

## The Duties of Citizens – I Peter 2:11-17

### I. Introduction:

- A. Good sermons begin with a text of scripture and as the Lord directs, other scriptures, explanations, illustrations and applications are used to bring that scripture home to the heart.
1. We have an example of this here in this passage.
  2. The scripture text is made up of **verses 11 & 12** – *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*
  3. From there, Peter develops his thought with a pertinent example.
- B. So, what is the theme of Peter’s sermon?
1. It is an exhortation to behave like good citizens of Heaven. This is as applicable today as it was in his day.
    - a. We are only pilgrims in this world.
    - b. In God’s world, we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation and peculiar people,
    - c. but in this world we are visitors – strangers passing through.
  2. Peter’s second point exhorts us to live victoriously over our fleshly lusts.
  3. And the third point flows out of the first: strive to silence the objections of non-Christians toward Christ, through your godly living.
    - a. Obviously, that means live in complete honesty and sincerity.
    - b. Evil men may approve of their own sins, but they will never approve of the sins of professing Christians.
    - c. We can silence them to some degree through our honesty and our positive good works.
  4. The conclusion of the message is: these three things work together toward the glory of God.
  5. In **verses 13-17** we have a couple of illustrations to enlighten Peter’s sermonic text.
- C. Before I get to that, however, let me point to the close proximity of the text’s two citizenships.
1. From **verse 9 to verse 12**, Peter develops the thought that we are citizens of Glory – of Heaven.
    - a. The born-again child God, is part of a peculiar people – a special people of God.
    - b. At first we were not a people, but now we are a people belonging to the Lord.
    - c. We are strangers in a foreign country called the United States, because our citizenship is in Heaven.
  2. I said in an earlier message that the word *“conversation”* in **verse 12** speaks of our behaviour, our manner of life.
  3. In **Philippians 3:20** we again have the word *“conversation.”* Paul says,
    - a. *“Our conversation is in Heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*
    - b. Paul uses the word *“politeuma”* (*pol-it’-yoo-mah*) through which you might hear the English: *“politics.”*
    - c. *“Politeuma”* in secular Greek literature is sometimes translated *“citizenship.”*
  4. But as I say, Peter uses a different word. Nevertheless, his theme and context is the same as Paul’s.
  5. We are God’s special people
  6. But then Peter immediately steps from the duties Heavenly citizenship to the duties of secular citizenship.
  7. In other words, we cannot separate those two very far and still glorify the Lord the way we should.

### II. Peter and Paul both tell us how the Christian should *VIEW* secular government.

- A. Like it or not, we should accept the fact that all government is God-ordained – *all* government.
1. At first glance, looking at various anti-Christian regimes, we’d say: *“It isn’t logical that these could be approved or ordained by God.”*
  2. But that is what **Romans 13:1** says: *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.”*
  3. What are the alternatives if we deny that all governments are derived from God?
    - a. First, we are stuck with calling Paul a liar or trying to make what he says mean something else.
    - b. Second, if we deny that all power is of God, then we must deny the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.
  4. So the question is: Is God, or is God not, the absolute monarch over His creation?

- B. Someone may say, but our government was established by Satan, not by Jehovah.
1. I won't deny that God has intermediate instruments, but He is still God.
  2. Think about the Biblical account of the establishment of Israel's first king.
    - a. It was the people of Israel who demanded of Samuel a king; but it was God who supplied him.
    - b. And incidentally, in granting their demand, it was, in fact, a kind punishment.
  3. Our government may be elected out of small field, chosen by a select group of conspirators.
    - a. And the one who is dictating those powerful puppets may be Satan Himself.
    - b. But Jehovah can point the Devil in any direction, like the arrow on a weathervane.
  4. Does **Romans 13:1** say that there is no power but of God, or doesn't it?
- C. Obviously, God has chosen to give men the apparent reigns of government.
1. And of those men, not a single king or governor since days of Adam has been free of sin.
  2. This means that God knew that human government would be corrupt to some degree.
  3. In some cases that corruption is to a very large degree.
  4. But the Lord has laid down a pattern for those leaders to follow whether they actually do so or not.
- D. Governments have been established and permitted by God to serve its citizens.
1. For example, they should be in the business of punishing evildoers – **verse 14**.
  2. There is no mystery about that word "**punish**;" it speaks of retribution.
  3. And the Bible teaches that punishment should fit the crime.
    - a. Punishment for theft should involve restoration to the offended party with interest – **Leviticus 6**.
    - b. Punishment for murder, rape and other serious crimes should be execution.
      - (1) *"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."*
      - (2) *"If thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for the governor beareth not the sword in vain; he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."*
    - c. Capital Punishment is not cruel and unjust punishment, it's God's punishment.
    - d. Punishment for any crime should be fitting.
    - e. And from what I read in God's word, incarceration in prison is not a fitting punishment.
  4. Second, proper government should encourage and support that which is truly beneficial to society.
    - a. The minister of government is a minister to thee for good – **Romans 13:4**.
    - b. Governments are ordained of God for the praise of citizens that do well.
  5. Nowhere in the Word are governments supposed to be never-ending legislation factories.
- E. There is a lot to say in the Bible about governments, but I'll let my thoughts end with these two:
1. They are ordained of God, and they are created to serve society.

### III. Okay then, what is the Christian's general **DUTY** toward the government?

- A. Our first responsibility according to **1 Timothy 2:2** is to pray for all that are in authority that we might live a quiet and peaceable life.
- B. After that it is our job to *"submit ourselves to every ordinance of man."*
1. The word "**submit**" is not a difficult one to define.
  2. Literally it means, *"to put oneself under"* – that is, *"to obey."*
  3. Paul said, *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, there is no power but of God..."*
  4. Neither apostle gives us the privilege of choosing which ordinances, laws and powers to obey.
  5. They both appear to teach obedience to all.
- C. But there is one exception: when the laws of men conflict with the clear commands of the Lord Himself.
1. This same Apostle once told one level of government over him, *"We **MUST** obey God."*
  2. If the government said that it is unlawful to meet together to worship the Lord...

- a. If they said that it is unlawful to possess and study our Bibles...
- b. If they forbade the work of evangelism...
- c. Then we are obligated to disobey that government in order to obey God.
3. Notice that in **verse 17** fearing God comes before honoring the king.
4. But if the government said that they wanted to tax the offerings received by our church, I personally, and reluctantly, think that we'd be obligated to comply.
  - a. If the city said that we couldn't park our cars on south side the building next to the street, we'd comply.
  - b. If they said that cats must be licensed then our cats should be licensed.
- D. And in regard to this principle we have the example of our Lord Jesus to follow.
  1. **Verse 21** – *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did not sin...”*
  2. Was the Lord in sympathy with those who ruled over the Temple? He was NOT!
    - a. Yet He still paid his temple tax when it was required. Yes, Jesus paid His taxes.
  3. Was Christ in sympathy with either Herod or Pilate? Definitely not.
    - a. But He never raised a peep in protest to their governorships.
    - b. We never find the Lord Jesus in any other attitude except submission to higher authorities.
  4. And remember that they were higher than Christ only in a very limited way.
  5. It was the Lord Jesus, as God, who granted them their authority.

#### IV. But **WHY** should we have this attitude and show this submission?

- A. It is certainly not simply to avoid personal trouble with the law.
  1. Peter said, *“Our motivation toward submission is the Lord; do it for the Lord's sake.”*
  2. The Jews had been a thorn in the side of their political captors throughout the ages.
    - a. They acknowledged the Romans only when it suited them; as when then wanted someone crucified.
  3. When the Lord began to call out a special people for His name, the Romans falsely assumed that these were just a different kind of troublesome Jew.
  4. Indeed many of them were born again out of Judaism and they perhaps did carry those same prejudices.
  5. So non-Christian governments falsely assumed that the Christians were trouble-makers.
    - a. They were accused of treason and trouble, simply for being followers of Christ.
    - b. They were hunted and murdered as if they were Asiatic Huns trying to destroy Western civilization.
  6. So both Paul and Peter taught the saints to live their lives in such a way that the lies and accusations thrown against them might be silenced.
  7. Christians are not society's evildoers, they are doers of good works.
  8. The life of the Christian should be exemplary – for the sake of Lord who has bought and saved us.
- B. Second, we are to submit ourselves to the ordinances of man, simply because it is the will of God.
  1. We really don't need anything more than that, but we do have more.
  2. Think of the ministry of the Gospel.
    - a. The facts are preached, and the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment.
    - b. But the general call of God, the logic of the gospel and the ministry of the Spirit are usually resisted.
    - c. But they are resisted unto damnation. God's will is not going to be naysayed.
  3. What about other forms of the power and authority of God?
    - a. **Romans 13:1-2** – *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.”*
    - b. *Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”*
  4. It is God's will that we Christians obey the laws of our various governments.
  5. If we resist, it is not too much unlike resisting other forms of God's authority.
- C. And then we come back to our responsibilities toward our neighbors.

1. If we want to win the lost to Christ, we have to silence their criticisms.
  2. Look at **verse 16** – *“As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as servants of God.”*
  3. Many Christians fight against their governments because of sin in those governments.
  4. But that struggle does nothing, or at least very little, to win our neighbors to Christ.
  5. We need to fight the battles which God commands us to fight, not those which only appear logical.
- D. There was a man in the church in New Mexico which I pastored, who was a deliberate tax-dodger.
1. He wasn't simply a wise Christian who was trying to keep his taxes to a minimum.
  2. He was trying his best to defraud the government, encouraging me and others to do the same.
  3. There is no doubt in my mind his real purpose was motivated by personal greed.
  4. The man wasn't as concerned with the wickedness of government as he was the weakness of his own bank account.
  5. I know that he is just one man, and that it is a matter of conviction in others,
  6. but there is a lot of self-seeking among those who are in opposition to the government established by God.
- E. Our lives, and therefore our behaviour, should be higher than horizontal.
1. We are commanded not to love the world, neither the things in the world.
  2. The only exception to that is to love the souls which are still found in the world.
  3. The problems in society cannot be overcome by electing good men and passing good laws to overthrow bad laws.
  4. The problems in government can only be overcome by changing the hearts of the people who are under those wicked governments.
  5. Jesus' attention was not in Pilate and Herod, but the souls of the people who lived under those men.
  6. And that should be the focus of our attention as well.
- F. In this 4<sup>th</sup> of July week, I commend you who love your country and who want it to be very best in the world.
1. But I tell you again, the only way that can be possible is to bring it to the righteousness of Christ.
  2. That does not mean battling bad government and making ourselves obnoxious.
  3. Our responsibility in this area is to live righteously and to keep Christ before the eyes of the lost.
  4. Be a patriot, I encourage you, but be a Christian patriot and that means putting Christ first.
    - a. Fly the stars and stripes with great pride. You have good cause.
    - b. But fly the flag of Christ just as high if not higher.
    - c. His flag is the only one that will be unfurled in eternity.
- G. The Roman empire, under which Christ lived and under which the apostles served Christ, is now gone.
1. There have been hundreds of kings, prime ministers and presidents who are now just notes in history.
  2. If God called an end to the United States of America, and eternity began tonight, the only thing that would matter would be the Kingdom of God.
  3. Will you rule and reign with Christ, because you have been born again and you are one of Christ's peculiar people?
  4. Will you be honored by the Saviour, because you put Him before all the other causes and fights in this world?
  5. This is what Peter is telling those saints in Asia, Bithynia and Galatia.