**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**The Christian and Civil Government**

Thank you and good morning. Welcome to our program.

The questions I want to address on our program today are, How should the Christian view civil government? What are the Christian’s responsibilities to civil authorities? We all live under a civil government and we need to know what God expects of us in relation to these authorities. What does the Bible say? This is the focus of our lesson today.

First of all, the Bible teaches that God ordained civil government, and He ordained it for a purpose. Romans 13:1-2 says, *“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.”* Notice, civil authorities are ordained by God. As we continue to read in this passage we see that the civil authority is God’s minister. Look at verses 3 and 4: *“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.”*

This passage not only teaches that God ordained civil authorities, but that God ordained them for a purpose. They were ordained for our good. They were ordained by God to keep law and order and to promote the security and well-being of its citizens. Where there is no governmental authority, human life and property are unsafe. Paul says here that civil authorities are ordained for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of those who do good. The apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 2:13-14, *“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.”* Can you imagine living in a society where there is no law and order; where evil doers are allowed to freely practice their carnage on the good people of that society without any restraint? God ordained the civil authorities to keep that from happening. He ordained them “for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.” We are told in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, *“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”* One thing this passage tells us is that civil rulers are to rule in such a way “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” That is a purpose for which they were ordained. And we are told here to pray for our rulers that this may be accomplished.

Someone might say, “but some of the civil authorities are evil and the civil authorities themselves pervert justice by acquitting the evil doer and punishing those who do good.” This is true. That happens in some governments. There are some civil authorities who abuse their authority. But that doesn’t change the fact that God instituted civil government for our good. Abusers do not diminish the value of the institution. God ordained the institution of marriage for our good. Abusers in a marriage do not diminish the value the institution. God ordained the church for our good. Evil members do not diminish the value of His church. And just because there are evil rulers does not mean that civil government itself is evil. No, God ordained civil authorities for a good purpose. And we are to pray for our rulers that that purpose may be accomplished.

What are the Christian’s responsibilities to civil government? First of all, we are to submit to the governing authorities. Look at Romans 13 again. In verses 1 and 2 it says, *“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.”* Also in 1 Peter 2:13-14, *“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.”* And so we are to submit to the civil authorities. If the civil authorities set the speed limit at 70 mph, then we must submit. These passages do not make a distinction between fair and unfair laws. I may think it is unfair for the government to make me wear a seat belt, but I must submit. I may pay more taxes than you do, and I think that is unfair. I still must submit.

And it is also interesting that in these passages the Lord does not make a distinction between evil rulers and good rulers. At the time these passages were written the Roman government was full of evil kings and governors. They still were told to submit. Even though our rulers are evil, we must be subject to them. The only time we do not submit is when submission brings us in conflict with God’s law. If civil government made a law, that in obeying that law we would be disobeying God, then we should not submit to that law. In such cases we must say, as Peter and the apostles did, *“We must obey God rather than* *men.”* (Acts 5:29) You see, the apostles had been commanded by the Jewish leaders not to preach in the name of Jesus. Jesus had commanded them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15). Who were they going to obey? They said, *“we must obey God rather than men.”*

In Daniel chapter 3 when king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon ordered the people to fall down and worship his gold image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego would not. Nebuchadnezzar then said to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *“if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”*  Notice what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego said to the king, *"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”*

In the first century when Christians were required to worship the Emperor of Rome, many refused to obey and they were persecuted.

There are those in the United States of America today who are being forced by governmental officials to bake cakes or provide flower arrangements for same-sex wedding ceremonies, and if they do not they will lose their business. In Romans chapter one the practice of homosexuality is listed among the sins of the Gentiles who refused to acknowledge the true God. After Paul lists their sins he then says, *“who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”*  Not only is it wrong to engage in these sins, but it is also wrong to approve those who practice them. It is wrong for Christians to condone same-sex unions by assisting them in their sin. And so, when our government orders us to assist people in their evil practices, we must say as the apostles did, “we must obey God rather than men.”

We are to submit to the civil authorities, but never if by submitting we are disobeying God.

Secondly, the Bible teaches that we are to honor our rulers. Romans 13:7 says, “*Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*

1 Peter 2:17 **– “***Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”* We must respect our rulers. We must show respect by how we speak to them and of them. This is not to say that it is wrong to disagree with them, or that we should not try to correct them when they are wrong. There are examples in scripture where God’s people did try to correct their rulers when they did what was wrong. John the Baptist told Herod that his marriage with his brother’s wife was not right (Matt. 14:3-4). Nathan, the prophet, confronted king David with his sins, recorded in 2 Samuel 12:1-12. In Acts 24:24-25 we read of Paul speaking to Felix, the governor, trying to bring him to repentance. But in our efforts to persuade our rulers to do the right thing, we must be respectful, and honor them because of the positions they hold.

Thirdly, as we have already mentioned, we must pay our taxes. Romans 13:6-7 says, “*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, honor to whom honor.*  In Matthew 22 we read of Pharisees who were plotting how they might entangle Jesus with His words. In an effort to do that they sent certain ones to Jesus and asked Him this question: *“Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”*  It goes on to say, *“But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, ‘Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.’ So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘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.’ When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.”* (Matt. 22:15-21).

I may think the taxes are too high and that we shouldn’t have to pay that much. And that may be true. But our Lord says, pay your taxes.

Fourthly, we are to pray for our rulers. We read earlier in 1 Timothy 2,*“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and**giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may**lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and**acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to**the knowledge of the truth.”* (vs. 1-4) James says in James 5:16 says, *“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”* There is power in prayer. If we are concerned about where our nation is headed, then we need to be praying, and praying fervently.

What are we to do toward our governmental officials? We are to submit, unless submission brings us in conflict with God’s law. We are to pay our taxes. We are to honor our rulers, and pray for them.

Our time is gone for today, and we thank you for listening, but before we close I want to announce a special series of meetings that will be conducted by the St. James church of Christ in St. James. Beginning next Sunday, May 5 and continuing through Friday night of that week, May 10th, David Thomley from Spring Hill, Tennessee, will present lessons dealing with the question, “Does Truth Exist?” We are now living in a time in which truth is no longer held in high esteem by many. Many people question whether we can know what is truth. Mr. Thomley will address these important issues in this series of meetings. That’s May 5-10. We will meet Sunday morning at 9:30 and 10:15, Sunday evening at 5:00 and then Monday through Friday of that week we will meet at 7:00 PM. Come and be with us. Our building is located at 685 Sidney Street in St. James where Sidney Street and Highway B intersect.

Before we close we want to invite you to check out our website. On this website you are able to hear sermons on a variety of Bible topics, and you also are able to hear previous Bible Talk radio broadcasts. The web address is sjchurchofchrist.com, that’s sjchurchofchrist.com.