

Good Citizens

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity On the 24th of February 2002 The preacher is Paul Barker His sermon is entitled Good Citizens And is based on Romans Chapter 13 Verses 1 to 7 And you may like to have open in front of you Romans Chapter 13 Page 923 in the Pew Bibles 1980s, one of the presidents of South Africa Was P.W. Botha During the time of apartheid in that country Like much of the South African leadership He claimed Christian allegiance In October of 1985 There was a movement called The National Initiative of Reconciliation

It was an attempt by Christians, I gather To try and bring about an end of apartheid And reconciliation Between all the different racial groups Within South Africa And on this day in October 1985 One of its leaders A significant Christian minister Had an appointment with the president Mr. Botha And he went to this appointment With some hopes Of at least the first steps Of the dismantling of apartheid On reception The president, Mr. Botha Read these words To him Let every person Be subject To the governing authorities For there is no authority Except from God And those authorities That exist Have been instituted By God And so he continued By reading these words From Romans Chapter 13 Words that have been Controversial in some sense Throughout history Since they were written By St. Paul Nearly 2,000 years ago In a world Where there is so much Corrupt government Not only in our day But in Paul's day as well These words are surprisingly Positive About government And surprisingly Strong In their statement That Christians Ought to submit To government In effect Full stop Without qualification When we consider That just a few years Six or seven years Before St. Paul Wrote these words Christians were expelled From Rome Along with Jews These are surprisingly Positive words About government When we consider St. Paul's own Unjust treatment At the hands Of local authorities Throughout his time As we read In the Acts of the Apostles These words are Surprisingly positive About government And when we consider

That Jesus Of course Was cruelly And unjustly Put to death By Roman authorities These words are Surprisingly positive About government How can he be So positive?

We'll see what he says The end of verse 1 Paul says That all governing authorities That exist Have been instituted By God Hitler Pol Pot Beginning of verse 3 He says For rulers Are not a terror To good conduct But to bad Idi amen Beginning of verse 4 For it is God Government Governing authorities Are God's servants For your good Is that really true For Christians Who lived in Communist Soviet Union How can Paul Be so positive?

[3 : 5 7] Can Christians Really submit To such evil Regimes And states The basic reason Paul says We are to submit To government Is because it's Instituted by God It's ordained By God Its authority Comes from God He says in verse 1 And he doesn't Qualify it there By saying It's a Christian Government After all He's writing To Christians In Roman Empire Which was very much A pagan state Indeed Opposed To Christianity Here and there And that opposition Would grow Within the lifetime Of Nero Who had just Become emperor At the time Of this letter Being written Paul is saying That all Governing authorities Whether they're Inname Christian Or whether they're Muslim Whether they're Atheist Whether they're Anti-Christian Or not Communist Or capitalist They derive Their authority From God They're instituted By God His words here

Echo Jesus' words At his trial Before Pontius Pilate Do you remember Jesus saying To Pilate At trial You would have No power Over me Unless it had Been given you From above And there is Jesus saying What Paul says Here in effect That the authority Of any governing Authority Derives from God Even if it's Evil As Pilate Was As much Of the Roman Empire Was Even the Authority That a government Has When it acts In badness And evil Things Ultimately Derives from God At the last Book of the Bible There are A series Of visions About the End times In effect And the Roman government And state Is parodied As a demonic Beast A satanic Beast But even There

Where the Authorities Are regarded As hostile To Christians

In the Extreme The power That that Beast Has Was Given to It The text Says in Revelation 13 By God That is So even There we See that Evil Regimes Derive Their Authority Ultimately From God So that's The first Point in Effect God Is the Ultimate Authority There is No human Governing Authority That is The ultimate Authority Because even If they Don't Recognize It Any Government Has its Authority From God And whilst We can read These words Of St.

Paul And say Well there's No qualification Here he just Tells us To submit Implicitly Because it Acknowledges That a Governing Authority Authority Derives From God Therefore There is An implicit Qualification The ultimate Authority To whom We submit Is God But under God We are to Submit In general To a Governing Authority A state A federal A local Government A regime Whether Dictatorship Or democracy Capitalist Or communist Islamic Or not Whatever It is We are In general To submit To it Under God's Authority That does Not necessarily Mean of course That in Every single Thing We must Be obedient There are A number Of cases In the Bible Of civil Disobedience Where the People of God Are approved By God For Disobeying And rebelling Against the Authority of Their day

When the Israelites Were in Egypt Under their Oppression In the Book of Exodus Part of That Oppression At one Point Was the Command From Pharaoh To kill All the Israelite Children But the Israelites And their Midwives Disobeyed And Exodus Chapter One Makes it Clear That God Approved Of their Disobedience Because Killing Babies Was wrong Later In the Old Testament Three People By the Name Of Shadrach Meshach And Abednego Refused To bow Down To a Statue Of the Emperor Nebuchadnezzar Of Babylon And worship It Again They were Approved Their Act Was approved By God As seen From the Fact that He rescued Them Miraculously From fire To which They had Been cast In Punishment A Little Later Again In the Book of Daniel Daniel Himself Refused To obey The Prohibition That said

[8 : 38] You could Not pray To any God Other than The Emperor Nebuchadnezzar He refused He was Caught He was Thrown Into a Lion's Den But God's Approval Of his Civil Disobedience Is seen In the Fact that God Rescued Him From the Lion's Den Later On Still In the Old Testament Queen Esther Disobeys The Protocol And Rules Of the King And Goes Into His Presence Without permission Her Predecessor As Queen Had In Effect Similarly Broken That Law Although In Reverse And Had Been Deposed But God Rewarded Her Civil Disobedience By Rescuing The Israelite People From The Threat Of Genocide Under Persian Rule And Then Of Course In New Testament Times The Apostles Of Jesus Christ Were Commanded By The Authorities Not To Preach The Gospel They Refused And God The Acts Of The Apostles Makes Clear Approved

Of Their Refusal To Obey The State So It Seems That From The Bible Story That There Are A Number Of Times When It Is Right To Exercise Civil Disobedience Or Insubordination But In Each Case It Is When There Is A Command From The State Or The Governing Authority To Commit Sin To Kill Babies To Commit Idolatry To Pray To Another God Or So Called God And Not To Preach The Gospel For Example So When A State It Seems That When A State Or Governing Authority Or Us In Some Way To Commit Sin Then They Have Broken The Bounds Of Their Authority Under God And Christians Are Right Indeed Must Civilly Disobey Now This Is A Complex Issue And There Are Many Grey Areas But The Basic Starting Point Is If A Government

Commands Us To Do What A Christian Would Regard As Sin We Must Disobey The Government And Rather Obey God Not To Kill Babies Not To Commit Idolatry Not To Be Prevented From Preaching The Gospel So How Does That View Sit With Romans 13 That Is So Positive About Government Well The Government And The Governing Authorities Have Their Authority From God It Is An Ideal Picture In Some Sense But The General Thrust Of Romans 13 Is To Submit It Is Not A Passage About Trying To Find Loopholes So That We Don't Have To Submit The Thrust Of Romans 13 Is Submit To The Governing Authorities Indeed There's A Clear Warning In Verse 2 If We Don't If You Resist Authority Then You Resist What God Has Appointed And Those Who Resist Will Incur Judgment And Implicitly

That Is Not Only Judgment From The Governing Authority But Ultimately Also From God So The President Of South Africa In 1985 Had It Wrong It Was Not His Right To Force Sinful Behaviour Onto Christians It Seems That Perhaps He Was Overstepping His Mark In One Sense By Reading Those Words To The Christian Leader Who Came To Him But Paul's Positive Words Also Must Be We Must Take In The Context In Which He Wrote In The 50s AD When He Wrote This Letter To The Roman Church There Were Significant Revolts In Rome Over The Issue Of Taxation Roman

Historian Tacitus Tells Us About The Revolts In The Period Of The Mid To Late 50s AD Paul Probably Writes At The Early Point Of That Revolt But No Doubt There Was A Simmering Unrest And Not Dissimilar Probably From

The Britain Of The 1980s Under Margaret Thatcher's Poll Tax Here We Had In Rome Great Revolts And Unrest By Widespread Citizenship Of Christians Christians It Seems Some Christians Probably Thought That With Jesus As Their King Rightly So Then It Gave Them Freedom To Disobey And Not To Pay Taxes And Not To Be Involved As Submitting Citizens Of The Roman Empire And Remember Of Course That Just Six Or Seven Years Before This Letter Was Written Christians Had Been Expelled Maybe Wrongly But For Some Riots With Jews In 49 AD Under Claudius The Emperor In That Context Of Unrest Paul

[13:39] Is Saying The Christian Obligation Is To Submit To The Governing Authority Government Is God's Good Gift For The Ordering Of Society As Well As For The Dominion Of This World God Does Not Approve Of Anarchy Therefore There's No One Right Model Of Government Though Democracy Or Dictatorship Capitalist Or Communist Monarchy Republic There's Not One Right God Given Model Of Government We Tend To Think That Democracy Is The Greatest Form Of Government But It Does Have Its Flaws And Its Weaknesses Regardless Of The Form Government Is God's Gift For The Ordering Of Society And Its Basic Function At Least As Described In These Verses Is To Punish Wrongdoing And To To To So Verse 3 For Rulers Are Not A Terror To Good Conduct But To Bad Do You Wish To Have No Fear Of The Authority

Then Do What's Good And You'll Receive Its Approval For It's God's Servant For Your Good But If You Do What Is Wrong You Should Be Afraid For The Authority Does Not Bear The Sword In Vain It's The Servant Of God To Execute Wrath On The Wrong Doer And Notice There Too A Tie Into What We Saw At The End Of Chapter 12 Last Week There We Were Commanded Not To Repay Evil For Evil And To Leave Room For The Wrath Of God So It's Not An Individual's Responsibility To Go Around Reeking Revenge Or Punishing Wrong Doers We're To Leave Room For The Wrath Of Jesus Returns But This Passage Of Romans 13 Adds Another Dimension To That Governments Even Imperfect Ones Have A Function Under God Of Executing His Judgment And His Wrath Even If It Is Imperfect

And Notice Too That Paul Seems To Endorse In Verse 4 The Right Of Government To Carry Out Capital Punishment He Says In Verse 4 It Is The Servant Of God To Execute Wrath On The Wrongdoer Sorry The Little Bit Before That For The Authority Does Not Bear The Sword In Vain He's Not Talking About Military Campaigns But The Word For Sword There Was The Sword That Was Used For Capital Punishment Paul Seems To Endorse The Right Of Government For Capital Punishment That May Well Be That We Cringe From That Barbaric We've Moved On To More Sophisticated Times And Capital Punishment Ought Not To Be Part Of The Pattern Of Punishment Of A Government Could It Be A Coincidence Or Is It Linked That The Decline In Christianity In The Western World In

The Last Hundred Or Two Hundred Years Is Coincidentally Linked With The Abhorrence And Decline In Capital Punishment That Is Our Societies In The West Have Become More And More Humanist In Their Motivation Basically Governments In The West Are Secular Humanist Governments And The Thing That Is Prized Above Anything Else In Humanist Society Is Human Life To Be Preserved At Any Cost Christians Know That God's The Judge And That Will Mean Not Only Physical Death But Eternal Death That Is Human Life Is Important For Christians But It Is Not The Be All And End All It Has A Place Within Eternity For Us So The Death For Christians Has Lost Its Sting And For Those Who Are Right To God's Judgment And Justice So Paul's Endorsement Here Of Capital Punishment May Be Telling Us That There Is A Place For Government To Execute Capital Punishment It Must Be Restrained Of Course It Must Be For Serious Offences In The Old Testament It Was Limited To Very Fundamental And Severe Sins The Same Ought To Be The Case Not To Be Barbaric Or Cruel Not To Be In Form Of Torture Of Course And Any Shadow Of Doubt In A Particular Case Ought To Lead To Some Sort Of Lesser Sentence But Nonetheless It Seems That The Christian Faith And Scriptures Allow The Possibility Of Capital Punishment Now In The Old Testament The Form Of Government Was Me To Be What We Would Call A Theocracy God As King He Would Rule By The Laws That Would Be Mediated Through The Priests Of The Nation Now In Time Of Course It Didn't Work Like That The Society Corrupted

[18:42] A Bit They Had Judges And Other Leaders And Ultimately A King And A Monarchy Often That King And Monarchy Would Drift Very Far From The Laws Of God Indeed We Read In The Old

Testament How It Completely Forgotten Them At One Point Until It Rediscovered Them In The Temple By Accident Despite His Jewish Background Paul Does Not Advocate A Theocracy Of Government That Is He Doesn't In Any Way Say Here To These Christians Or Seem To Even Imply That Their Ideal Is To Grow The Church To Be So Strong That The Church Becomes The Government And Becomes The State So That The Church Is In Control That's Not Paul's Aim Here He Writes To Christians Under A Pagan Regime He Writes As One Under A Pagan Regime And Not For One Minute Does He Say That We Ought To Be Striving For A Christian State Government The Model Of Church Controlling The State Does Not Seem To Be A

Christian Model But The Opposite Is Not Either The Opposite Is Where The State Controls The Church The Technical Word For That Is Erastianism Named After A Man Called Erastus In The 16th Century In Switzerland Erastianism Is Where The State Controls The Religion Now In The Reformation Period It Was The Issue Of Whether The State As A Christian State Could Control The Church In The Reformation Time But We See The Same Sort Of Thing In Islamic States Where The Islamic Church Is To Control The Government We See It In Communist States Where The Communist And Usually Atheistic Governments Restrict And Control The Religious practices Within But We Also See It Even Today To A Small Extent In Say Great Britain Where It Is The Government Officially Who Appoints The Bishops Of The Church Of England And The Government Officially Who Must Give Approval To Any Liturgical Changes For Sunday Services In Britain That Seems To Me Not To Be A Model That Is Right Nor One That St.

Paul Is Advocating Here The Right Sort Of Responsibilities Between The State And The Church There May Be Tension There May Sometimes Be Opposition There May Sometimes Be Harmony But Each Has Its Responsibilities The Church Is Not To The State Is Not To Inflict Its Own Laws Upon The Restraint Of Religion And Practice Of Faith Nor Is The Church In Effect To Try To Control Society Not To Say Of Course That The State Has No Place To Say Something About Religion Nor That The Church Rightly Indeed Has A Place To Say Things About The Way Society Should Be Ordered Of Course It Does The Two Should Interrelate At That Point What Then Does Submission Look Like What Does It Mean For Us To Submit To The Governing Authority What It Means Is That Usually

Happens We Can Change Governments Without Great Unrest And Coos And Violence It Ought To Be That If A Government Is Rightly In Office Then We Are Not To Respond With Unrest Or Unviolence Or Trying To Topple It And So On It Means Adherence To The Laws Of The Land For Example Yesterday Coming Back From Our Staff Two Days Away As A Planning Retreat For The Speed Limit Even Though I Think The Speed Limits On The Geelong Road Even With Road Works Are Pretty Stupid I Wanted To Cover Up My Speedo So That The Other Staff Members In My Car Didn't Dob Me In It Means That We Adhere To Things Like Proper Building Regulations And Customs And Quarantine Laws And All The Other Sorts Of Laws In Our Society Whether Or Not We Think They The Best Laws Our Job Is To Submit

[22 : 59] To Them And Live By Them It Also Means That We Pay Our Taxes And Paul Seems To See That That's A Significant Issue To The Roman Church And As I Mentioned There Been Unrest Over The Issue Of Taxation In The 50s AD So He Says In Verse Six For The Same Reason You Government In Society Pay To All What Is Due Them Taxes That Is Direct Taxes To Those To Whom Taxes Are Due And Revenue That Is Indirect Tax To Whom Revenue Is Due Now It's Almost An Australian Characteristic To Be A Cheater On Your Tax I Know Ministers Who Cheat On Their Tax Who Get Paid From Funeral Companies For Funerals Or Wedding Couples For Weddings And Keep The Money Themselves Never Declare It On Their Tax It's More Or Less Cash In Hand Under The Counter Sort

Of Stuff Well That Doesn't Happen Here All The Money We Get From Weddings And Funerals Gets Paid For Holy Trinity And Not To The Ministers Rightly So In My Opinion But There Are Plenty Of People In Our Society Will Quickly Take Cash In Hand Issue No Receipts Therefore There's No Need To Declare That On Our Tax Return And So On Christians Are Under Obligation As Indeed All Citizens Of Australia Are Anyway But Christians Are Under A Religious And Moral Obligation As Well To Pay Our Taxes And To Do So In Full There Are Right Ways And Appropriate Ways Of Minimizing Our Tax But Certainly Not Cheating On Our Tax Paying Taxes Is Part Of Our Sustaining The Good Order Of Society That God Has Given As A Gift Under His Own Authority And Even When Our Society And Government Like Ours Is Is Pagan And Secular In Nature It Is Still There In Part To Fulfill The Creation

Command To Exercise Dominion Over This World And We Are To Submit To It And Therefore Supported By The Payment Of Our Taxes Even More Than That Paul Finishes This Section By Saying Not Only Do We Pay Taxes And Revenue To Whom It Due But Also Respect Literally Fear To Whom It Is Due And Honor To Whom Honor Is Due Both Fear Or Respect And Honor Are Words That Are Appropriate About How We Relate To God In Other Parts Of The Bible What This Is In Government With Fear And Honor And That Is Respect And Honor And That Will Mean In Part That We Pray For Our Government As We Do In Sundays In Church And Ought To Do During The Week As Well Elsewhere In The New Testament Paul Commands Timothy To Be Praying For Government So That Christians Can Live Peaceably In The World And In Society Same Sort Of Thing Happened In The

Old The Welfare Of Babylon And Pray For Its Government Though It Was Pagan And Opposed To The People Of God Well In Some We Have Little Reason Not To Submit To Our Government In This Country Even Though At Times It Will Do What We Don't Think It Should Do Times We May Think It To Be We Even Corrupt There Is No Real Reason For Us Basically Not To Submit To Our Government And Its Laws In Our Society We're Fortunate In Having Plenty Of Opportunity To Inform Ourselves About Government To Exercise Our Opinions By Voting By The Media By Petitions Or Letters As We Do So And If We Protest We Must Protest Legally And Peaceably They Are Principles In These Chapters Of Romans That We Should Adopt That Is Not Violently And Not With Hatred We Ought To Thank God For The Freedom We Have In This Country To By And Large Practice Our Christian Faith Without Hindrance It It May It May It May Be Right That When We See The Foretaste Of Laws That Might Infringe Our Christian Faith And Practice And Rights Then We Ought To Protest Them Quite Strongly For Example In The Racial And Religious Vilification Laws That Some States Including Ours Have Tried To Adopt In Recent Times There Is It Seems To Me A Threat At Least That There May Be Infringements And Restrictions Placed On Christian Behaviour That Is At The Level Of Trying To Win Other People For Christ If That Does Indeed End Up The Case Then We Must Disobey That Part Of The Law It May Be I Suspect That In

[28 : 00] Time It May Even Become Illegal For Example To Speak Against Things Like The Practice Of Homosexuality If That Is The Case That Is An Infringement On Christian Freedom And Practice And Ought To Be Opposed We Ought Also Though Because We Are In Such A Lucky Country Pray For Those In Other Countries Where It Is Illegal In Effect To Practice The Christian Faith Where It's Illegal To Gather With Christians To Worship Maybe Other Than At A State In Places Like Saudi Arabia And China We Must Pray For Those Where They're Prevented By Law From Preaching The Gospel That Is An Infringement And Restriction On Christian Behaviour That Must Be Opposed So We Must Pray For Those Who Have To Break The Law Of Their Country In Order To Do What Christ Commands Us To Do Pray That They Do Not Repay Evil For Evil Pray

That They Live Peaceably With All Pray For The Reform Of Their Government And Pray That They May To The End Be Faithful To Christ Above All Finally These Instructions In Romans 13 Fit Into The Wider Context Of Offering Our Whole Lives To God As A Sacrifice Of Worship Chapter 12 As We Remember From The End Of Last Year And So Last Week As Well Is A Turning Point In The Letter Of Romans In The Light Of The Mercies Of God As Expressed In The Gospel Expounded In Chapters 1 To 11 We Are To Offer Ourselves Wholus Bolas So To Speak For God All Too Often We Compartmentalize Our Christian Lives That Our Christian Faith Is Restricted To Sunday Mornings Occasional Bible Study Groups Church Activities Maybe A Little Bit Of Quiet Prayer Before We Fall Asleep At Night Or Something Like That But The Rest Of The Lives We Just Carry On As Normal But Our Response To God We've Seen Is

To Be All Of Our Lives So That Not Just In A Sense The Christian Activity Of Our Life But Our Life In Society Our Life In Response To Our Government And Submitting To Our Government Is Therefore Also To Be Part Authority Of God And Therefore Everything We Do In Whatever Context We Live Is To Be Done Submitting Ultimately To God As The Ultimate Authority