

## Lesson Two

# The Christian's Responsibility to Civil Government

*Civil Government*, pp. 47-63

### Goals

1. To understand our God-given role toward civil government.
2. To learn how to live in a God-pleasing way as citizens of a government.

### Introduction

- Complaining about the government is a nearly universal pastime. Why is this so common?
- Based on what we have learned so far, what does God think about this kind of complaining?

### The Christian's relationship to civil government: submission

- *Submit* means “to yield to another” or to “arrange oneself under another.” Give some examples of how our sinful natures resist submission.

#### *Read Philippians 2:1-8*

- How is submission an essential element of the Christian life?

*1 Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*

- God commands us to submit to all levels of governmental authority. Explain how the phrase “for the Lord's sake” helps us deal with such objections as “But my government isn't fair!” or “But my leaders don't deserve my respect!”

#### *Read Romans 13:1-5*

- List the reasons why God commands us to submit to governing authorities.
  1. (Verses 1,2)
  2. (Verse 3)
  3. (Verse 4a)
  4. (Verse 4b)
- Consider verse 5. What does this verse say about why Christian citizens should respect and obey the governing authorities?

## Putting an attitude of submission into action

### A Christian citizen respects the government and its leaders

*1 Peter 2:17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.*

- What two words from 1 Peter 2:17 describe what God expects of us as we submit to our civil authorities?
- Consider some of the civil authorities under whom Peter lived: Pilate, Herod, Nero. What do you know about the character of each man?
- In spite of the kind of rules under which Peter was living, he links honoring the king with fearing God. What does honoring even corrupt leaders have to do with our fear and respect of God?

*1 Peter 2:20-23 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

- How did Christ set the perfect example for us in the way he respected governing officials (even the ones who unfairly tried him and physically abused him)?
- Explain “respect” for government in concrete terms. Make a list of what we should do and what we should not do in our lives as citizens.

**DO****DON'T****A Christian citizen pays taxes**

*Romans 13:6,7 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*

- What does Paul single out as a means of expressing respect for the government?

**Read Matthew 22:15-22**

- Jesus said, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” How does paying our taxes give to the government what it deserves and give to God what he deserves at the same time?
- Give some reasons why we may feel that evading payment of taxes is justified.
- The Roman tax system Jesus and Paul lived under was corrupt and unfair, lending itself to extortion and excessive taxation. The taxes supported a pagan rule by an emperor who considered himself divine. By the end of Paul’s ministry, this government was even persecuting Christians. How did this affect what Paul and Jesus said about paying taxes? How should this affect our attitude toward paying taxes?

**A Christian citizen prays for the government and its leaders**

*1 Timothy 2:1,2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

- We have already noted that the Roman government was corrupt, godless, and unjust in many ways. It was even oppressive toward God’s people—the church. Why pray for a government like that?

- What blessings should we ask God to give our government and its leaders?

### **A Christian citizen works for the good of the nation**

*Jeremiah 29:4-7 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”*

- What did God tell the Israelite exiles to pray for and promote, while they lived in the foreign country of Babylon?
- Give some reasons why God wanted them to do this.

### **A Christian citizen does more than what the law demands**

*Matthew 5:41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*

- Jesus here refers to a Roman law that empowered a Roman soldier on the march to seize someone and make that person carry the soldier’s pack for one mile. Jesus says, “Do it . . . and go with him an extra mile as well!” Why would a Christian be willing to do this?
- How could we reflect this “go the extra mile” love in our citizenship?

## **Summary**

God tells Christians to live under their government in the same Christ-like spirit of humble submission that permeates every other aspect of their lives. Christians, in their role as citizens, want Christ’s love to show in how they desire to serve others. Christians respect their leaders and

obey their laws, pray for them and for their country, willingly support the work of the government, and gladly work for the good of their nation and government.

### **During the week**

1. Read all of 1 Peter and answer the following questions: Chapter one—For what reasons do you, as a Christian, desire to “be holy in all you do”? Chapter two—Peter talks about Christians living as “aliens” in this world. What does he mean by that? Chapter three—What words describe the kind of relationships Christians seek to have with others? How are Christian relationships built on Christ’s relationship with us? Chapter four—Why are Christians willing to submit to others, even to the point of unjust suffering? Chapter five—Why is a life of humble submission to all (including our government) worth it?
2. Read pages 63-91 of *Civil Government*.