

SPECIAL SESSION

CHRISTIAN CITIZENS

Christian citizens are charged throughout the Scriptures to submit to the God-ordained rule of those in human government. But despite the ordination and coordination of God and human government, the laws of human beings are imperfect. When man-made laws run contrary to the Scriptures, they must be abandoned for the sake of a greater commandment and a greater rule. In short, our heavenly citizenship trumps our earthly citizenship.

STEPS TO PREPARE

1. Read the main passages for this study, recording your insights and questions:
 - ▷ Matthew 17:24-27
 - ▷ Romans 13:1-7
 - ▷ 1 Peter 2:13-17
2. Review the Teaching Plan (pp.2-5).
 - ▷ Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
 - ▷ Adjust the plan if necessary.
3. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp.6-12).
 - ▷ Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
 - ▷ Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.

LESSON OUTLINE

GOD CREATED GOVERNMENT...

- 1. To represent His authority (Rom. 13:1-4).**
- 2. For His people to live under (Matt. 17:24-27; Rom. 13:5-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).**

SPECIAL SESSION

TEACHING PLAN

CHRISTIAN CITIZENS

CONNECT

OPTION 1

Highlight some of the issues that make it difficult for Christians to make sense of the relationship between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God. Emphasize that God’s Word helps us walk the right path with respect to God and government (p.6).



What is your perception of human government—a blessing, a necessary evil, or something else? Why do you feel that way?

OPTION 2

Lead students to discuss the role of government in everyday life (the point here would be to get them thinking about how government touches their everyday lives, leading to a discussion on why it is important to think biblically about it). Consider the following questions to get the conversation started:



How will you come into contact with local government today? How does the federal government influence our lives, families, and communities on a regular basis? Am I supposed to obey government without question? Explain. Why is it important to think about how Christians should relate to government?

TRANSITION

In this session, we will see the reality of two kingdoms—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. We will see that Christian citizens are charged throughout Scripture to submit to the God-ordained rule of those in human government. But despite the ordination and coordination of God and human government, the laws of human beings are imperfect. When man-made laws run contrary to the Scriptures, they must be abandoned for the sake of a greater commandment and a greater rule. In short, our heavenly citizenship trumps our earthly citizenship.

NOTES:

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

CONVEY**GOD CREATED GOVERNMENT...****1. TO REPRESENT HIS AUTHORITY (ROM. 13:1-4).**

Point to Genesis 9:5-6 as God's first institution of human government. In this instruction, God delegated authority to humans to regulate and deal justly with each other. This truth grounds the rest of the Bible's teachings regarding interaction with human governments (p.7).



At this point, consider using the story "When Kingdoms Collide" in the Personal Study Guide (p.3) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.



God created the institutions of marriage, family, and government. What similarities exist between these institutions? What are differences between them?

Explain the specific ways civil authorities are expected by God to steward their power: (pp.7-9)

- **To punish evildoers who are within.** Read Romans 13:1-4 with this point.
- **To protect from evildoers who are without.**
- **To promote what is good.**



What are some limitations that prohibit a government from rightly carrying out its role?

2. FOR HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE UNDER (MATT. 17:24-27; ROM. 13:5-7; 1 PET. 2:13-17).

Transition to God's expectations for His people who live under the authority of governments. Read Romans 13:5-7, connecting obedience to God with obedience to governmental authority (p.9).



At this point, consider using the story "Pray for Politicians" in the Personal Study Guide (p.5) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.

Read Matthew 17:24-27, in which Jesus gives us an example of honoring government. Explain the details of the passage. Emphasize the freedom that God's people have in Christ, but conclude that we must obey God's higher law of love and concern for others. This will cause us to fulfill our expectations just as Jesus did (pp.9-10).

Next read 1 Peter 2:13-17. Point out the vertical implications in verses 13-14. Explain that obeying God requires obeying our government as they steward their authority (vv.13-14). Then explain the horizontal implications in verses 15-17. Our honor and obedience to government serves as a means of

WHEN KINGDOMS COLLIDE

Christians are citizens of two cities—the City of God and the city of man. The former city is our future and forever home, and it is within it we find purpose and peace. The other city is our temporary residence, and it is often hostile toward the rule of God in the hearts of His people. Yet even though our future home is what we look forward to, we are still called to represent our King and to be on mission for Him while here on earth.

► *What are some benefits for citizens when a government faithfully stewards its delegated authority?*

PRAY FOR POLITICIANS

When it comes to criticizing politicians and government decisions, unfortunately we sometimes see Christians respond in a similar manner as everyone else. An election is won or a bill is passed and, before you know it, those who are in opposition let their voices be known, and sometimes in the most vocal way possible. But when was the last time we offered prayer for our leaders over complaint? When was the last time we prayed for their salvation, and for wisdom as they lead? Prayer should always be the first response of a Christian—not complaints.

► *On what issues should Christians disobey their government? How might respect for authority be shown even when Christians cannot obey?*

SPECIAL SESSION *by Marty Duren*

EXPANDED LESSON CONTENT

CHRISTIAN CITIZENS

GOD CREATED GOVERNMENT TO REPRESENT HIS AUTHORITY, AND FOR HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE UNDER.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are distinct in their nature, and ought never to be confounded together; one of which is called civil, the other ecclesiastical government.²

—Isaac Backus

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

The battle for godly government isn't won with upward fists of rebellion, but with downward, humble knees in prayer.³

—Adrian Rogers

OPENING ILLUSTRATION AND DISCUSSION STARTER



Since the beginning of the church, Christians have attempted to make sense of the relationship between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God. How do we remain faithful as people holding dual citizenship? We are, after all, citizens of both heaven and earth. How does this look as it is lived out in the world day by day? Where are the lines of obedience and disobedience to earthly rulers? How do we honor God in submission to earthly rulers? “It is ‘as free people’ who are ‘slaves of God’ that Christians...are able to subordinate themselves. Subordination is thus an

expression of freedom, not of coercion.”¹

History has shown us many forms of government, among them monarchies, oligarchies, democracies, and republics. Some of these are present even in Scripture, though the Bible never endorses one form of human government over another, aside from perhaps the theocracy of ancient Israel. People’s perceptions of government are also varied. One extreme sees government as the answer to all problems and fundamentally necessary for human welfare. The opposite extreme see all government as tyrannical and to be overthrown. Some view government as a blessing to its people; for others, government is a necessary evil.

Where is the line, the path that Christians should follow when navigating the realms of faith and politics, the kingdoms of heaven and earth? How should we live in earthly kingdoms in light of the gospel? God’s Word does address how Christians are to respond to governments of all kinds. Looking at government through a biblical lens will help us avoid extremes that dishonor God and harm our witness.

Christian citizens are charged throughout the Scriptures to submit to the God-ordained rule of those in human government. But despite the ordination and coordination of God and human government, the laws of human beings are imperfect. When man-made laws run contrary to the Scriptures, they must be abandoned for the sake of a greater commandment and a greater rule. In short, our heavenly citizenship trumps our earthly citizenship.

GOD CREATED GOVERNMENT...

1. TO REPRESENT HIS AUTHORITY (ROM. 13:1-4).

How do we know that governments are instituted by God and not simply a man-made establishment for the purpose of structure and safety? Well, we look in God's Word. In order to witness the first institution and instruction for human government, we have to go back very early in human history.

Immediately following the great flood, God said to Noah in Genesis 9:5-6: "I will require the life of every animal and every man for your life and your blood. I will require the life of each man's brother for a man's life. Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image."

This form of justice was a form of human government implemented by God. For the first time, He had given humans the authority to regulate and deal justly with each other. It was God who instituted the earliest form of human government, and the rest of the Bible's teachings regarding interaction with human governments find their foundation in this truth.

It may be easy to view government as a human invention to consolidate power over others. Cynicism over politics could lead one to believe all politicians are only in it for control. But despite the oft-broken nature of human government, Scripture tells us God was the originating factor in its institution. Though no world government is a theocracy—directly ruled by God Himself in a political office—the governments of the world are ruled by civil authorities expected by God to steward their power in specific ways:

To punish evildoers who are within. In Romans 13, the apostle Paul addressed exactly how the government is to protect against evildoers in our midst.

Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God. So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. For government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. (Rom. 13:1-4)

? FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Those who serve in government, whether Christian or not, have a difficult task. Scripture tells us that it is the responsibility of the Christian to pray for his or her government. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Paul wrote: "First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." We must pray on behalf of those who occupy the offices in all levels of government if for no other reason than it pleases our God. Leading is hard, and whether or not our political leaders are Christians, they need the wisdom and guidance of God in their roles.

Pray for them.

FURTHER COMMENTARY

That no authority exists except from God indicates God's sovereignty over human affairs. It also shows why unwarranted rebellion against government is de facto rebellion against God."

"Government is ordained by God to reward good and punish evil, providing peace and order for those whom it serves. The sword alludes to capital punishment. A government that rewards evil and punishes good will not long survive, for evil is innately destructive."⁴

—Edwin A. Blum

FURTHER COMMENTARY

Any submission to the authorities must pass through the filter of God's will and call upon a believer's life. The difficulty here involves discerning God's will and call in those areas to which Scripture does not speak, which requires determining and applying biblical principles rather than explicit biblical statements. This is the Christian's crucial duty for a failure to discern carefully God's will risks disobeying God and incurring His displeasure. Of course, obeying God against the government may result in incurring the government's anger—as the NT and subsequent church history well attest—but that puts a Christian in good company (Matt. 5:10-12).⁵

—William W. Klein

Governments have a delegated authority from God so individuals do not have to take justice into their own hands. It is the responsibility of a government to ensure its citizens are protected from evil by punishing those who have done wrong. When evil goes unpunished, society is weakened. When evildoers face justice, the character of God is revealed in the activity of the government.

For this reason, those who resist authority find themselves opposing God's command, not simply man's laws. Those who would disobey the law are warned that the government "does not carry the sword for no reason." Indeed, God's wrath is executed through the channel of government, which functions as His servant. The human government that God has established is expected to use its authority to punish lawbreakers for the sake of order and the benefit of law-abiding citizens.

To protect from evildoers who are without. What does it mean for a government to protect its citizens from "evildoers who are without"? This refers to those times when a government must protect its populace from outside invaders and assailants.

We live in a war-torn world. Jesus promised the last days would bring "wars and rumors of wars" (Matt. 24:6), and both have happened with consistency since Jesus ascended back to the Father. It seems someone is at war all the time.

Because we live in a fallen world, war is sometimes a regrettable but necessary course of action. A government that goes to war in protection of its people is within the instruction Scripture gives. As children of the Prince of Peace, we should always pray and hope for peace even if war seems the most likely or inevitable outcome. Attempts at peace should be pursued if a government reflects the character of God. However, when protecting the citizenry from outside attack, war is allowed, if necessary.

A primary reason for God's institution of human government is that of justice, and without the principle of self-defense, a government is likely to get obliterated by a rogue government that has chosen to attack. A government must defend itself in an effort to maintain freedom and justice for its people. If a government is being attacked or has failed to resolve peacefully any conflict in pursuit of freedom and justice for its people, then it must responsibly and wisely defend its right to be a just establishment as God originally intended for it in Genesis 9.

The destruction of image-bearers must never be the first option in seeking a solution between conflicting nations or governments. Christian citizens, in their participation in government, must vote and serve in such a way that promotes a culture of peaceful resolution, not willful human bloodshed.

To promote what is good. In addition to punishing evildoers within and protecting from evildoers without, human government is tasked with the responsibility of promoting justice.

In Romans 13:3, Paul wrote that the establishment of human government is for the promotion of good conduct, not bad. To earn the approval of his or her government, a citizen must "do what is good." From its establishment,

the institution of human government was meant for the promotion of righteousness and the prevention of unrighteousness.

2. FOR HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE UNDER (MATT. 17:24-27; ROM. 13:5-7; 1 PET. 2:13-17).

God has instituted civil governments, and the people who lead in government are charged with stewarding their authority to protect its citizens and promote righteousness. This much is clear. But what are the expectations of Christians who live under the rule of human government? One of the primary principles guiding the Christian citizen must be the commandment to honor the governmental authority under which he or she lives. In the Romans 13 passage we just examined, Paul went on to write:

Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath, but also because of your conscience. And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's public servants, continually attending to these tasks. Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor. (Rom. 13:5-7)

In our obedience to the government under which we live, we obey the commandment of God, thus honoring and glorifying Him. In the Gospel of Matthew, we see one of the ways Jesus honored the government under which He lived, which serves as a lesson and an example to us. Matthew 17:24-27 says:

When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the double-drachma tax approached Peter and said, "Doesn't your Teacher pay the double-drachma tax?" "Yes," he said. When he went into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, "What do you think, Simon? Who do earthly kings collect tariffs or taxes from? From their sons or from strangers?" "From strangers," he said. "Then the sons are free," Jesus told him. "But, so we won't offend them, go to the sea, cast in a fishhook, and take the first fish that you catch. When you open its mouth you'll find a coin. Take it and give it to them for Me and you." (Matt. 17:24-27)

What is going on here? The temple tax collectors asked Peter if his Teacher, Jesus, pays the temple tax required of all Israelite males over the age of 20. This double-drachma tax was about two days' wages. Formally trained and ordained rabbis were exempt from the tax, much like some tax exemptions for religious organizations today. Jesus was not a formally ordained rabbi, so it would be a breach of the law if He exempted Himself from the temple tax on Israelite men.⁸

In His subsequent discussion with Peter, Jesus explained the larger context for a proper view of taxes and government. As sons of God—Jewish

FURTHER COMMENTARY

Since the civil government is ordained by God and gives us certain benefits, we are to submit to it. We are to pay taxes to support it, honor and respect it. Early Christians refused to worship emperor or state, but they showed their respect by praying for the authorities.⁶

—Edwin A. Blum

FURTHER COMMENTARY

Because the temple is God the Father's own house, the Son and those he has brought into the Father's family (Matt. 12:48-50) are exempt from the temple tax, signaling that, with the coming of the kingdom, believers are no longer under the OT law but the law of Christ (see Gal. 6:2).⁷

—Michael J. Wilkins

men—He and Peter owed no money to the Jewish temple. By virtue of their identity, they were free from obeying this law. Still, Jesus concluded to pay the taxes in order not to offend the tax collectors and their fellow Jews. Jesus paid His earthly dues to whomever required, whether the Jewish temple or the Roman Empire. (See Matt. 22:15-22.) He did not pay taxes out of compulsion, however; He paid taxes in obedience to the higher law of love and concern for others. Jesus' focus on His spiritual kingdom affected His earthly ministry.

It is worth emphasizing again the way in which Jesus showed honor to those in authority—He chose not to offend them by agreeing to pay the taxes. It will not always be natural for us to honor the government under which we live, especially if we disagree with it. Narrow is the path of those who wish to honor God in submission to a dislikable government, but in our honor of human government, we honor the One who has instituted it—the God of our salvation.

Further, the submission of Christian citizens to their governments goes beyond simply honoring God. Scripture supports the idea that submission and obedience to the government can be a means of outreach. 1 Peter 2:13-17 says:

Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the Emperor as the supreme authority or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. As God's slaves, live as free people, but don't use your freedom as a way to conceal evil. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor. (1 Pet. 2:13-17)

Peter's words show that our submission and obedience to our governments not only have vertical implications in our relationship with God but also horizontal implications in our relationships with others being governed by the same authorities. We as Christian citizens communicate to those around us by the way we relate to the government and the kingdom of God.

In verses 13-14, Peter reiterated the same theme of stewardship that Paul presented in Romans 13. Christian citizens must submit to the rule of the government under which they live, and Peter emphasized that human governments must encourage good conduct, not evil. Christian citizens are to honor the civil authorities over them that have been given the responsibility to promote the upright and prosecute the unrighteous. "Peter's implication here is, therefore, that God, not humanity, is behind the setting up of the civil authorities: they are for the regulation of social life, as God intends, and this is reflected in the reason Peter adds: submission is for the Lord's sake."⁹

Peter then explains, in verses 15-17, the effect that submission to governing authorities can have on those around us. Christians are subject to persecution of all levels in governments around the globe. Even in the countries most welcoming to Christians and biblical values, false charges may

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Submit' is the overriding action required of believers. The word means 'to place yourself under someone, to rank under someone.' Here it is essentially a synonym for obedience. Of course, submission to authority does not involve actions that are sinful or contrary to the Word of God. The believer is to obey except when commanded to sin. This is the Christian's responsibility toward all forms of human authority. The all-encompassing nature of this responsibility is underlined in Peter's emphasis on 'every authority instituted among men.'¹⁰

—David Walls
and Max Anders

be brought against Christian citizens. What, then, must be the Christian response as it relates to the authority of government? Again, submission. It is God's will, Peter said, "that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good."

Further, Christians are to utilize whatever freedoms they may have under the authority of their government, however freeing or oppressive it may be, to honor everyone and love their brothers and sisters in Christ. The freedom that Christians have in Christ and under the rule of their government must not be used to conceal evil acts that may undermine the human government that God has ordained or the heavenly kingdom that God has established.

In his Gospel, Luke wrote about an occurrence with Jesus that runs along the same lines as that of the temple tax event. Luke 20:23-25 says: "But detecting their craftiness, He said to them, 'Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?' 'Caesar's,' they said. 'Well then,' He told them, 'give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.'"

This classic passage is often used to teach the Christ-likeness of submission to one's government. In usual form, the Jewish leaders were trying to trap Jesus in His words and prove that He contradicted Himself in His teaching. In equally consistent form, they failed. Jesus, showing the face of the coin, showed that it was Caesar and his government who owned the denarius and thus had the right to determine how much could be taxed. The monies that the people of God use are property of the government that created them. Likewise, the people of God who use the monies of the government are the "property" of the God who created them, and honor should be given to whom honor is due, whether a government or God.

How should Christians respond when the laws of God and government collide? God is holy. His laws are an expression of His character. The governmental systems of this world are fallen and corrupt by nature, and their laws can bear this fallen nature as well. It is inevitable that these two orders of laws will come into conflict, perhaps frequently. When such a situation arises, what is our path as God's people? Can we not obey governmental laws and still obey the God who calls us to submit to civil authorities?

Being put into such a position is not unique to 21st century Christians. "The relationship of Christians to the state was one which soon became problematic, for in the early centuries of the church all states not only were governed by pagans but included pagan worship within their social, economic and political systems. A collision with the church, owing its primary allegiance not to the state but to Jesus Christ, was inevitable."¹³

Perhaps the most well-known example in recent history of choosing between the laws of God and the laws of man concerned families in Germany's Third Reich who illegally hid Jews and members of the Dutch Underground from the Nazis. One such family was that of Casper ten Boom, including his daughters Corrie and Betsie.

"The Ten Boom family were devoted Christians who dedicated their lives in service to their fellow man. Their home was always an 'open house'

FURTHER COMMENTARY

The focus is on honoring the government (even one that may be antagonistic to Christians) that maintains a society's order, thus becoming God's instrument for facilitating the testimony and progress of the gospel. Peter believes that holding to the gospel will make us not problematic revolutionaries but humble and honorable citizens.¹¹

—Jared C. Wilson

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

As with submission to husbands, parents, masters and church leaders, then, submission to governing authorities must never be absolutized. When governments demand that Christians behave in ways that contradict his expressed will, Christians must respectfully disobey.¹²

—Craig Blomberg

for anyone in need. Through the decades the Ten Booms were very active in social work in Haarlem, and their faith inspired them to serve the religious community and society at large. During the Second World War, the Ten Boom home became a refuge, a hiding place, for fugitives and those hunted by the Nazis. By protecting these people, Casper and his daughters, Corrie and Betsie, risked their lives. This non-violent resistance against the Nazi-oppressors was the Ten Booms' way of living out their Christian faith. This faith led them to hide Jews, students who refused to cooperate with the Nazis, and members of the Dutch underground resistance movement.”¹⁴

History gives us the lens through which we know the ten Booms were right, but what about decisions we must make? In short, we must obey God rather than man.

Thomas Schreiner addresses the seeming universality of Romans 13, arguing this injunction does have a limit: “This text is misunderstood if it is taken out of context and used as an absolute word so that Christians uncritically comply with the state no matter what is being demanded. What we have here is a general exhortation that delineates what is usually the case: people should normally obey ruling authorities... Christians should submit to such authority and carry out its statutes, unless the state commands believers to do that which is contrary to the will of God.”¹⁵

The Scriptures address this issue in the Book of Acts. Peter and the apostles faced a civil government insistent that preaching Jesus had to come to an end. Acts 5:28-29 contains the crux of the confrontation: “‘Didn’t we strictly order you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to bring this man’s blood on us!’ But Peter and the apostles replied, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’”

CONCLUSION

The Bible is clear that God is the ultimate Sovereign to whom we all owe allegiance. In His infinite wisdom, He has chosen to delegate authority over the rule of humankind to civil governments, though He still maintains His supreme authority (Dan. 4:32). He has high expectations that His civil servants promote what is good and punish what is evil.

God also has expectations for His people who live under these governments. They are to honor their authorities, obey their laws, and do what is good. In this, we follow the example of our Savior. When a government’s law conflicts with a clear commandment of Scripture, however, we must look to our Savior as the highest authority and follow the decision of the apostles—to obey God rather than men.

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