

Our Civic Responsibilities As A Christian

In this article we will examine what God's Word, the Christian Bible, tells us as to the attitude we should have towards the country in which we live.

Looking at our responsibilities to the civil government of our nation.

Christians should pray for the nations

Sometimes it is hard to feel good about our country, or any other nation, for that matter.

We see all the sins of violence, hatred, deceit and lust for power and we sigh and cry about the abominations that people involve themselves and others in.

When we see the injustices that happen, it is all too easy to be critical of our country and its leadership.

We earnestly pray for Jesus Christ to return and sweep aside all human government and set up His rule of humanity.

1 Timothy 2:1 [New King James] *“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,”*

Notice we are to pray for all people, that includes the entire nation and the whole world.

We can pray that more people will hear the gospel message, that will do them the most good, for the first time knowing the very reason for human life.

We are to love all people as our neighbours, [Matthew 19:19] and pray for what is best for them, including their need for repentance and forgiveness from the Creator God, when we as Christians reveal Him to them.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14 [New King James] *“When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

Even when the Creator God Himself causes the land to be cursed because of the people's sins. We should pray that it will bring them to an attitude of repentance.

Has such a thing happened to a nation?

Jonah 3:4-10 [New King James] *“And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.”*

Nineveh, the capital city of Assyrian empire and enemies of God's people Israel, did repent.

Doesn't this hold out hope for any nation today?

We should pray that the people of our nation do repent also.

There is something in human nature, including Christians, that seems to encourage each of us to think we are better than others, and that they deserve punishment.

But we are **not** better than others, [**Philippians 2:3-4**] the Creator God has extended grace towards us and we should desire that others will also receive this blessing.

Jonah 4:1 [New King James] *“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.”*

This repentance made Jonah angry, for he wanted these enemies of Israel punished so that they would not attack Israel.

Jonah 4:11 [New King James] *“And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and much livestock?”*

The Creator God pities all people, and loves those who in ignorance sin against Him, [Romans 5:8].

Ezekiel 18:30-32 [New King James] *“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord GOD. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore turn and live!’”*

God does not enjoy seeing human misery, He wants all people to learn to live the way that will bring them blessings, and this is what we should desire also.

Luke 6:27-28 [New King James] *“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”*

We are to love and pray for our enemies. This applies whether they are personal or national enemies, anyone who might harm us for any reason.

How much more should we pray for our friends and neighbours!

Christians should pray for the nation's government and leaders and all who are in authority

1 Timothy 2:2 [New King James] *“for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”*

We do not pray for their overthrow, but that they will be given wisdom so that we can live a quiet, safe and peaceful life, that the economy can prosper and the Christian Church can do its work of witness without interference.

Romans 13:1-7 [New King James] *“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to*

you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour."

Note it is the Creator God who has ultimately placed these people in authority [verse 4].

1 Peter 2:17 [New King James] *"Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."*

To honour leaders is included with our fear of the Creator God.

2 Peter 2:4-11 [New King James] *"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord."*

The reason the Creator God punished by death those who were sinful and ungodly was to be an example to future generations [verse 6], including us today.

Remember the Creator God will extend His mercy to all of these evil people in a future resurrection back to human life in a world governed by the righteous Jesus Christ, [Revelation 20:11-13].

What we are to avoid is to despise authority, [verse 10].

Jude 8 [New King James] *"Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries."*

In the context of Sodom and Gomorrah are listed those who "speak evil of dignitaries."

Ecclesiastes 10:20 [New King James] *"Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter."*

Do not even curse those in authority in our thoughts.

Philippians 2:14-15 [New King James] *"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,"*

We should be good examples, harmless, without murmuring. Respecting authority and pray that they will rule in such a way as to benefit everyone.

Such an attitude will be a shining light to this world that is so full of rebellion and violence against all forms of government.

Ephesians 5:20 [New King James] *"giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"*

Give thanks to the Creator God for **all things, even if our government may be far from perfect, but is better than no government at all!**

Christians are to be law-abiding citizens

Romans 13:1-7 [New King James] *“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.”*

Authorities help to prevent crime, not perfectly, but at least there is some restraint on the people’s carnal human nature, for that we have to be thankful.

Those who resist this God-given authority will bring judgement on themselves, for we are resisting an authority appointed by the Creator God.

Titus 3:1 [New King James] *“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work,”*

Both here and in 1 Peter 2:13-17 the Greek word used is “*hupōtassō*” the same as bondslaves should submit to their masters, [Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18].

We should submit not only to good masters/leaders/governments/laws, but also to those harsh and unfair.

Ephesians 6:5-8 [New King James] *“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.”*

We should obey not with eye-service, but with sincerity of heart, even if the civil authorities are not looking, the same as we would to

Matthew 5:41 [New King James] *“And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.”*

Jesus Christ was referring to a very unpopular law of His time. Any Roman soldier could force anyone to carry his heavy pack for one mile at any time.

As Christians we have been called to a life of submission and service for this is how we are being trained to rule correctly in the world tomorrow after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, [Revelation 20:6; Matthew 20:25-27; Luke 22:24-30].

Of course, in the rare circumstances that the human laws are a violation of God’s laws, we must obey God, and if necessary, submit to the penalty of civil government.

Acts 4:18-20; Acts 5:26-29 [New King James] *“So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” ... “Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had*

brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, 'Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!' But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: '**We ought to obey God rather than men.**'"

Notice that the apostles submitted to the civic punishments and did not resist arrest [verse 26]. They were beaten and they rejoiced and continued doing God's work, [verses 40-42].

1 Peter 2:20 [New King James] "*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.*"

Any such punishment should be taken patiently.

1 Peter 3:8-9, 14-17 [New King James] "*Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender-hearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*" ... "*But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. 'And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.'* But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

Revenge is **not** the way a Christian lives, **we leave the final outcome to our Creator God and Saviour.**

Luke 20:22-25 [New King James] "*'Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'* But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, '*Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?'* They answered and said, '*Caesar's.*' And He said to them, '*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*'"

The paying of taxes is one kind of law in particular mentioned, even if the money is used for an immoral purpose.

Romans 13:6-7 [New King James] "*For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.*"

Our responsibility is completed when we pay the taxes, that is what we will be judged on. If the money is not properly used, that is not our fault and not our responsibility.

We can also use the civil law to our advantage.

If we have been robbed, we can call the police and take legal steps to get our property back.

If we have been unjustly accused, we can legally try to avoid being found guilty.

Acts 22:25 [New King James] "*And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?'*"

Paul avoided a scourging by using his legal rights.

Acts 25:10-12 [New King James] "*So Paul said, 'I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.'* Then Festus,

when he had conferred with the council, answered, 'You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!'"

Paul appealed to the highest human court in Roman territory, Caesar.

Christians have dual citizenship

Philippians 3:20-21 [New King James] *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."*

Our civil rights are towards the Kingdom of God, whose King is at the time at the right hand of God the Father awaiting His return to earth to take over world rulership.

Colossians 1:13 [New King James] *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,"*

Christians have been transferred into God's Kingdom.

1 Peter 2:9 [New King James] *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light;"*

God's special people who are being trained to be priests, that is teachers, in His Kingdom, which will soon take over rulership and reverse the false teaching in this present world.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 [New King James] *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."*

We are ambassadors, representatives of one national government yet living in another nation. Our task is to reconcile this country in which we reside and its government to the government of the kingdom we represent.

Hebrews 11:13 [New King James] *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."*

Christians are sojourners and pilgrims in the nations of this present world.

Hebrews 11:14-16 [New King James] *"For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."*

Christians seek a permanent homeland, and God is preparing that new homeland and ruling city for us in the wonderful world tomorrow, [**Revelation 21:1-7**].

John 17:14-20 [New King James] *"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may*

be sanctified by the truth. 'I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;''

Though we live in this world we are **not** of this world, for Jesus Christ's Kingdom is **not** of this world, [John 18:36].

The governments of this world, in so far as they are under the influence of Satan, [1 John 5:19] are in opposition to God. But God authorises their power, and tells us to submit, to their civil laws.

God does not authorise us to get involved in the political struggles of this world, [2 Timothy 2:3-4].

God is the One who ultimately sets government officials in office, [Daniel 4:17; John 19:11; Romans 13:1].

God has the final authority to determine who should govern.

It is not our duty to try to remove leaders, either through civil war or by voting.

Luke 12:13-15 [New King James] *“Then one from the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But He said to him, ‘Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?’ And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’”*

Jesus Christ refused to get involved in civic judgements.

Ambassadors are **not** supposed to get involved in the politics of the judicial or government systems of other nations.

Instead we submit.

When Jesus Christ's Kingdom does come to earth, we will then participate, we have been appointed to be rulers, judges and teachers in the world tomorrow, [Daniel 7:27; 1 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 2:26-27].

But for now, Christians are to be separate, [2 Corinthians 6:17].

Christians are to be good examples

Matthew 28:19-20 [New King James] *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”*

The commission all disciples of Jesus Christ have been given is to teach people the way of life that Jesus Christ practiced and taught.

The major way we do this is by personal example of living this very different way of life.

Matthew 5:14-16 [New King James] *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

People will glorify our heavenly Father when they repent and submit their lives to the Creator God, as they see we have done and continue to do.

When they ask why we live this different life and what hope we have of a future life, we must be ready to give them an answer directly from God's Word, the Christian Bible.

1 Peter 3:15-16 [NIV] *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”*

For people to ask they must observe a different and more loving lifestyle.

Colossians 4:5-6 [NIV] *“Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

Our lives should be guided by the Godly wisdom that is found in God's Word, the Christian Bible.

We should only use speech that befits a Christian.

Deuteronomy 4:5-7 [New King James] *“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?”*

God told ancient Israel to be an example to other nations. That job is now given to the Christian Church.

1 Peter 2:11-12 [New King James] *“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

We need to conduct ourselves honourably among non-Christians.

Ephesians 2:10 [New King James] *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*

We were called to be Christians at this time to do good works, not just for other Christians but for all humanity, [Galatians 6:10].

Matthew 6:1-4 [New King James] *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”*

Do **not** do good works just to be seen by other people, but good works that are motivated by a sincere love for other people.

1 Corinthians 13:3 [New King James] *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”*

It does not matter how good our works are, unless they are motivated by love, they are worthless.

Luke 10:25-37 [New King James] *“And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ So he answered and said, ‘“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and “your neighbour as yourself.”’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.’ But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ Then Jesus answered and said: ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.” So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘**Go and do likewise.**’”*

Jesus Christ gave this parable to show us how to love our neighbour, that is, anyone who is in need.

It is significant that Jesus Christ chose a Samaritan, a non-Jew, that is, a non-member of the religious community at that time, to do the good works.

We as Christians can learn two things from this.

First, many non-Christians have in deed done good things for us, so we even more so have the responsibility to do good works for non-Christians, as we see the opportunity.

Second, non-Christians today do many good works and when they do, we should **not** be afraid to join them.

We should join community service organisations or at least help out in specific projects.

Helping our community is our civil and Christian duty.