

# Good Citizens

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Date: 21 August 2022

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[ 0 : 00 ] So please keep your Bible open to chapter 13. Chapter 12 and 13 can be treated as one unit.

But you can also go from 12 to all the way to the end of Romans. But whichever way you look at it, chapter 13, 1 to 7 seems a bit out of place to talk about being a good citizen while Paul talks about in light of God's mercy we are to love others sincerely in our new identity.

However, as both James and Steve point out last two Sundays looking at chapter 12, being a follower of Jesus, living in the realm of salvation is meant to affect every part of our life.

It should also affect how we live as a good godly citizen. So I look up the requirement of becoming an Australian citizen as I prepare this talk.

And I come across the citizen pledge and its explanation. It says all Australian citizens must understand our prosperity and privileges and what it means to be a citizen, whether we are Australian by birth or by choice.

[ 1 : 24 ] When you pledge, you are making a public commitment to Australia and accepting the responsibility and privilege of a citizen. And the pledge goes, From this time forward, under God, I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold and obey.

If you are Australian by birth, you may not have been through an Australian citizenship ceremony and make such a pledge. Still, your privilege of being born to be an Australian citizen comes with responsibilities.

I remember pledging around the late 80s, 30s, 90s with my family at the Australian citizenship ceremony at the Grand Rector Hall. It was much easier to become an Australian citizen back then. Nowadays, you also have to pass the citizens to test. So how about we go through some questions to see whether you'll pass, especially if you were born in Australia. There are 20 questions you have to answer, but five of them you have to get correctly to pass the test.

There are questions about Australian values to demonstrate that you understand your responsibility and privilege as an Australian citizen. So I'll put the question up, think of the answer, don't tell anyone, don't share with anyone, especially if you have done the test recently.

[ 3 : 00 ] The answer will come up very soon, and I will go through the five questions. So, did anyone make any mistakes in these five questions?

If you did, sorry. You are not fit to be a citizen yet. You can't call yourself an Australian if you don't understand and uphold Australian values.

If becoming a citizen of one of the countries on earth required tests and privileges, it would not make sense to expect less to be a citizen of the kingdom of God, whose king is the creator of everything in this world, everything, including those parts, that doesn't seem very Christian. Think about that. Comparing all that God has accomplished to transform us from our hopeless, sinful realm into a new realm of salvation in Christ, submitting to authority and loving others wholeheartedly seems a minimal requirement.

And the good news we have seen from the Book of Romans so far is that even though we have failed in all the tests to prove that we are a worthy citizen, God still accepts us as part of his kingdom based on the merit of the Lord Jesus.

[ 4 : 25 ] This is so wonderful. In the Christian life, doctrine and duty always goes together. Doctrine is a teaching that you live by and duty is your action in fulfilling your responsibility.

What we believe helps to determine how we behave. It's not enough for us to understand Paul's teaching from chapter 1 to 11.

We must translate our learning into living and show our daily life as we trust God, trust in God's word, which is the aim of the rest of the Book of Romans.

And one thing very important to remember today is in chapter 13, we need to remember that Paul is not giving us a discussion on church and state relations, but is giving individual Christian instruction about personal citizenship based on a new relationship with the state and a new relationship with the world.

And that are my two main points for today. A new relationship with the state and new relationship with the world in your personal citizenship. So Romans 13, starting in verse 1, let everyone be subject to the governing authority, for there is no authority except that which God has established. [ 5 : 54 ] The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

God invests people with authority. But as Paul said, as Paul pointed out earlier in chapter 3, all human are sinful, which means those God invested his authority with will not exercise the authority as God intended.

Even though we cannot always respect the man or woman in the office, we must respect the office established by God because he institutes every government.

If we believe that God is sovereign, then disbelief requires that we respect those in authority over us. Our passage today says, we must fear if we resist them because we also resist God.

Paul's rationale for obedience has nothing to do with the ruler's godliness, competence, or any other qualification. Instead, his call for submission to their authority is grounded in God's authority. [ 7 : 17 ] It is between you and God that you submit. The only authority that exists are the ones whom God has placed there according to his sovereign plan.

So do you think there's any excuse or any valid reason for you not to submit to God's authority? Can you read justify your choice? It goes on to say, for rulers hold no terror for those who do right, for those who do wrong.

Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commanded. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid. For rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servant, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoers.

Paul tells us about the government's function by highlighting the core of our problems, the human heart. Because man's heart is sinful, God established a government to legislate and enforce the law.

[ 8 : 31 ] But laws cannot change the heart. man's heart is still selfish and can only be changed by the grace of God. The problem of our world is not what kind of government is in charge.

Neither democracy nor authoritarian to fix the world's problem is not to change the government but to deal with each of our sinful hearts. Do you want to be free from the one in authority?

Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commanded. Many people take freedom as living independently or living in a free country but there will be a big mistake.

True freedom is not fun in doing whatever you want whenever you want. True freedom is never fun in putting yourself in the middle of your world and making it all about you.

True freedom is never fun in writing your moral code or finally getting your way. True freedom is only come from submission to God's authority.

[ 9 : 42 ] There are all levels of human authority that God put on earth to make his invisible authority visible. Personal freedom is not fun in resisting human authority because freedom and authority are not enemies.

Unfortunately, among Christians, there seems to be an increasing appeal to the example of civil disobedience in the scripture without a balancing commitment to the clear and repeated commands in scripture to submit to authority.

You cannot cling to one principle without denying the other. civil disobedience and civil rebellion are not the same thing.

Living under Rome's suppressive, abusive, immoral authority, Jesus never calls his followers to rebel against authority. In a country of democratic government, it is easy to mistake government for serving our enjoyment.

government. We get easily upset when our government tells us what we can or cannot do. But no matter what kind of authority you are living under, God set up authority for Christians to demonstrate how to be godly citizens through their respectful, active participation for his glory. [11:15] Let me say that again. God set up authority for Christians to demonstrate how to be godly citizens through their respectful, active participation for his glory.

So Paul goes on, therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authority, not only because of possible punishment, but also as a matter of conscience.

This is also why you pay taxes for the authority of God's servant, who give their full time to governing, give to everyone what you owe them, if you owe taxes, pay taxes, if revenue, then revenue, if respect, then respect, if honour, then honour.

Christian citizens ought to be the best citizen. Christians may not always agree on politics or parties, but we can all agree, but they can all agree on their attitude towards human government. Whether we like or respect a leader and vote for them or not, our response should be the same. How do you respond to authority, especially ones you don't like or respect, or ones that are abusive or autocratic?

[12:32] In our modern democracy, where we have a say in who governs us, we might feel entitled to speak disrespectfully about our government officials.

officials. And that normally happens a lot while in private settings. It's much easier to jump on the bandwagon and follow the latest social media trend.

Over the last few years, there have been many opportunities to speak disrespectfully or to voice our disapproval of government actions, our government actions, in handling various difficult crises. in a not very peaceful or even passive aggressive way. But Jesus said in Luke 6.45 that from the overthrow of our hearts, your mouths speak.

There's no hiding what's happening in each one of our sinful hearts. Are you known as someone who often speaks disrespectfully and loves to call others names?

[13:36] Or are you a willing submitting kind of person? Do you actively do all that you can to honor those in authority above you?

Or do you keep looking for faults and encouraging others to push out for the government? Paul makes no hint of merely going along with something grudgingly or under duress.

The obedience that he described is respectful and complete. he calls for active action to save our conscience in verse 5 to 7 by paying our due, giving everyone what we owe them, taxes, revenue, respect, or honor.

We have been called to a new relationship with our government because of God's mercy.

Christians are to be the salt and light of this world. A responsible citizen is willing to uphold the authority God gave their human government with respect and not begrudgingly.

Ruling submission is so counter cultural because we live as if we are our king, but we have a new king, and he calls us to have a new relationship with the authority and with the world.

[14:59] So continuing from the payment theme in verse 6 to 7, Paul uses the analogy of debt to describe how we should live in our new relationship with the world.

Verse 8, let no debt remain an outstanding except a continued debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

Paul acts love as another kind of thing that we owe others. Tax, duty, honor, respect can be paid in full, but love is a debt and ongoing obligation that we will never be able to pay out fully.

We should not expect that the need for us to love others will ever be fulfilled. It would be ridiculous to say, I've loved someone enough, I do not need to love them anymore.

You only need to reverse that sentence and consider someone saying that they have loved you enough that they don't have to love you anymore to realize how ridiculous even to contemplate the idea.

[16:10] God warned us to never stop loving by letting our priority fall out of sync with God. It's very easy. We easily focus on the wrong things as we interact with others.

there seems to be a list in our mind that we always check, especially regarding God's command.

The commandments, you should not commit adultery, you should not murder, you should not steal, you should not comfort, and whatever other commandments there may be, are sum up in this one command, love your neighbors as yourself.

Love does no harm to our neighbor, therefore love is a fulfillment of the law. according to Paul's credential, a Pharisee devoted to observing every law, a cellist Christian persecutor considered himself faultless regarding righteousness based on the law.

It would be very out of character to give such a summary about how to fulfill the law if Paul did not meet Jesus. But his encounter with Jesus while on the way ready to persecute Christians by executing them, make him realize how far he was from God's priority.

By promoting loving one another and loving God as the highest calling for Christian, Paul reminds us that following this particular command of love enables everything to function in God's order.

[ 17 : 51 ] Love is positive, active, and I can even say it's proactive. Love will fulfill the law because even looking at it negatively, you will not harm your neighbor when you love.

You may be driven to be successful at any cost. You may consider other people as a stepping stone towards a fulfilling life. you might think setting aside a relationship to enable you to get to where you want is acceptable and unavoidable.

Those extra hours staying at work or networking seems more necessary than spending time with your spouse, kids, or other fellow believers. It all reflects how much you love yourself and how much we love ourselves.

We are so familiar with loving ourselves that it should be easy to understand how to apply the command, love your neighbors as yourself.

You should love and attitude towards others, have the same depth of concern for yourself. Our relationship with the world builds on our renewed relationship with God.

[ 19 : 11 ] It calls to some things in an upside down way, to prioritize relationship with God and others. You may think or feel that up to this point, all I have said is easy, said, than done.

Let me help you by looking at our final session of the three contrasts and the secret of success. We are living in an exciting and challenging time.

You may feel like your life is constantly on the go without any breathing space. You might have chosen to deal with all that is happening around you with nostalgia and reminiscing the good old days, or slumbering, trying to slip them off.

But Paul says, and do this, understanding the present time. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when you first believed.

The night is nearer, nearly over, and the day is almost here. Paul calls all Christians to do three pairs of contrasting action in our current already and not yet states.

[ 20 : 25 ] The mercy of God through the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross saved us from all our sin, but we still sin and live in a sin-broken world.

But this tension is almost over. We have been made new, and the promised new world is almost here. So now is not time to hit the snooze button.

Let's get into some actions. So let's put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let's behave decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Rather, quote yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desire of the flesh. There seems to be three contrasting actions from this final session of tests, but they are very closely related and can be studied as one action group.

Firstly, Paul calls us to put aside or put off our nighties and put on our day clothes. As much as our nighties, our pajamas are comfortable and help us to sleep.

[ 21 : 41 ] They are inappropriate for how we should live or want to live our life during the day. Dressing right, dressing for the right occasion, help us to perform better on most occasions.

The pajamas, the nighties we are putting aside are the deeds of darkness. We're putting off what is harmful to us, and we are to put on the armor of light that will protect us and save us.

No one in their right mind will go into a battle naked. However, if you only think about what you have to put aside or give up, not thinking about the armor God prepared for you, you'll be fearful and worried, like going into a battle naked.

Secondly, let's not only dress right, but behave right and decent. Like Paul's time, we also live in a dark time.

Nothing is hunky dory, but we can behave decently as if in the daytime by not giving in to dark, sinful behavior.

[ 22 : 54 ] And even if you fail, the third thing is our comeback and our secret to success. We can complete the first two pairs of action because Jesus has gone before us and nailed the desires of his flesh on the cross.

And he became the armor of light we are to put on. Jesus took off his armor, allowing the arrows of our sins to pierce his body.

He was treated with the worst indecency on the cross, stripped naked, hung dead, so we know what behaving decently looked like in a proper relationship with God and others as we live out as a living sacrifice for God in our daily relationship.

If you only think about how unsatisfied your body will be because you have to deal with all your sins and love those you deem not worthy of your love, in that case, you'll find all the instructions from Roman 12 to the end of the book, or even the whole Bible is teaching challenging and difficult. But clove yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ. Wrap your thoughts around him. Think of Jesus as your armor.

[ 24 : 20 ] Let him cover you and comfort you. Let him embrace you and be your protection as you love and serve in your new relationship with others.

Think about how you can glorify God and glorify Jesus as your salvation, the good news of the gospel. You will not pass the test if you focus on yourself and what you need to do.

You will only succeed if you focus on God's mercy shown to you through Jesus. We are all citizens of God's kingdom not because we have passed any test.

It was due to the merit of Jesus. We are called to be the best citizens on this earth but we will fail because we are sinful.

But even if we fail, you are covered by Jesus. Jesus He is your armor of light. He is steadfast love through and drew forever and He will never come of you.

[ 25 : 29 ] Jesus guaranteed your loyalty to God by His life as you live as a citizen of God in this world. Clothe yourself with Him daily as a true and proper worship to our majestic God.

Let your mind be filled with God's mercy, the Lord Jesus Christ.