

**THE  
BAPTIST HOUR**

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*The Christian  
And  
Citizenship*

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## THE CHRISTIAN AND CITIZENSHIP

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” – Romans 13:1

Suddenly Paul shifts from considering the Christian in his personal and spiritual relationships to that of his citizenship. As a Christian you are a citizen of the kingdom of God, but you are also a citizen of some nation. As in the former so in the latter you bear certain responsibilities. Thus Paul felt it necessary to exhort this church with regard to the Christian and his citizenship. We also need such counsel. Let us consider this as we note, first, the mandate; second, the motive; third, the means.

### The Mandate

First, note the mandate. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” (v.1). “Every soul” is a Hebraism for “every man.” Since Paul is writing to Christian people he actually means “every Christian.” “Higher powers” refers to the institution of government. That he feels strongly about this may be seen in his use of the present imperative form. It is a command. The present tense suggests a habitual action. The verb translated “be subject” is a military term meaning to line up in orderly fashion under a general. And Paul’s use of the middle voice implies that their lining up is to be done in voluntary submission rather than under duress. In short, Paul says that every Christian is habitually to put himself in voluntary submission to the authorities which hold position over him.

Then the apostle states his reason for such a command. “For there is no power but God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (v.1). The point here is not that God approves of each individual ruler and his actions. The Roman emperor at the time of this writ-

ing was Nero, everything but a godly man. Instead Paul is saying that God has ordained the institution of government. The word "ordained" means to appoint or assign a place. In the perfect tense it speaks of the permanency of such an institution. In other words, human government is a permanent institution brought about by God for bringing order into human relations. So Paul exhorts the Christian to submit to such.

Now this word is sorely needed at this hour. Our generation is in danger of losing all respect for law. How many of you take the attitude that if you do not like a law you are under no obligation to keep it? Or if you can get away with it, it is all right to break it? Someone has said that character is what you are in the dark. You reveal your true character in what you do when no one is looking at you. Your respect for law is gauged by how you regard it when there is no policeman about. As a general principle Paul is saying that since human government is an institution of God, the Christian should abide by it not on the basis of personal approval or outside coercion. He should do so as a Christian desiring to be well-pleasing to God.

### **Servant of God**

This is true, because under God rulers are not a terror to righteous people, only to those who live unrighteously (Rom. 13:3). Instead, the ruler is a servant of God for your good. But to the evil person "he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (v.4). This is the meaning of Paul's word in verse 2. "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive unto themselves damnation." The word "damnation" renders a Greek word which refers not to the soul. It is a word meaning "judg-

ment" or a judicial sentence from the magistrate. Some interpreters take this to refer to the courts of men. Others see it in the fact that even though you may escape the judgment of men you still are judged of God.

It should be remembered that Paul is assuming a governmental system whose function is for the general good of humanity. For that reason he does not cover many particular situations. He says nothing about the Christian's duty in revolutionary situations when the processes of a given government violate the higher laws of human good. Elsewhere in the New Testament we are told that when civil laws are in violation of God's laws, the Christian must obey God rather than man (Acts 4:19f.). If civil power calls upon you to violate the common laws of humanity, your obedience is due to the higher law rather than to the lower.

Let it be remembered that in regard to law, you as a Christian have a two-fold duty. You are to be obedient to the principle of legal regulation for the good of all people. But when individual laws are otherwise, it is your duty to secure, by lawful methods, the repeal or alteration of such laws, because all laws are to be in keeping with God's will. However, your answer to hard and unreasonable laws is not violation but legitimate protest.

### **The Motive**

Second, consider the motive. In Romans 13:5 Paul says, "Wherefore ye needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." Here the apostle leads us beyond the fear of outward punishment to the motive of inward compulsion. Illustrating with the matter of taxes he says that this is not a political duty only. It is also a spiritual service to God. For those to whom taxes are paid are ministers of God on our behalf (v.6). The word "minister" translates a

Greek word used also to refer to priests who serve in the temple. Thus, he says, the ruler performs a divinely ordained service even as does the priest.

On every hand we hear complaints about high taxes. Whenever revenues are wasted or embezzled such a complaint is justified. But in the same breath with which we complain, we often also demand more services from government. In order to meet these demands increased taxation is necessary. Approximately eighty percent of our national budget goes to pay for wars, past, present, and future, should such become necessary. Thus, Paul says that as Christian citizens we should pay for what we receive.

He goes further in this matter when he says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (v.8). Literally Paul admonishes, "Stop owing to anyone even one thing." Some interpret this to forbid the contracting of a debt. But Paul is thinking of something else. When you contract a debt, pay it! No Christian can do otherwise and be true to his profession. According to Paul the only debt that you can never pay is that of love. The more you love others the more love you owe to them. Doctor A.T. Robertson remarks that about all you can do is to pay the interest on the debt of love that you owe.

Herein then is the real motive in Christian citizenship. It is Christian love. Five times in three verses (vv. 8-10) Paul uses the Greek word for the highest kind of love. It is the love which the Christian should show in his relations to others. So Paul says that we are to be indebted only in the matter of Christian love.

#### Fulfil the Law

Furthermore, citing the Ten Commandments as basic in law, Paul declares that love is the fulfilment of

all law. In this instance it is interesting to note that he quotes only those commandments which have to do with other people outside the family circle. Then he concludes by adding, "And if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (v.9). Thus the essence of Christian citizenship is bound up in the matter of loving others as you wish to be loved.

As we render this debt of love, the debt increases. For love itself becomes deeper and more vibrant. Love asks not what it must do, but what it may do. It asks not how little, but how much it may give or serve. Thus our acts of Christian citizenship become not a duty but a privilege.

Mrs. Hobbs and I have recently completed a world mission tour. In most countries visited, governmental services which we take for granted are unheard of. For instance, Japan has a law against begging. The only beggars which we encountered there were crippled and maimed former soldiers of World War II. Japan has no veterans program. In lieu of one the government permits those ex-soldiers to beg for their organization.

Continuing, Paul urges the proper kind of Christian conduct. "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (v.11). "Time" here is not time as such. It is a word referring to a special, critical period of time. It is the time in which they lived, a time demanding the best that the Christian has to offer. Our "salvation" is nearer than when we believed. We have noted that salvation is seen as justification, sanctification, and glorification. It is the last of which Paul speaks here. Whether by your death or by the return of the Lord, your glorification in heaven is nearer every day than it was the day you became a Christian.

Therefore, you are to awake from your lethargic, non-aggressive, lazy Christian life. You are to cast off your sleeping clothes, your "works of darkness," and are to put on your working or fighting garments, "the armour of light." You are to walk decently, not in rioting, drunkenness, immorality and strife (vv.12f.).

### The Means

Third, note the means. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (v.14). No man can be a true citizen in every sense of the word who is not a Christian. No Christian can be a true citizen without being true to Christ in every respect.

The demands of Christian citizenship are impossible of achievement within your own strength. Only as Christ empowers you by His Holy Spirit can you reach this ideal. We are living in difficult times. Someone said, "When the world is at its worst, the Christian must be at his best."

So to those of you who have never believed in Jesus as your Saviour I would say, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." The words "put on" translate a verb meaning to put on as a garment. It is a first aorist imperative middle form. The imperative speaks a command. The middle voice expresses something that you must do for yourself. The aorist carries the note of immediacy. So Paul says to you, "You yourself must put on Christ as a garment. And you must do it right now." You put on Christ by trusting in Him as your Saviour. I beg of you that right now, without delay you will do this, for no one else can do it for you!



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