

The Christian's Civic Responsibilities

By Matthew Black, Pastor

Text: Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3

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Pray: We had a national tragedy in Texas, and we want to pray for our country, and for the families that were devastated by this act.

"Father, we pray for the families at Fort Hood. Please comfort them and heal them. We pray that they would find rest in You. We also want to pray for this man that has perpetrated this evil act, and we know that Your mercy is so great that it extends even to him. Please have mercy on all who are hurting, and bring them true peace and safety in the arms of the Lord Jesus Christ."

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John Adams and John Hancock had a famous motto: "We recognize no sovereign but God, and no king but **Jesus!**" It is true that our ultimate king is Jesus, but we do have certain responsibilities to those who govern us. How are we to act as Christians toward our leaders?

Whether they are good or bad, whether they are tyrannical or promoters of liberty, we have biblical duties that are found in **Romans 13**. Let us stand as we read **Romans 13:1-7**, "Let every soul be subject unto the governing authorities. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid [have any fear] of the power [one who is in authority]? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise [approval] of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. 5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. 6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 7 ¶ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

Let us pray and ask God for the grace to give honor to whom honor is due.

[Prayer for Guidance]

Introduction: The message this morning is not primarily a political one, but I am going to touch on politics and the Christian. The two things that we are told never to discuss are politics and religion, and I'm going to talk about both in one message!

- A. Politics and government are notoriously **controversial** in any country or setting, certainly among family, and even at times among Christ's people. So

you can see why anyone would hesitate. But then I remembered what God has called me to do here this morning. I'm not here to present you my opinion or my political theory, but to preach to you God's unchanging Word. And as I looked, I found that He has many profitable and important things to say to us.

- B. The Christian life is not **compartmentalized**. We need to understand that Christian living is not divisible, it is not compartmentalized, it is not detachable from any part of life. We are Christians at church, at work, and as citizens of the United States. ***No part of life—thought, word, deed, or relationship is unaffected by our devotion to Jesus Christ our Savior.*** While we are here on this earth, we have certain responsibilities. We are to carry that devotion to Christ to our family, to our work, and in our civic responsibilities.
- C. God does **cares** about politics. In fact, not only does He care, He controls every aspect of it all. He is the "governor of the nations" (**Psalm 22:28**). "He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings" (**Daniel 2:21**). **Psalm 47:8** says that "God reigns over the nations".

God has put us in a place and time in history to carry out His will, and we have responsibilities to the place God has us to sojourn. Paul was proudly Jewish and strongly Roman. Paul utilized all the political powers and rights he had as a Roman citizen not simply to raise the moral standard of society, but to use any rights He had as a platform for the Gospel.

So what are our civic responsibilities? From Romans 13, we are going to see that:

- We are to **prize**, or honor, our leaders.
- We are to **pray** for our leaders.
- We are to use our citizenship on earth **proclaim** the Gospel of Christ's Kingdom of heaven.

I. So first we are to prize, or honor our leaders.

Paul says in **Romans 13:1**, "Let every soul be subject unto the governing authorities. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall bring judgment on themselves." He says in verses 6-7 say, "they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 7 ¶ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

A. **Definition:** The word honor means "to prize, to revere, to show deference to"

B. **Explanation:** Paul says in **verse 7**, with regard to governing authorities, we are to give "honour to whom honour" is due. **Romans 13** was written during the reign of a tyrannical leader. Paul wrote this at a time when Nero had just come to power. Within ten years of writing the book of Romans, Paul would have his head cut off by this one he was honoring!

Look over at **1 Peter 2:17**. Peter tells us the same thing. "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."

The word "honour" here is the same as in **Romans 13**. It means "to prize, to revere or value". This was written from the apostle who was crucified upside down by the king! Any power that our presidents have comes from God.

Peter tells us to honor, or literally prize, the king. Again this is written by a man that was eventually crucified upside down by the king (Nero) he is writing about. Why does he separate that out? He says before "honour all men". Are not kings men? There are two reasons he distinguishes kings.

1. First, he does this because there is a priority. It is God who puts men in positions of authority, and by honoring their position, we are honoring God. Daniel tells us that he sets up kings and tears down kingdoms. The powers that be are ordained of God.
2. Second, God is never redundant. So the second reason is ***because we tend to hold leaders in contempt and to at least be overly critical of them***. When we are overly discouraged or overly disparaging, we are forgetting that it is God who has ordained them.

We cannot simply sit on the sidelines and be discouraged. Neither is the main goal drafting godly legislation or voting in a moral majority. Our main goal is to live a life that is pleasing to Jesus Christ and to proclaim His Gospel. If you are a pauper or if you are a prince, as a Christian, you are to use your influence for Christ's sake.

We live in a country where by the grace of God where we have a voice, almost unprecedented in the history of mankind, and we should use that voice for God's glory (whether by voting or writing letters, etc.), but we must use this privilege with a spirit of reverence and respect to those God has ordained to govern us. When you consider the context of when this was written it is more jaw dropping. Peter and Paul both give numerous instructions to honor the king. Both were martyred in 68AD under the same king they wrote about, Nero.

C. ***Application:*** So what does this mean for us? In honoring our country and our governing leaders, there are two extremes that we seek to avoid in this church.

1. We don't come to church to worship America or our leaders. There are Christians in every nation of the world, and no Christian is to worship their respective country. At the end of the day, our leaders are only human beings with great faults and sins. Our local and national leaders, our soldiers, and our police and firemen are in need of God's grace. They've been given authority, and we ought to honor that authority, because it is given to them by God. They are "ministers of God" for our sake. We ought to obey them and submit to them. We ought to always have a very positive and submissive attitude toward government and law enforcement and the military. But we do not place country above God.

We are humbled and thankful for the country that God has allowed us to be born in, but we worship the God who rules all nations, and any

blessings that we experience in our country is due to God's grace and mercy.

2. Neither ought Christians to **bash their country** or their leaders! We are to **honor** those who are in authority over us.

Our last three presidents have taken a lot of criticism. Perhaps some of it was rightly placed, but in this church we must follow the Bible's commands to us to honor those in authority over us.

We hold our leaders accountable in a God-honoring way. There is a way to disagree with the policies of our Commander-in Chief while not attacking him personally, and while esteeming him as the man God has put over us. We are to honor them.

The Bible overall has much to say about this. The Old Testament is filled with instruction telling people to obey the law of the land and to honor those who enforce it. The New Testament is the same. The Apostle Paul on many occasions instructed believers to submit to the authorities, to honor the ruler, to obey the governor, to respond to those who are in authority over us. Look at Titus 3 and I Peter 2.

- **Titus 3:1**, "Remind them to be **subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work**". Paul wrote this during the reign of Nero, who could not crucify Paul because he was a Roman citizen, but he had him decapitated.
- **1 Peter 2:13-14**, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the **king as supreme**, 14 or to **governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.**" Peter wrote this also during the reign of Nero, who would later have Peter crucified upside down.

Explanation: Obviously, when it says we are to obey and submit to the government, this implies that you are to submit to them as they submit to God. In other words you are not to carry out the whims of tyrants if they are in contradiction to the Law of God.

For example, when Hitler told his soldiers to arrest and kill all Jews, as a Christian, you would have had to exercise civil disobedience in a peaceful way. When the governing authorities ask you to sin against God, you must refuse.

But Paul says that the wicked emperor Nero and all the magistrates of the pagan Roman Empire were "ministers of God" for our sake. We live in a country that is much kinder and gentler than Rome. We ought to obey them and submit to those God has placed over us. As I said, we ought to always have a very positive and submissive attitude toward government and law enforcement and the military.

Transition: So we are to **prize** our leaders. That's our first responsibility. The entire Bible is filled with it.

- II. Secondly, we are to **pray** for our leaders. Paul tells us in **1 Timothy 2:1-3**, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

During the past fifty years, well-meaning Christians have founded a number of Christian activist organizations and sunk millions of dollars into them in an effort to use the apparatus of politics—lobbying, legislation, demonstration, and boycott—to counteract the moral decline of American culture. They pour their energy and other resources into efforts to drum up a "Christian" political movement that will fight back against the prevailing anti-Christian culture.

John MacArthur said, "The greatest temporal good we can accomplish through political involvement cannot compare to what the Lord can accomplish through us in the eternal work of His kingdom." "The greatest temporal good we can accomplish through political involvement cannot compare to what the Lord can accomplish through us in the eternal work of His kingdom."

But aren't we to do more? Aren't we to legislate and run for office and vote? You may do that, and you ought to do that. But that is not the most important thing.

We are called to do good "when it is in the power of our hand to do it" (**Proverbs 3:27**). There is room for Christian liberty here. I don't know how involved you should be. Each has to seek the Lord.

A. There is certainly no prohibition on believers being directly involved in government as civil servants, as some notable examples in the Old and New Testaments illustrate.

1. Old Testament.

- **Joseph** in Egypt and
- **Daniel** in Babylon are two excellent models of servants God used in top governmental positions to further His kingdom.
- We also have **Esther** who was called to the kingdom of Persia "for such a time as this".
- We have the example of **Nehemiah**. God used a pagan king (Artaxerxes) to further his cause.

2. New Testament.

- We know that there were times **Paul** relied on his Roman citizenship. He didn't say "God save me!" Instead, he appealed to Caesar. Paul knew that even the Caesar (the Roman emperor) was a minister of God.
- The **centurion's servant** (**Matthew 8:5-13**)
- **Zaccheus** the tax collector (**Luke 19:1-10**), and
- **Cornelius** the centurion (Acts 10) all continued in public service even after they experienced the healing or saving power of Christ.
- Also, as far as we know, the **Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus** also remained in office after he was converted (**Acts 13:4-12**).

B. Church History also illustrates this.

- During the Reformation how God used kings and kingdoms to further the Gospel.
- You think of King Henry the VIII who killed Tyndale who translated the English Bible, and then God used King Henry to distribute the Bible for the first time in English to all the churches in England within three years of Tyndale's death.

So we do good, we use our place and privileges, not as an end or as our final hope, but simply to be good stewards of what God has put in our hand. We want to be instruments of His sovereign will. But this is not an end in and of itself. There are many times when things will not turn out the way we want, but that does not mean that God is any less sovereign or that His plans are frustrated.

So many times we get so busy talking about how to effect change, we forget that the one who actually effects and controls change is not the President or the Legislature, or the Governor. **Proverbs 20:1**, "The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord".

Application: My challenge to you on this point is to do what you have liberty in your conscience to do politically. Talk what you will about changes that ought to occur in government. But as much as you talk and act, spend at least that amount of time in prayer, for it is God who affects change.

- III. The final responsibility we are looking at is this: ***we are to use our citizenship on earth proclaim the Gospel of Christ's Kingdom of heaven.*** The Bible tells us that all Christians are looking for another country. Paul tells us that every Christian has dual citizenship. We are citizens here in the United States, but we are living and waiting for Jesus Christ to come and bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. If you are born again, you are a "citizen of Heaven" with responsibilities to that Kingdom (**Philippians 3:20**). The agenda of God's redemption of souls is much more important than having people live in comfort and peace on earth. Temporary comfort and safety is important, but eternal safety is much more important. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Leaders are in a place of high honor, but they are not beyond the need of salvation. The Gospel is for Presidents, Kings, as well as the poor and miserable of the world.

Kings and Presidents can and ought to be saved. Soldiers and police officers ought to turn to Christ. Consider how God can humble anyone. He humbled great king Nebuchadnezzar of ancient Babylon.

I don't have a corner on the truth; I am not worthy of this truth, but this is the Gospel = Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

We want to honor you today. We prize you as God commands us. Our respect for you comes from the great authority God has given each one of you. If you are a veteran or active military, a police officer or firefighter, or if you are in the government of our community, we honor you! And today we want to honor you by persuading you to fully submit your life to Jesus Christ.

We are here only temporarily. We are not here to simply pass good legislation. There is nothing wrong with that for sure, but it is a matter of priority. God left us here on this earth primarily to rescue the souls of men. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this, the judgment." God left us here on this earth to prepare men and women for eternity.

One day we are going to stand before Jesus Christ. He is called the Judge of all the earth. He is the greatest King and the Greatest General.

He is going to right every wrong and bring justice to every injustice.

2 Peter 3:10 says that when the Lord comes it will be "as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

We will all give an account before Him.

We need to see that Jesus Christ is the Greatest Sacrifice, and therefore the Greatest Hero. He gave His life to show all people every where the Way of salvation. When we think of deliverance in this world, we think of oppressive governments.

2 Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Jesus Christ said in **John 14:6**, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me".

- A. Following the right way is absolutely necessary if you want to live another day in relative peace on the earth.
1. If your boss gives you direction for a job, and you neglect or do something different, you'll be in big trouble.
 2. Now those of you who are soldiers or policy makers or the protectors of society know that in an emergency, people need to have the right direction. Going the right direction in a war or in an emergency, or simply following the laws of direction in the flow of traffic is absolutely necessary for you to come out of the situation alive. If you are in a fire, you must follow the exit signs. If you are in an emergency situation, you must follow the commands of the police and rescuers.
- B. In our day of confusion, people are saying that every way is the right way. There are no absolutes. Things are right and wrong only as each individual decides.
1. That doesn't work in **geography**. If I tell you any way will get you to my house, then I'm not guiding you rightly.
 2. It doesn't work in the **realm of morals**. We don't tell our children the prescribing drugs and pushing drugs are the same. One is saving lives—the other is killing them. Not every way is the right way.
 3. It doesn't work in the **realm of government**. Liberty and tyranny are not the same. There is good government and bad government.

4. So why would it work in the **realm of religion**? Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one can come to the Father except by me". Now all religions want to claim Christ as their own, but if they want Him, they must take Him as He is, and not re-invent Him. If we receive Him and not some reinvention of Him, then we must receive Him as the Only Way to Heaven.

Jesus Christ said in **John 14:6**, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me".

Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Conclusion: Brethren, let us **PRIZE** those in authority over us, our government, our military, our police and fire fighters.

Let us **PRAY** for them for they are the ministers of God for us.

Let us use our place in life not simply to legislate, but to **PROCLAIM** the Gospel that will grant eternal life to anyone. Presidents, princes, police, all people need Christ!!