

Question: What is the Christian's responsibility to his country? Since our government seems to now exclude anything to do with religion, why should we continue to care about our government?

Jesus taught that his followers should use every opportunity to influence society in a righteous and positive manner. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God." Jesus also used salt and light as metaphors to teach the importance of a Christian's influence in the world. He said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16 NIV).

In this most powerful of nations, even the humblest of Christians has an opportunity to influence peace in our world through the people elected to govern. However, we should always remember what Daniel said to the ancient king of Babylon: "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people" (Dan. 4:17 NIV). Followers of Jesus Christ should use only peaceful and godly means in whatever they do. They should never think they have a responsibility to force even righteousness upon anyone by military force, laws, elected officials or any other means. The ultimate power and decisions about government lie in the hands of God. In his wisdom, sometimes he even uses wicked men to accomplish his greater and good purposes for our world. Only the kingdom of God will last forever, and in the end his kingdom will crush all other kingdoms (Dan. 2:44; 6:26).

Although they often faced the threat of persecution from the idolatrous, pagan governments of the first century, the early Christians continued to maintain respect for their rulers because it was God's will. Thus the New Testament suggests the following five principles: (1) *God has authorized civil government.* "Everyone must submit himself to governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established"

(Rom. 13:1). (2) *To disobey the laws of the land is to disobey God.* “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient” (Titus 3:1). “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men . . . For this is God’s will” (1 Peter 3:13-15). If rulers give laws that are in conflict with the law of God, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). (3) *Christians must pay taxes.* Jesus said, “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Matt. 22:21). Paul explained, “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing” (Rom. 13:6). (4) *God has authorized the government’s use of force to punish evil.* “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. . . . But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing” (Rom. 13:3-4). But a few verses earlier, Christians are told: “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). (5) *We must seek the highest good of our country through prayer and godly living.* “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and for all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). (All biblical quotes are from the NIV).

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