34* it says: *Then they said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always."* And Jesus said to them, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and*

*yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."* So here we have Jesus saying these words to a crowd that wants to use him only as a meal ticket. And he understands this is a crowd that will eventually crucify him. He was determined to do good to those who would later betray him and so he calls the crowd out right then and there. In verse 64 Jesus says: *"But there are some of you who do not believe," for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."* From that time many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more. Jesus knew that many in those crowds would wind up being those who would later be shouting "crucify him" and yet he did good to those who hated him. And you know what enabled Jesus to do that? It's the very same thing that would enable us to do it. He entrusted himself to him who judges justly. And he's our example.

So how do you and I respond to those who hate us? I mean if we truly believe that him who judges justly will guarantee, guarantee that in the end justice will be completely served, it changes everything. I mean if I truly believe that, then I am freed up to respond in a way that breaks the cycle of "love your neighbor and hate your enemy." I want to give you an example. I want to give

you an extreme example of how this works. I want to give an extreme example because it may give clarity to some of the less extreme situations that all of us have to deal with, situations that we see and I want you to see this extreme example to see the value of trust in circumstances that we could hardly even imagine.

Miroslav Volf is a theologian who lived through the horror of the war in Kosovo in the late 1990's. If you know anything about that conflict, you know that it was a conflict filled with ethnic cleansings that included rape and murder and torture, arson and terror. Now if you were ever on the receiving end of those horrors, your natural inclination would be to even the score if you ever had the opportunity because that's how the power of power itself works. And the key to allowing the power of love to do its work is to genuinely believe that you can trust yourself to him who judges justly. God says in *Romans 12:18*: *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* Now God is very clear, he says you don't do vengeance well, and I do it perfectly. And what he asks of us is to shift our desire to exact vengeance for ourselves to him. It literally means trusting that God's vengeance and not mine will be best for everyone involved. Now it's one thing to do that when your neighbor has slandered you. It's another thing in its entirety when your neighbor has raped

your daughter and slit your brother's throat and everything in you cries out for vengeance. Well, Miroslav Volf knows all about that. He went through hell on earth where that kind of thing actually happened. Volf demonstrated the incredible power of love over the power of power itself by pointing out that the only ones who were capable of acting in a Christ-like manner, the only ones who could embrace a nonviolent response to atrocity were those who knew that Him who judges justly would in the end be the only one capable of making certain that justice was done. You see, believing in that God freed them up to act as Christ would have them act in the most unimaginably awful circumstance. This comes from Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*, an essay he wrote. Many of you might recognize it. Tim Keller refers to it many times. This is what Volf wrote about that. Actually he's writing about our reaction in the West. He says this:

"My thesis that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West. To the person who is inclined to dismiss it, I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war zone. Among your listeners are people whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit. The topic of the lecture: A

Christian attitude toward violence. The thesis: We should not retaliate since God is perfect noncoercive love. Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind."

Do you hear what he's saying? What he's saying is only within the confines of this safe protected place such as we enjoy here in the West could this silly idea of a God who is unwilling to practice retributive justice even be considered. I mean safe places give rise to mushy gods who don't ever exact vengeance because they're nothing but "perfect noncoercive love." In a place where your daughter is raped and your father and brother have their throats slit, you had better believe there's a God who's going to make things right and has the power and will to make sure that justice will eventually prevail or you're going to spend all of your time looking for their daughters to rape and their brothers and uncles to have their throats slit. I mean the reason why Jesus could break the cycle of "love your neighbor and hate your enemy" is because he knew his Father could be trusted to judge all things justly. And knowing that freed him up from ever having to seek a

vengeance that he knew his Father would always deliver. And that's why Peter says that Christ here is our example. He says: *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he didn't revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

Now we are nowhere near living out the horrors of Kosovo and our enemy's attacks are mainly on our reputations and egos instead of our families and possessions, but the principles remain the same. And our ongoing cultural collapse means eventually this culture is going to come after you. And when it does, God expects us to fight our enemies exactly the way Jesus fought his. You know, we're not used to being hated and attacked for believing that marriage should be between a man and a woman and that babies should be safe in the womb, but attacking that has become a new cultural norm. And if you break "the new normal," you can expect to be reviled as a bigot, a hater, maybe even a fascist. Trusting in Him who judges justly is the essence of Christ's teaching as to how we are to respond to personal attacks. And we recognize we still have much to learn about loving our enemies and the power of love over the power of power.

I remember a few years back during the height of the Chick-fil-A

controversy in one of the restaurant parking lots it had filled up with people who were protesting the owner's stand on traditional marriage. It was a hot August day and the restaurant's response was to bring out cold water that they served to each of the protesters. The protesters were absolutely flabbergasted. I mean they believed like everyone else that they should only love their neighbors in the gay community and hate their enemies in the Chick-fil-A community. And when the very people who they regarded as bitter enemies showed them the love of Christ by giving them a cup of cold water, they didn't know how to respond. Truth be told they probably would have been more comfortable if the Chick-fil-A employees had gone out with fire hoses and tried to forcibly remove them because that's how the power of power works. That's how most people respond and that's what most people's comfort level consists of. Violate that norm by opting for the power of love and you will find people are absolutely mystified. See, all of us have been taught from day one almost the exact opposite of what Jesus teaches. I mean, someone hits you, you hit them back. When we grow up we put away the hitting but the principle remains the same: If somebody hurts you, you got to find a way to hurt him back. And whether we like to admit it or not, all of us are far more comfortable with flight or fight than love your enemies. I tell folks all the time that God's way of approaching conflict is radically different from the way all of us are used to. I mean we

may hate conflict or argument or fighting but it's what we're used to and what we're actually very, very comfortable with. So when we get into a conflict, we figuratively put up our dukes or we take off running. I mean it's usually one or the other, and God is telling us to do something different, something totally counterintuitive. Jesus invites us to come into the ring with our hands down, trusting that him who judges justly will see that justice is eventually done. I'm not suggesting that Christians are called on to be so naive and so pacifistic as to be inviting conflict. What I'm saying is that Jesus is instructing us on a new and different way to view conflict. And when you attempt to do things God's way, I can tell you people just don't know how to react. They come in with their dukes up and they expect you to put your dukes up and when you don't, they really don't know what to do. I mean the folks in the Chick-fil-A parking lot, they didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to react when their "enemies" treated them with love and respect instead of hate. This is God's secret weapon. And it only works to the extent that we genuinely believe that God has our back. And when we deploy it, God's power is unleashed. God says in *Romans 12:18* *if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* To the contrary, *"if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty,*

*give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* I've seen what those burning coals look like and sometimes folks react to those coals by being even more aggressive, even more difficult and sometimes they're completely unnerved and sometimes it's somewhere in between.

But you know we all know that we are living in hate-filled times. The CEO of Twitter made a cosmic blunder recently of acknowledging that he ate a chicken sandwich at Chick-fil-A. The Twitter world blew up. How dare he eat a chicken sandwich in a place that supports traditional marriage! And the outrage went on for days even after the CEO personally apologized. One person summed up the situation nicely by tweeting this: "Just shows what a sad world we live in when a guy feels he has to apologize for eating a chicken sandwich!"

Well what do you do when folks expect us to apologize for believing the Bible? When we get labeled as haters for not accepting the new cultural norms? Well God says the key here is the ability to trust in the sovereignty of the Lord you give your loyalty to. *Leave it to the wrath of God for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.* God also says: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* You know what God is

saying is you're only responsible for your side of the street, I mean, you can't control what goes on on the other side but you can control what goes on on yours. And all that God is asking of us is that we trust him enough to let him decide the outcome.

In spite of all the anger and the rancor and bitterness that we see surrounding us in the culture today, we do need to understand something: We do have a reason to celebrate good news. And the good news is that there is a God who judges justly. And he judged every single one of us as guilty and worthy of eternal separation from God in hell, but then he did something about it. He came to this earth as one of us and he lived out his life perfectly and then he offered his life up on a cross as a substitute for our life of sin so that we by faith could have our sins paid for, so that we by faith in his sacrifice could exchange our wickedness for his perfect righteousness. That's the good news that we represent. And Jesus wants and expects us to be imitators of Him. That's why God says: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* Jesus was able to do good to those who hated him because he trusted his Father implicitly, and he is our example. He trusted his Father would judge justly when he was threatened, when he was reviled, and when he suffered the brutality of the cross on our behalf. If he could trust his heavenly Father's

justice, then so can we. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son. We thank you for the example that he has left us, of trusting in Him who judges justly. And Lord, I pray for those times when we are tempted to exercise the power of power over the exercise of the power of love, that we would remember the example that you are, that you gave and that you would give us the strength, the wisdom, and the power by your Holy Spirit's grace and indwelling presence to do exactly what is pleasing to Christ, to be that example. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.