

The Christian and Government

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- I. Introduction
 - a. Have you ever had run-in with the law?
 - i. Traffic ticket
 - ii. Something more serious
 - iii. JOKE: Mother to friend: My son is in jail for something he didn't do. Friend: What was it that he didn't do? Mother: He didn't run fast enough to get away from the police.
 - iv. There is much lawlessness that is just a laughing matter in our society. From fudging on legal contracts to shoplifting, working the system and taking all we can get seems to be the wisdom that the world lives by
 - b. What is our responsibility as Christians before our government?
 - c. If we lived under a different government, would our responsibilities be different?
 - d. This is the subject that we want to explore this morning, and get our answers from God's word.
- II. Key Sentence: The Scriptures teach that the Christian has a duty to submit to the government, influence the government for good, and transcend earthly government as a citizen of heaven
- III. The Christian has a duty to submit to government
 - a. The clearest statements of NT teaching on this subject are
 - i. Romans 13:1-7
 - ii. And 1 Peter 2:13-17
 - iii. We are to submit to the government, unless doing so would infringe upon our obedience to God
 - iv. We will look at that in detail near the end of our lesson
 - b. From these passages, we see that our responsibility to submit to government means we should
 - i. Obey its laws
 1. Even inconvenient laws
 2. Annoying laws
 3. Silly laws
 4. Ridiculous laws
 5. Laws that cannot be enforced and that no one obeys except the conscientious
 6. "Every ordinance of man"
 - ii. Pay its taxes
 1. We must do our best to pay every penny the law requires
 2. It won't be long until tax time arrives
 - iii. Honor its representatives

1. Nothing is more traditional in our society than criticizing government officials, especially ones we disagree with, and speaking of them with contempt
 2. God's law on how the Christian should use the tongue does not have an exception for political speech
 3. We must be on guard to speak of all men and women justly and graciously, even if we disagree with them
 4. But in these passages, we are specifically commanded to show respect to government authorities
 - a. Even the foolish ones? YES
 - b. Even the sinful ones? YES
 - c. Even the corrupt ones? YES
 5. There are no governmental authorities today who are as bad as the Roman emperors who were ruling when Peter and Paul gave these commands
 - a. Caligula was actually insane and appointed a horse to a government office. He believed that he was the god Jupiter incarnate.
 - b. Nero was disgustingly debased in morals, and instigated intense persecutions against the Christians in Rome. He reportedly had Peter crucified and Paul beheaded.
 - c. Of these men, Peter through the Holy Spirit said, "Honor the king"
- iv. Accept its punishments, deserved or not
1. Our submission to government is similar to the servants 1 Peter 2:18-23
 2. Jesus and the early Christians were not only persecuted, but actually killed by their government because of their righteousness.
 - a. Nevertheless, they did not seek to subvert the government
 - b. Or rebel against it
 - c. Or overthrow it
 - d. They just were faithful, obedient subjects, until their faith in God required them to lay down their life rather than submit to the human authorities that were demanding that they blaspheme Christ
 3. This is true submission. We as Christians MUST understand that THIS is what God requires us to be ready to do, if called upon, and we MUST accept it and be willing to do it. When we can do that, the petty annoyances that may arise while living in one of the freest nations in human history will seem as nothing to us, and we will exhibit more humble gratitude with respect to the law and government we live under.

- c. Not only are we to submit to government...
- IV. The Christian has a duty to influence government
 - a. We have many examples of the people of God influencing the governments under which they lived.
 - b. They did this in many ways
 - i. By advice
 - 1. Joseph – Genesis 41:33-37
 - 2. Daniel – Daniel 4:27
 - 3. How do we advise our government?
 - a. By speaking out on issues
 - b. By contacting our representatives
 - c. By exercising influence with those we know in government
 - 4. A Christian seeks to influence the government in ways that bring honor and glory to Christ
 - 5. Not only did they advise the government, they influenced it...
 - ii. By participation in it
 - 1. Joseph – Genesis 41:38-41
 - 2. Daniel – Daniel 6:1-3
 - 3. Erastus – Romans 16:23
 - a. Treasurer (or director of public works) in Corinth
 - b. Paving stone in Corinth has an inscription in Latin, which reads: **ERASTVS. PRO. AED. S.P.STRAVIT**
 - c. This is an abbreviation of **ERASTUS PRO AEDILITATE SUA PECUNIA STRAVIT**
 - d. It translates as "Erastus in return for his aedileship (commissioner of public works) laid [the pavement] at his own expense."
 - e. Very likely the same person who laid this pavement and held office in the city government in Corinth was one of the earliest brothers in Christ
 - f. SOURCE:
http://www.kingdomrecaptured.com/erastus_inscription.htm
 - 4. The world needs Christian leaders
 - a. In families
 - b. In churches
 - c. In communities
 - d. In business
 - e. In government
 - 5. There is another way that the people of God influenced their government
 - iii. By exercising its rights and duties as a Christian
 - 1. Paul is the prime example of this, as a Roman citizen

- a. Voting rights
 - b. Protections
 - i. Romans could not be bound or imprisoned without a trial
 - ii. Could not be scourged
 - iii. Could appeal to Rome if not satisfied with the ruling of local authorities
 - iv. “Never before or since has citizenship been so jealously guarded or so highly prized” – historian Will Durant
 - v. Anyone who falsely claimed to be a Roman citizen could be executed
2. Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to
- a. Protect his reputation as a preacher of the gospel - Acts 16:35-40
 - b. To avoid an unnecessary scourging – Acts 22:24-29
 - c. To take advantage of an opportunity to preach in Rome – Acts 25:9-11
 - d. He did not use it when doing so would have compromised his message – Acts 16:20-23
3. We live in a country where we have many rights protected by law
- a. This is a great blessing for which we should be always thankful
 - b. We should exercise these rights, not for personal gain and glory,
 - c. but for the furtherance of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and for His glory
 - d. We have
 - i. The freedom of speech – Do we speak of God?
 - ii. The freedom of religion – Do we practice our religion freely?
 - iii. The freedom of assembly – Do we assemble with the brethren for worship and on other occasions to encourage and uplift them
 - iv. The freedom of the press – Do we take advantage of the information that is freely available to us and use it for the Lord?
 - v. The right to vote – Do we make voting decisions based on our best judgment of what will be most beneficial to God’s kingdom?
 - vi. So many other rights and freedoms – we should use them for God

4. There were many in Paul's day that had NO RIGHTS. They were slaves. The Roman Empire was in many ways built on slave labor.
 - a. If a master killed his slave, people considered it to be foolish, but not immoral or unlawful.
 - b. Many of the early Christians were slaves
 - i. They not only had to submit to their government
 - ii. But also to their masters, as we read earlier
 - c. From them we learn that even if we had NO RIGHTS AT ALL, we could still be faithful Christians, and would be responsible before God to live righteously, even in a slave state
 5. Not everyone is in a position to advise the government, or serve in government. Many in this world have few rights if any, to exercise in an attempt to influence the government toward righteousness and godliness
 6. However, there is one way in which every Christian can and must influence the government...
- iv. By praying for it
 1. 1 Tim. 2:1-2
 2. Our leaders should receive our prayers regularly
 3. If we are not praying for them, we are neglecting a Christian duty
- V. The Christian has a duty to transcend government
- a. By transcend we mean to rise above it.
 - i. If the individual is the highest good, then we have anarchy, and every man is a law to himself.
 - ii. If the state is the highest good, then individuals have no value except as they further the goals of the state
 - iii. The reality is that God is the highest good. God transcends both the individual and the state, and is personally interested in human souls, made in His image, and secondarily in the government
 - b. There are several ways in which Christians transcend human government
 - i. We have higher standards
 1. If what is legal is the true measure of right and wrong, society is in serious trouble
 2. Even the law of Moses, given by God, was transcended by the higher standards given by Jesus
 3. Matthew 5:38-42 – one example of many
 4. APPLICATION:
 - a. How does our work ethic compare with the world?
 - b. How does our integrity compare with the world?
 - c. How does our attitude in our dealings with others compare with the world?
 5. We not only have higher standards

- ii. We have a higher law
 - 1. This means we have a law that supercedes any human law
 - 2. Whenever there is a conflict, God's law must be obeyed
 - 3. Acts 4:18-20
 - 4. Acts 5:27-29
 - 5. APPLICATION:
 - a. Are we willing to disobey the law of our land, if the law of God requires it?
- iii. We have a higher ruler
 - 1. Greater authority – Matt. 28:18 – “All authority”
 - 2. Greater justice – 1 Peter 2:23 – “he committed himself to Him who judges righteously”
 - 3. Greater punishment – Matt. 10:28
 - 4. APPLICATION:
 - a. Do we honor our human rulers?
 - b. Do we honor the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?
- iv. We have a higher citizenship
 - 1. The Romans were incredibly proud of their great civilization
 - 2. They planted colonies throughout their empire to spread Roman ideas and institutions throughout the world
 - 3. Philippi was one of these Roman colonies – If you were born there, you got all the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen
 - a. Voting rights
 - b. Protection from imprisonment and beatings
 - c. The right to appeal to Rome
 - 4. Phil 3:20-21
 - a. The Christians there were told to consider their true citizenship to be in heaven
 - 5. Where is your citizenship? Where is your loyalty?
 - a. Is it to your state or commonwealth?
 - b. Is it to your country?
 - c. Is it to the kingdom of God?
 - d. Peter and Gina Culpepper – A number of years ago they were anticipating possibly changing jobs. They were deciding where to move to.
 - i. New York City?
 - ii. Charlestown, SC?
 - iii. How will they decide? They are trying to figure out where they can do the most good for the Lord's kingdom
 - e. What would this world be like if every Christian made every decision by seeking to determine how they could do the most good for the Lord's kingdom?

- i. Where would you be living?
- ii. What would you be doing?
- iii. What would your monthly budget look like?
- iv. How would you be spending your leisure time?

VI. Conclusion

- a. The Christian is to
 - i. Submit to government
 - ii. Influence government
 - iii. Transcend government
- b. Are you a citizen of the kingdom of God?
 - i. Acts 16:19-33