

## A Christian's Responsibility to its Civil Government

Curtis Carwile

Finally, the elections are finished and our new President-elect is \*shudders\* Illinois Senator Barack Obama. Despite being thoroughly bummed out (though not surprised) by it, life continues. So, whether you voted for or against Senator Obama (we all know nobody voted FOR John McCain), the question should be asked: "What is a Christian's responsibility toward their civil government?"

In Titus 3:1, Paul tells the young preacher in Crete, Titus, to **"Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work."** Be subject to (obey) the rulers and the authorities where ever you are. Paul repeats that idea in Romans 13:1a and goes into further explanation in vss 1b-7. Paul explains that any and all authority that man possesses comes from God (cf. John 19:11). Paul explains that it is the Christian's responsibility to obey the civil government because its authority is from God and obeying the civil government is the same as obeying God. This obedience to the civil government permeates all aspects of a Christian's life. Paul, in vss 6-7, says to pay your taxes (Matthew 22:21), follow the customs, respect those who deserve respect (whether by their own merits or by the position of their office), and honor those who deserve honor. In 2 Peter 2:13-17, Peter makes similar points. He says to **"submit to every ordinance of man"** and tells us to do that from the king all the way down to governors. God makes it very clear that He commands us to obey our civil government.

In the passages we just looked at (Titus 3:1; Romans 13:1-7; 2 Peter 2:13-17), the Bible writers tell us the responsibilities they hold, as well. First and foremost, the responsibility of any civil government is to uphold the statutes of God. Those in positions of authority have been given that power and authority by God and therefore are stewards of that gift. It is their responsibility to use that gift in a way that glorifies God. The authority any government uses should be used to protect and encourage the serving of God. In Romans 13:3, Paul tells us that the role of government is to be a terror to evil works, not good works. In 2 Peter 2:14, Peter tells us that the role of government is to punish evil-doers and praise/reward those who do good deeds. Eventually, those in positions of authority will have to answer for how they used that authority (on the Judgment Day). However, regardless of how the government uses its God-given authority, it is still the Christian's responsibility to obey the government because that is one of the things they will be judged on in the Judgment Day.

Does this mean we have to agree with our civil government on all accounts and blindly follow them? Of course not! In the Old Testament, the prophets God would send to Ju-

dah and Israel would always recognize the political power of the kings despite their disobedience to God (think Elijah and Ahab). In the New Testament, Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." This is at a time when emperor-worship was huge, people were put to death in the Coliseums and Circuses for entertainment, and prostitution was government-sanctioned. I am sure that Jesus disagreed with Caesar in the way he ran his empire and disagreed with Herod and Pilate in the ways they ran their administrations. Yet, Jesus told them to obey that government. He tells us to obey our government despite all the evils it promotes and allows.

With all of this said, there are times where disobeying the government is required. In Acts 5, Peter and the other apostles were arrested for teaching Jesus to the people. In vs. 28, the rulers asked them, "**Did we not strictly command you not to teach in the name of Jesus?**" In vs. 29, Peter responds, "**We ought to obey God rather than men.**" Our example was that obedience to the government is commanded only as far as the commandments of God. That does not mean we can disobey every law of the government if they are disobedient to God, but rather that we are to obey God in all things even if that goes against the civil government. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Daniel 3 made the same stand against the idol worship established by Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 6, Daniel faced the same dilemma when forced to disobey King Darius of Persia when Darius decreed that no one could pray to anyone else other than him for 30 days, but he still obeyed God and prayed to Him. The point is that there are times and situations in which it is a Christian's responsibility to DIS-obey the civil government. Christians in oppressive countries like China, Cuba, and Venezuela all have to disobey the civil governments under which they live in order to obey God. There may come a day when those of us in the United States will have to disobey the civil government here in order to obey God (THINK: calling something a sin regarded as "hate-speech" and therefore prosecutable).

There are several reasons why we are to obey the civil government. One is explained in Romans 13:1-7. Paul explains that we are to obey the civil governments because God gave them their authority. In 2 Peter 2:13, Peter says that we need to obey the government for "**the Lord's sake.**" One of the reasons we are to obey the civil government is because they were established by God. Another reason is mentioned in 2 Peter 2:15, that we need to obey those who rule over us to "silence the ignorance of foolish men." Later, in vs. 20, Peter reasons it out for us: "**For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.**" One of the reasons we are to obey the government is to bring others to Christ. There is something about watching a righteous person suffer that inspires others to righteousness despite what "common thought" professes (Romans 5:6-8; 2 Peter 2:21-25). And, if nothing else, the third reason is because it makes God happy (2 Peter 2:20).

In conclusion, we have seen that it is the Christian's responsibility to obey the civil government despite our feelings toward it and those in charge. We need to obey the civil government because it has been established by God and obeying it is the same as obeying God. The only time it is not acceptable to obey the civil government is when it violates God's laws and even then, it is only acceptable to disobey that civil law. The reasons we are to obey the civil government is because 1) it is from God, 2) it might bring

some lost soul to God, and 3) it makes God happy. Therefore, we need to obey our civil government regardless of who is in the White House or Congress. But, ultimately, we need to obey God. Let us do our best to obey and serve Him all of our lives.

## Prayer

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In praise and worship of God, Prayer is not just a jumble of words or sentences of praise thrown together. A proper prayer should be constructed in a manner that is edifying to the person saying the prayer as well as to any Christian who might be listening. A prayer should consist of one or more of three elements: petition, praise, and thanks. Each is important to a Christian in their relationship with God. And finally, how often do you stop to think about the period at the end of your prayer? Yes that word often used as a punctuation mark by many, not knowing the significance and power of that word: the word “amen”.

What we ask of God can be anything from our daily needs, to health for the sick; we can pray for anything, in fact we are commanded to pray for all things. Philippians 4:6 claims, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” This is clearly saying that anything you might need or whatever troubles you are going through, take it to God in prayer so that He may lighten your burden and comfort you.

Just as we can ask something of God, so must we also give Him thanks for all that He gives us. Over one hundred times in the Bible it says to give thanks to God or it gives examples of others doing so; often this was done to emphasize a word or a point. Rather than making the letters bigger, the authors tended to repeat themselves; and if the Lord bothered to put this point in so many times, that should emphasize how important it is for us in our daily lives to give Him the recognition He deserves for everything He has done for us and given us.

In doing so, you are praising Him. The most overlooked part of a prayer is usually praise. We must praise our Lord in Heaven. Praise, by definition, means “to offer grateful homage to,” as in words or song. By praising God in prayer we are using our words to show our respect, gratitude, devotion, and our fealty towards Him. In the parables of the unmerciful servant and the talents, Christians are portrayed as servants and often refer to themselves as servants of Christ. If we claim to be so, should we not subject ourselves to Him in a manner that would truly make us worthy to even be counted as a servant of Christ? So give God and Jesus Christ the thanks and loyalty they deserve.

Finally, the word “amen,” means “so be it” or “let it be so.” By interjecting this at the end of any prayer, one is stating that they agree fully with everything within the prayer. Unfortunately, it is common among a number of Christians to use this word without listening to the entirety of the prayer or not paying attention at all. Those who are guilty of doing this should be warned; according to God’s word, this is a sin just as great as any other. Matthew 12:36-37 claims that you will be held accountable for your words

whether you are aware of them or not (“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”), and in 1 Corinthians 14:16 the question is raised as to how you can say “amen” if you do not know what the speaker is saying. If you are guilty of this, I beseech you to think about what you are doing. Listen to the prayer being said so that you might properly be able to conclude the prayer in an appropriate manner that is according to God’s word.

## I’ll Tell Them About God Tomorrow

Michael Dunn

Upon my introduction to college, I found that procrastination was not the same game played in high school. In college, you will be found out eventually because procrastination is more noticeable to those who have their doctorates in a certain field. I soon realized that my faith was something that could easily take the back burner of life and become something I put off and ignore. Eventually someone would notice that I proclaim to be God’s adopted child but am procrastinating to tell others of my Father. I could not believe how much I had been putting off spiritual conversation with those who desperately need it and even spiritual conversation with myself (i.e. reading my Bible, praying often).

We as Christians are charged by Christ Himself to “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation,” (Mark 16:15). Why do we covet this gift that freely was given to us? Do we not “... remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’” (Acts 20:35)? How then can we not tell others of Him? My grandmother always told me “spend your time wisely, because that is who you become.” She was right, if I spend my time telling others of our fellow heir and Savior Jesus then I will take on attributes that a child of God ought to have. Have we as a generation taken on the doctrine that we will tell people about God tomorrow? I for one am ashamed to say that I fell into that habit. He deserves our praise now! Not when WE think WE have time. I continually am reminded of the hymn, “None of self and all of thee,” because it reflects so deeply on what our thought process should be to serve God. How beautiful those words are, they speak directly to the heart but how easily our hearts can become entangled in the creed of “all of self and none of thee.”

Phillip is told by an angel to walk and find a eunuch reading the scriptures upon finding him, he asks if he understands what he is reading, and the Eunuch replies, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:31). He is reading Isaiah and so Phillip expounds upon him “the good news about Jesus.” Phillip does not tell the Eunuch that they will talk later but instead sits down and explains so that the seed might be planted. As Paul would say, “I beseech you brethren” to go out and start up a conversation on a whim with somebody about spiritual things. All I am talking about is to spark people’s interest and remember that we are to plant the seed, but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7).

If being ridiculed is what keeps you from telling others, then take this into consideration, “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,” (Matthew 5:11). But do not think blessings will come automatically because for this reason: “You will be hated by all for [Jesus’] name,” (Luke 21:7). I think this is truly one of the hardest realizations to accept as a Christian. But take joy that, “... [His] power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9), says Jesus to Paul. Jesus knew that He had to take people from among sinners and make them His own.

Why should we then be afraid when we should “Count it all joy,... when [we] meet trials of various kinds,” (James 1:2)? I commission you to bring more lost sheep into the fold that they may know the good shepherd’s voice. Why wait to tell them about God tomorrow? We must make “...the best use of the time, because the days are evil,” (Ephesians 5:16). Light the fire in some person’s heart this week through your use of the Gospel given by God.

## YOUR BODY IS A TEMPLE

Taylor Ladd

*“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, NKJV

When you look at yourself in a mirror, what do you see? The answer seems obvious. You see eyes, ears, lips, a nose, a face. Basically, you see flesh. But have you ever thought about what God sees when He looks at us? Paul tells us in this text that God sees a lot more than just flesh; He sees *temples*. Think about that. What exactly does Paul mean when he says that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? Consider the purpose of a temple -- it functions as the dwelling place for some deity. That is exactly what we are as temples of the Holy Spirit -- our bodies function as a residence for God.

This concept may be nothing new to us, but let’s think about its implications. Have you ever noticed how much preparation went into God’s dwelling places in the Old Testament? A large part of the book of Exodus is devoted to recording the detailed instructions God gave for the construction of His tabernacle. Several centuries later, it took Solomon -- the most powerful king in the world and a man with wealth and resources beyond compare -- seven whole years to build God’s temple. After the Babylonians destroyed that temple, it took Zerubbabel nearly 23 years (working off and on) to completely rebuild the Lord’s house. In the days of Herod, the main temple building took 10 years to complete, while the entire temple complex was not finished for 83 years! Imagine all of the intricacy and the attention to detail involved in the construction of these buildings. Rightfully so. We would be foolish to expect the Creator of the universe to live in a Motel 6.

Now, in light of Paul's statement in v. 19, how does your temple measure up to all of that? How much time have you spent preparing your body to be God's dwelling place? How much attention has been paid to detail? If we could all see your temple, what would it look like? Would it be shiny, ornate, intricate, and majestic ... worthy to be inhabited by the God of the universe? Or would it be broken down, abandoned, and in a state of disrepair? God makes it clear what He thinks about a dwelling place that lies in ruins. *He despises it.* Paul says it this way: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The stakes are incredibly high -- either we prepare ourselves to be God's dwelling place, or we invite destruction.

But how does this relate to us in practical terms? Sometimes, our struggle is not about knowing the difference between right and wrong; it's about being disciplined enough to *choose* right over wrong. I may know what Jesus says about jealousy, worldliness, and lust, yet still fall prey to those temptations. The problem is not a lack of knowledge; the problem is a lack of proper *perspective*. Instead of seeing my body as God's temple, I'm seeing it with selfish eyes. I'm viewing my body as something that belongs to me, something I can use however I want. On the other hand, if I understand who is living in my temple, I am going to be a lot more careful about what I decide to put inside that temple. An expectant mother will often be very cautious about what she puts into her body. She may eat healthier, stop smoking, or stop drinking alcohol. Why? Because she understands that her body is a dwelling place for the baby living inside her, and she wants to ensure that the environment is a suitable one. Likewise, when I remember that my body is God's dwelling place, I will be a lot more concerned with what goes into it.

As temples of God, every part of our lives should be affected: our actions, our words, our dress, our values, and our thoughts. We certainly wouldn't want someone to come into our homes and fill them with trash. How could we possibly justify filling God's home with lies, bad language, sexual impurity, dirty entertainment, alcohol, greed, and hatred? This kind of irresponsible behavior is especially inexcusable in light of the fact that God bought us with a price, and therefore we are not our own. When a family buys a home, they have every right to arrange it however they choose. After all, they paid for it. The color of the walls, the type of floor, the furniture, and other interior details are determined by the people living in the house, not by the house itself. If God bought us with the intention of making His home inside of us, what right do we have to fill His house with things that disgust Him? If He wants a house that is spotless, blameless, and holy, then we must give Him such a house.

We must also remember that providing a house suitable for God requires more than just getting rid of the trash. A house may be free of trash, but if the walls are blank, the rooms empty, and the atmosphere sterile and plain, such an environment will not make for much of a dwelling place. It does us no good to remove the garbage from our temples if we make no attempt to replace the garbage with the character of Christ -- honesty, love, humility, servitude, forgiveness, chastity, patience, and courage. How we fill our temple says a lot to the rest of the world about how we view our Lord. When people see our lives, they should see temples that say, "I have been bought at the highest of prices,

therefore I am not for sale. My body belongs to God and no one else ... not even myself.”  
What does your temple say?

# The Voice of Experience

## Senior Life Sketches

*Brief Introductions to good old people!*

*Ken Hirshey*

**Life Before Baptism** - I was born December 1932 on a farm in southwest Missouri. My early years were very simple in daily life, without electricity and all or it's comforts. No TV, no Radio (the batteries were too expensive, so the morning markets and Saturday "Grand Ole' Opry" was our radio listening) and evenings reading, talking, and early to bed along with a full day dawn to dusk working was our day. I recall my dad and mother reading the scriptures to us by a coal oil (kerosene for you younger people) light. We rode two miles to a country church, by rode I mean in a horse and wagon until I was about 4 years old, then dad purchased a Model T with curtains which remained raised in the warmer months and lowered in the cold months. During those early years the church used a single container for the fruit of the vine. When I was about 8 years old dad bought a 1936 Ford and we started attending another church about 5 miles distance. My dad and mother were God loving people as were most of my family; they were a good example for me to follow. My dad was active in the church, leading singing and prayers, etc. He did not graduate from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade while my mother was a high school graduate and taught in the one room elementary schools in the area. I was baptized at the age of 13 years in a creek near the church building in late fall of 1945.

**Life After Baptism** - After completion of high school, college, and two years mandatory service in the military (Army), I returned to Missouri in September 1957. I married my college sweetheart in 1955, a young lady I had converted during the last year of college. It was 6 years after leaving the Army that my work required us to move to Hannibal, MO. We could not find a church in that area, so we determined to try to find others in the area to join together for worship. From there we moved to Omaha, NB where we again started another work. Each of these two started with just two families meeting in our home and finally able to secure a building for a more suitable place to worship. Both of these churches are still in existence. These two experiences helped me grow as a Christian, learn to teach, preach, and do all the other works we need to do as men working for the Lord. Since departing from Nebraska my work has caused me to move to Memphis, TN and then to Cincinnati, OH where I found sound churches to work with. I lost my first wife to cancer in 1994 and have been fortunate to remarry another fine faithful Christian woman. Both have helped me to grow and develop with age, I feel so fortunate to have found two good mates to share my life.

**Life, Your Counsel To Younger Christians** - As I reflect over my 75 years, there are many things I would like to change or do differently, but I know that those things are not really important because they are fixed. The important things are where I go from here. What I do with my life for the remaining years the Lord grants me here. I must try to use each day to it fullest in my service to God, to my family, and to those whom I need to serve, then be able to look back at the end of that day and say I have no regrets. While I can truly say that this land in which we live has and is decaying morally, I must not let it change how I personally maintain my morality. It is so easy to rationalize yourself into accepting what goes on around you as OK. It can seem there are so few bible loving people and faithful servants of God that we are hopelessly outnumbered and to give up. When this starts occurring go to those whom you respect, to the bible, and through prayer, to God for your strength. Just determine to “keep on keeping on” because we all have the highs and the lows, the peaks and the valleys, that’s part of life on this earth.

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