

Citizen Christian: Christians as Citizens, part 2

1 Peter 2:13-17

MPS Christians are called to live as good citizens by prioritizing our identity in Jesus and bearing faithful witness to His Kingdom.

OBJ Every person can understand a Christian's relationship to human government by four principles.

INTRO We begin by continuing to address the question, **Should Christians really be that engaged in politics?** I remind us of the words of Carl F.H. Henry, "A Christianity without a passion to turn the world upside down is not reflective of apostolic Christianity."¹ The extent to which we believe that Jesus is Lord over all creation will fuel our labors to cultivate every realm of the public realm for the glory of God by the proclamation of the gospel. **Christians as citizens should reflect the wholeness of life, freedom and advancement of oneself in the world as God intended when He designated government for "good".**

TRANS Building a theology of citizenship begins by applying the transcendent gospel within all earthly spheres.

Christians are called to live as good citizens by prioritizing our identity in Jesus and bearing faithful witness to His Kingdom.

READ 1 Peter 2:13-17

*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. **1 Peter 2:13-17***

OBJ We began building a theology of Christ-honoring citizenship by **Four Foundational Principles.**

Principle 1: Christian citizenship begins with the priority of our identity in Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:1-12

The hope we have in Jesus Christ changes everything about our lives in this world; we exist to proclaim God's excellencies. For the Christian, knowing self, understanding the world and defining our purpose only comes by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Last week I stated, maybe the most controversial thing I will say, "The local church is the most important political community in our nation."² The importance of the Christian church as a political force in this world serves a greater glory. Our mission is far greater than merely state matters. **Christians serve as a prophetic voice to God's good for public conscience, declaring the Law and truth of God in the world.**

Three testimonies shape the Christian's voice to declare God's goodness to people on earth, God's creational narrative as the context for the whole world, God's creational command as the highest good and each person's responsibility, and God's creational mandate to cultivate good in the world. **As Christians prioritize our new identity by these three testimonies, we bear a faithful witness to Jesus' Lordship and God's goodness for the public conscience. Christian silence creates a vacuum of witness that leaves the public conscience open to be shaped by lies, false narratives, and deceptive ideologies.**

TRANS Once our new identity is prioritized, we can establish a right relationship to God's servants of authority in the world.

Principle #2: Christians as citizens model obedience to earthly authority in submission to Jesus.

*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. **1 Peter 2:13-14***

¹ Carl F.H. Henry. The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), Loc 186.

² Bruce Ashford, Letters to an American Christian. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), Loc 467.



In the midst of a world and culture of severe persecution by government rulers, Peter tells Christians to be subject, to obey every human institution for the Lord's sake. He begins with this command because the true issue is authority, and God is the source and Jesus is Lord of all authority. Paul teaches the same in Romans 13:1. When we recognize government leaders in this way, it does not make them more than they are or something that they are not but recognizes God's purpose in designating them. [Christians submit to government leaders because we recognize that our submission is to God's authority on them and Jesus' Lordship over their role.](#)

TRANS I want to use two questions to further explain and apply this question.

First, "what is the Christian's relationship to government?" America is a constitutional republic. This means that some decisions are made by the vote while others are made by elected officials. But in all we champion representation by Abraham Lincoln's infamous phrase from the Gettysburg Address, "government of the people, by the people, for the people". It is thought that even Lincoln stole this quote from John Wycliffe who wrote in the prologue to his translation of the Bible, "The Bible is for the Government of the People, but the People, and for the People."³ [In a unique way, the American people themselves hold some government-ordained authority because of our designed participation in the process.](#)

The American citizen's participation role, or relationship to government, includes both rights and responsibilities. Rights mean that citizens hold certain authority granted to us, as is recognized by our founding documents. The exercise of our rights serves to establish our role and protect our freedoms. What our rights bestow to us, responsibility places their safeguard upon us. The first right no one cares to defend is the one rarely exercised. Rights are established by our responsibility, which in God's creational mandate, comes first. As set forth in Principle 1, God bestows inalienable rights to fulfill the responsibility of His command placed on each person. God's creational mandate determines man's responsibility, which establishes our rights as inalienable. [Citizen rights are established by responsibility and must be exercised and guarded to be maintained.](#)

As one scholar stated, "A constitutional republic is best IF you can keep it." The greatest threat remains when good is determined by individualism, as secular humanism and atheism purports, where rights are inherent to the person, and not bestowed, therefore having no responsibility outside one's self. [Christians live subject to earthly authorities in submission to Jesus, when, for the good of society we exercise our rights for good and bear responsibility to defend them.](#)

ILLUS A Biblical example helps here. In Acts 25:11, Paul appeals to Caesar in the face of unjust treatment. It was his right to do so, but no one was interested in fulfilling his right if he would not exercise it. Paul exercised his right of appeal in the judicial process for a higher good. He was treated unjustly, and he wanted the opportunity to preach the gospel to him.

Second, we must ask, "Is there a time it is right to NOT submit to earthly authority?" Yes. First, the US was founded by affirming this answer. In considering this question I came across an old doctrine that frames our Christian response titled, "The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates". One author explains it this way. "The lesser magistrate doctrine declares that when the superior or higher civil authority makes unjust / immoral laws or decrees, the lesser or lower ranking civil authority has both a right and duty to refuse obedience to that superior authority. If necessary, the lesser authorities even have the right and obligation to actively resist the superior authority."⁴ You may have heard it echoed, but Acts 5:29 can be heard in these words, "*But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."* [When civil authorities mandate disobedience to God, it is the right, responsibility, and duty of the Christian to obey God rather than man.](#)

Francis Shaeffer wrestles with this when he states, "But what is to be done when the state does that which violates its legitimate function? Why were the Christians in the Roman Empire thrown to the lions? From the Christian's viewpoint it was

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/who-coined-government-of-the-people-by-the-people-for-the-people/2017/03/31/12fc465a-0fd5-11e7-aa57-2ca1b05c41b8_story.html Last accessed September 23, 2020.

⁴ Matthew J. Trehella, [The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates: A Proper Resistance to Tyranny and a Repudiation of Unlimited Obedience to Civil Government](#). (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 2.



for a religious reason. But from the viewpoint of the Roman State they were in civil disobedience, they were civic rebels.”⁵ He summarizes his response by, “The bottom line is that at a certain point there is not only the right, but the duty, to disobey the state.”⁶ Schaeffer justifies his position by citing an historical reference, Samuel Rutherford, who states that because the state is instituted by God, “Acts of the state that which contradicted God’s Law were illegitimate and acts of tyranny. Tyranny was defined as ruling without the sanction of God.”⁷ Schaeffer recognizes Rutherford’s arguments to establish the right and duty of resistance to unlawful government, then states, “It follows from Rutherford’s thesis that citizens have a moral obligation to resist unjust and tyrannical government. While we must always be subject to the office of the magistrate, we are not to be subject to the man in that office who commands that which is contrary to the Bible.”⁸ [Obeying earthly authorities includes reminding them where their authority originates by operating as citizens who exercise their rights and bear their responsibility and duty for the good of society.](#)

The best way to remember and empower our obedience to government authority, to posture a correct relationship, is to regularly pray for them.^{1Tim2:1-2} When we pray regularly for them, it reminds us of how God is working. [Christians hold as our first act of love and first labor in mission to pray for our leaders so Gods redemptive mission can go forth.](#)

Principle #3: Christians as citizens cultivate good by actions as evidence to silence accusation against us.

¹⁵*For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 1 Peter 2:15*

Peter frames our perspective for why we live subject to earthly authorities by showing us it is God’s will. The way we live under earthly authority, to do and create good for society as a whole, becomes a testimony from us to silence ignorant and foolish accusations that arise against us. [The will of God is that our good deeds, as defined by His Word, serve as witness of our true intentions and motives in laboring for good here on earth.](#)

Christian activism has always been one of seeking solution-based answers to real problems for people’s good.

This doesn’t mean we never address accusations. It does mean that when we answer foolish arguments, we use real, concrete actions to exemplify our answer. Christians are people of solutions, not accusation or blame. When attacked, we respond with the evidence of our cultivating good in the world. People who accuse or claim Christianity as useless in the world are simply ignorant or willfully blind. **ILLUS** The good Christianity has done in this world can be seen everywhere, but historically most notably in two of the largest institutional realms today, healthcare and education. We cultivate good by opposing what is contrary to God’s Word and laboring for what aligns with it. We oppose abortion and offer real solutions to crisis or unwanted pregnancies. We remember the poor by addressing their needs and helping them to advance their lives. [Christians cultivate good with real solutions that address people’s problems with answers that advance their good in life.](#)

One of the greatest actions a Christian can do for good is a commitment to vote. Voting is the most practical, regular action for good that we as Christian citizens can perform. Contrary to some claims, voting is important and still matters. There is great debate over how to vote today. A Christian’s first priority in voting is for the candidate who will promote good according to God’s Word, in how government exercises its authority and citizens are empowered to exercise their rights and responsibilities. Voting is one critical way for the Christian to exercise our voice for the public conscience. We do not confront problems by diverting attention, and we oppose actions that create pseudo-solutions. Government policy that offers solutions to problems by reducing individual rights or responsibility is always wrong and creates bigger problems. Policy must aim to remove barriers and hindrances that enable people to bear responsibility while exercising their rights to cultivate good. [In voting, policy should be a higher priority than persona because the office will always outlast the person holding it.](#)

ILLUS Political Temptations: One Nation Under God, by John DeBerry

⁵ Francis Schaeffer, A Christian Manifesto. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1982), p92.

⁶ Schaeffer, A Christian Manifesto., p93.

⁷ Schaeffer, A Christian Manifesto., p100.

⁸ Schaeffer, A Christian Manifesto., p101.



John DeBerry is an African-American pastor and longtime Tennessee state Representative (D) from Memphis. He personally integrated into an all-white high school and witnessed civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr.'s final speech before his 1968 assassination. He has just recently been voted out of the Democratic party for his positions. In answering the question in a sermon, "How do you know who to vote for?", he stated, "You find the person who has not openly declared war against God. That's what you do. You find the person who has not openly declared that they're going to remove the Bible from the marketplace. You find the person who has not openly declared that they're going to support late-term abortion. You find the person who has not openly declared that they're going to support the progressive agenda. You find the person who has not openly declared that they're going to work to destroy the Biblical standard of ethics and morality. You find the person who has not openly declared that they're going to bring marriage equality, which means homosexual marriage. And you find that person, and you may have to hold your nose to push the button, but you know what the alternative is. And when we think about this in the political realm, that's exactly what we have to do. The one that has declared war on God, you don't vote for him."⁹

I like how Tony Evans, Pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Church in Dallas, Texas, stated it, "We are not Republican, Democrat, nor Libertarian; Christians are Kingdom voters." [Christians as citizens cultivate good by actions to silence foolish and ignorant accusation against us.](#)

Principle #4: Christians as citizens champion freedom to honor God.

¹⁶Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

¹⁷Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. **1 Peter 2:16-17**

Peter reminds us that Christians hold that freedom is not defined by what earthly authorities do or say. Rather, freedom is secured by Jesus Christ. No matter where we live, in Jesus we are free. This freedom empowers us to rightly relate to others; to honor all people, love one another in the church, give highest glory to God and let Caesar have what is his.

Tension with government and politics is inevitable for the Christian, because we live in a world that is not our home. As Jason Duesing stated, "All political engagement...is always done uneasily."¹⁰ But that we are sojourners in this world is not the primary reason there is tension with government. The Bible recognizes tension between followers of Jesus and government. Tension arises because man-made structures strive to take on more than they are ordained to do and to have by the One who endows them with their power, Creator God. Without the recognition of God in the public square, that allows for freedom and plurality of religion, the entirety of our American government can be completely dismantled. Speaking of governmental regulation and freedom, Wayne Grudem states, "every incremental increase in governmental regulation of life is also an incremental removal of some measure of human liberty."¹¹ [Christians champion freedom as God's highest good for people on earth, that points to his eternal life in Jesus.](#)

Almost any political conversation today is accompanied by heated tension and marked accusation, along with shaming and virtue-signaling, and likely an accusation of worshipping the god of nationalistic pride. Christian, remember your prophetic voice is your best patriotic voice, in the way you regard and relate to all people, to speak the gospel that points to God as Creator and Jesus as Lord.

[Christians are called to live as good citizens
by prioritizing our identity in Jesus and bearing faithful witness to His Kingdom.](#)

⁹ John DeBerry in a sermon titled, "Political Temptations: One Nation Under God", as part of Truth in Love Lectureship. <https://christianchronicle.org/ousted-by-democrats-longtime-lawmaker-and-minister-fights-for-his-political-life/> Last viewed September 15, 2020.

¹⁰ Dr. Jason Duesing in a forum message on critical issues of politics and the gospel. https://vimeo.com/180977390?utm_content=buffera8ac5&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer. Last accessed September 17, 2020.

¹¹ Wayne Grudem. *Politics According to the Bible* A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p64-65.

