

HOW TO BEHAVE AS CITIZENS OF THE NATION

Romans 13:1-7

September 26, 2021

We are living in very frustrating and trying times as Christians – with the results of a needless and costly election that brought no changes in our Federal government; ongoing COVID restrictions that are causing frustration, hostility and division; distrust of our politicians and medical professionals; uncertainty about vaccines; ongoing border and travel restrictions; rising mental health issues, drug issues and suicide; worries about another lockdown; business that are struggling and closing; employers that can't find workers, and waiting for God to step in and get us out of this mess.

During the Nuremberg trials at the end of WWII a man on trial was asked this question: *“How did you get the people of Germany to buy into your deal?”* The man on trial answered, *“It was very easy, it had nothing to do with Nazism, it had to do with fear.”* You can easily control people with fear, and fear has had a big impact on what has taken place over the last 18 months with this ongoing COVID pandemic. So, as believers we need to set the example and have the boldness and courage to stand up against fear and pray in a new season, because the Gospel is the answer to our dilemma of fear and uncertainty. As **1 John 4:18** reminds us, ***“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.”*** The Gospel is perfect love and LOVE IS THE ANSWER!

The first 11 chapters of the book of Romans is all about what we believe and WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST, and then in the last 5 chapters, Paul unpacks how we are to behave as believers out in this messed up world, and **Romans 12: 9-21** is key to this last section of Romans, because we are to be known by our ***“LOVE.”***

It's very interesting that Paul has taken this approach before – in **1 Corinthians 12**, Paul teaches on spiritual gifts for a whole chapter, and then puts those gifts in perspective in **1 Corinthians 13**, *“the love chapter.”* Paul ends his teaching on spiritual gifts with these words: *“Now eagerly desire the greatest gift and the most excellent way which is LOVE,”* and then gives us why love is so critical to the behaviour of a believer: ***“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophesy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do***

not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Without LOVE you are a talking head whose words mean nothing and achieve nothing. Paul is warning us here that we can be the most spiritually gifted, most knowledgeable, and most generous person within any congregation, but if you don’t know how to love others, you are a big “ZERO!”

In **Romans 12:9** – Paul tells us three important things about love: 1) **Love must be sincere**, 2) **Love must hate what is evil**, and 3) **Love must cling to what is good**. In other words, our love must be true to God’s will, and our love must be based on God’s moral principles found within His Word. And in that way, we can overcome this messed up world with “*LOVE*.” That is important because as we move into **chapter 13 of Romans**, Paul tells us that we need to love our politicians and those in authority over us, even though we may not like or agree with what they are doing or what they are saying. **Romans 13:1-7** deals with our relationship and responsibility to our local, provincial, and national government as believers, and that’s where we are going this morning.

Today, there are many prophets of doom and gloom around us who keep pointing out how bad things are. There is a children’s fable that goes like this: “*Once upon a time Chicken Little was pecking away at her food when an acorn fell and hit her on the head. Chicken Little looked up and believed the sky was falling, so she ran and told all the animals in the barnyard crying, ‘The sky is falling! The sky is falling!’ Finally, Chicken Little approached the farmer and said, ‘The sky is falling! The sky is falling!’*” At this point the first grade teacher stopped the story and asked her students, “*And what do you think the farmer said to Chicken Little?*” Nobody answered! Then finally one little boy raised his hand and said, “*I think the farmer said, ‘WOW, a talking chicken!’*” There are people around us who want us to believe that things are so bad in Canada that the sky is falling, all is doom and gloom, there’s no hope. As believers we know better! We are people of hope!

Many Christians around us are quick to point out what’s wrong with our culture and how we have experienced a severe moral decline over the past 50 years – but these same Christians seem to also think this nation will magically change when women stop having abortions, or when gay couples stop demanding their rights for same-sex marriage, or when people stop watching pornography, or when all those selling drugs to our youth are put behind bars, or when we get rid of these COVID

restrictions. They naively think that when all evil has been eliminated things will be OK and then once again, we will be a God fearing peace loving nation. However, instead of pointing at others to get their act together, just maybe God is waiting for the church in Canada to get its act together and step up and be the church. YES, we all can agree that times may be in a rapid downward spiral, but this is no time for outbursts of anger or fear, hysteria or panic, and especially not a time for doom or gloom; instead it's time for the church to wake up and start lifting up our nation and our leaders in prayer, according to: **2 Chronicles 7:14**, ***"If my people, who are called my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*** What this country needs is the sleeping church to awaken, repent of their apathy, and then begin to engage our culture, bringing God's presence into every area of life, and we do that best through unconditional love.

So, should the church be engaged in all aspects of our culture and be involved in politics? My answer is YES, because politics affects so much of our lives, and we need to have a voice in the political arena. As well, politics can hurt people and the church can't ignore the hurt it inflicts on the people around us. American Presbyterian minister Charles Finney said, *"If there is a decay in conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the public press lacks moral discernment the pulpit is responsible for it. If the church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the world loses its interest in Christianity, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics becomes so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it."* God needs the church involved and have a voice in government and in all areas of secular culture!

From the very beginning of Christianity – church history has shown us that followers of Christ have been the best citizens in culture, all because God's Word instructs us to submit to those in authority over us. The first thing we need to realize is that when Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, Nero was the Emperor of Rome. Nero was known for excessive violence and cruelty, especially towards Christians. Nero blamed the great fire of Rome on Christians, plus tortured and martyred thousands of Christians for sport, yet Paul tells these Christians living in Rome at that time this: **Romans 13:1-5**, ***"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which***

God has established. 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. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but 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 commended. 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 servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience."

The first thing that Paul clearly indicates here is that God puts governments in place – ***"The authorities that exist have been established by God."*** These verses tell us about the sovereignty of God, how He both establishes and removes governing authorities from power, and in free countries like Canada, God works alongside of His people by using us to wisely choose godly leaders that agree with His perfect will. So, I believe God holds all Christians responsible to put the right people into power when they vote. And I believe that God expects all Christians to vote and be active participants in the election process by knowing their candidates, knowing their platforms, and their beliefs on important issues, so they can make wise decisions. That means that God establishes the leaders of a nation according to the prayerful and educated wisdom of His people, so if Christians don't get informed and engaged, then they can't complain about the leaders that are put into power, because God gives us the leaders we deserve. Christians are not only to study the Scriptures on how to live as holy and godly people, but also study the Scriptures to be educated on how God wants us to live as citizens of Canada and influence the culture around us. And, if we don't have godly leaders in government, it's because Christians haven't done their part. Christians have to get involved and influence the culture around them enough to put godly men and women into power.

When **verse 1** tells us to be subject to ***"The authorities that exist,"*** Paul is only referring to authority that has been endorsed by God. Paul is not referring to all authority that exists in this verse. God does not endorse ungodly authority that is controlled by the devil. We need to understand that God is not behind all governments, because Satan can easily take over and rule in our politic systems if you leave a door open for him. No sane person believes Hitler was God's will for

Germany, but it happened because the church was silent and did not push back against evil. The point is that God works through believers to stop evil. German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, *“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil, God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”* Nations can and do pick evil leaders. Against God’s wishes Israel wanted a king like all of the other nations around them, so get let the people choose and King Saul was the people’s pick and it turned out to be a disaster.

History also shows us that Christians can change a nation over time – Christian history professor Dr. Glen S. Sunshine wrote these words: *“It took the early Christians over three hundred years, but they transformed Roman society. We tend to get discouraged over a single election cycle. If we are going to have the kind of impact on our society that the early Christians had on Rome, we need their courage, their perseverance, and their faithfulness. If we have those qualities, we can and will have an impact on our society far beyond our numbers and will produce cultural renewal and a better life for those who come after us, Christians and non-Christians alike.”* Even though God is all knowing and all powerful, He still chooses to work out His sovereign will on this earth through the prayers and actions of His people. So, answers to our prayers for our nation and leaders can only come as a result of us aligning our will with God, and then through our desire to become more and more aligned to His will for Canada. And God’s will is for every nation to become a godly nation! So, as we go out into the world as model citizens, setting the example for others living around us as to follow!

Then, Paul tells us this in **verse 4**, ***“For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.”*** So, God establishes governing authorities over us because God is a God of law and order; He doesn’t want chaos and unrest according to **1 Corinthians 14:33**, ***“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”*** That is why God established our various institutions: like the institution of marriage and the family where there are rules and parents have authority over their children, so they grow up to become civilized and well behaved citizens. God also established the institution of church in which there are spiritual and lay leaders who lead by serving. Then, God established the institution of government where there are lines of authority to keep society in check so that there is peace and order, where we can live in relative safety in our homes, workplaces, on our streets and highways.

That is why Paul says in **verse 2-4**, ***“Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves...if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason.”*** Our government is established by God to bring about law and order in this land through our police forces, our courts of law, and protects our land from foreign invaders by our military forces. The role of the state is to ***“bear the sword,”*** which means to punish those who break the law, plus prevent hostile nations from taking away our freedom; thereby, God uses judges, the police and the military as His servants to accomplish His divine will. So, as law abiding citizens, ours is not to take the law in our own hands, God has set up our law enforcement to do that. What we are called to do is to follow the rules of the land;, so that we can be ***“free from fear of the one in authority”*** (verse 3), and ***“also as a matter of conscience”*** (verse 5). We follow the rules because it’s what God wants us to do as believers, and so that we would be able to sleep in peace at night with a clear conscience.

Now, some of you may be thinking – what about corrupt governments and wicked leaders like Adolf Hitler, do we follow them? So, if it’s true that God puts leaders in places of authority, why would God place dictators in authority over us? I strongly believe immoral and wicked leaders and ungodly laws and practices are the result of an immoral and wicked culture. The people get exactly the kind of leader they want and laws put into place because there is no one standing up for Christ in our secular culture to stop evil, so don’t ever be surprised when our government leaders and laws reflect our culture. So, what if our government tells us to do something forbidden by the Word of God? Who are we to obey, God or man?

The Bible is very clear that you are to obey God rather than man in ungodly governments, and there are lots of examples of Christians committing civil disobedience who willingly faced the consequences. In the Old Testament we are told about Daniel who went to the lion’s den because he disobeyed the ungodly law of King Darius not to pray to his God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace because they refused to bow down and worship a golden statue. Many of the early believers went to their death because they wouldn’t bow down to Caesar. Believers are called upon to obey God rather than men, and when we do, we may face a den of lions or a fiery furnace, but the Scriptures promise us that God will be with us if we’re true to Him and honour

Him, but that doesn't mean we will be protected from persecution or death. Even though God is with us, we may still die as martyrs of the faith. Two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and John, were told to stop preaching about Jesus, but they said to those in authority, ***"We must obey God rather than human beings"*** (Acts 5:29) and they suffered greatly for the sake of the Gospel, enduring persecution, beatings, exile, and eventually died as martyrs of the faith.

Refusing to obey man's anti-God laws is not a violation of **Romans 13:1-2**, ***"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;"*** instead, it's a confirmation of those verses, if God has not instituted that authority. You cannot obey an evil law without disobeying God's divine law. As Jesus said, ***"No one can serve two masters"*** (Matthew 6:24). We cannot serve both God and man! I believe that one day in the near future, here in Canada, we may be asked to do something that goes against God's Word. So, when that time comes who are you going to obey, God or man, and then are you willing to face the consequences!

None of us wants to be known as a Chicken Little – going around wringing our hands and complaining to everyone about the problems we face in society today and the unfair rules we have to follow. Instead, there are three things we can do as believers to make a difference in our country of Canada:

The first thing we can do is to pray for our leaders – the Bible directly commands us to do so in **1 Timothy 2:1-3**, ***"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Saviour."*** One big advantage that we all have here in Canada in the twenty-first century, which Paul's readers didn't have back in the first century, is the freedom to vote for our leaders; therefore, we have the leaders that the majority of our voting citizens have put into power. So, whether we had voted for our current leaders or not, we don't have the choice to not pray for those that have been put in positions of power. God's Word commands us to pray for our leaders. I wonder if you are aware that we have a National House of Prayer located in Ottawa right in the parliament buildings that was established in 2005 by Rob Parker and his wife Fran. Since that time, they have upheld our Federal Government in prayer and have been active in helping awaken the church

of Canada to pray as well through providing them with resources. Then, we also have Christian MP's, MPP's, mayors and council members that speak out for our interests, and we need to encourage them and let them know we are praying for them.

The one thing that every one of us can do and must do – is to be committed to pray for our leaders and those in power. And the most important thing we can pray for them is that they would fall in love with Jesus and know Him in a personal way as Saviour and Lord. Most of us may never have the chance to meet our leaders and speak to them about our concerns, but every one of us can have a positive influence in their lives as we lift them up in prayer. Start obeying God and pray for our leaders. YES, you can make a difference!

The second thing we can do as believers is play by the rules and follow the guidelines given to us for our good – Paul gave these instructions to one of his disciples, Titus: ***“Remind the people to be subject to the rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceful and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone”*** (Titus 3:1-2).

Because we are Christians we buckle our seatbelts, we don't park in handicapped parking places if we're not handicapped, we try to follow the speed limit, and we follow COVID protocols to protect others around us. Being good citizens, obeying the rules of the land and paying our taxes is part of our Christian duty, as Paul finishes this section with these words in **verses 6-7**, ***“This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, 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 honor, then honor.”*** We need to reimburse the many people that work in government agencies, on our behalf, by paying our taxes whether we agree how they manage the money or not! Christians are not dishonest or try to find loopholes!

If anyone had the right NOT to play by the rules – it was Jesus, yet He obeyed the laws of the land. When Jesus was asked about paying taxes to the Romans, He didn't have any money, so this is what He did: Jesus sent Peter fishing and the first fish he caught had a coin in its mouth, which Peter used to pay both his taxes and Jesus's taxes. As well three of the Gospel contain the story about paying taxes to Caesar in which the Pharisees try to trap Jesus into being disobedient to Rome. Jesus ask for a coin and then ask them, ***“Whose image and inscription are on it?”***

‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. He said to them, ‘Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’” (Luke 20:24-25). So, here is the attitude we should have as believers – you first give what you owe in tithes and offerings cheerfully to God, and then you pay your taxes willingly, living such lives that no one can accuse us of any wrongdoing. We can’t be a good Christian citizen unless we have a holy awe and fear of God by first giving to God what is His and then play by the rules of the land when they are godly laws!

The third thing we can do is to participate in the process – making a difference right where you are. Some Christians think the word “politics” comes from the two words: “*poli*” meaning “*many*,” and “*tics*,” meaning “*blood sucking creatures*.” Thereby, some Christians think that politics are so corrupt that they shouldn’t get involved and that is why we are in this mess, because most Christians are silent and don’t get involved, leaving it to the ungodly to rule over us. And sadly, there are some evangelical Christians who don’t vote or get involved in politics or help out secular organizations because they think “*our kingdom is not of this world*.” YES, we’re not of this world, but we are in this world, so we can’t stay distant and distinct from anything secular. We can’t sit back waiting for Jesus to come and rescue us from this mess, because Jesus said need to be busy doing His kingdom work in this world until He returns. Christians need to be out in the world as salt and light within their communities, rather than hide behind their stained glass windows waiting for the rapture. Thankfully, here in Canada we still have a political system that continues to invite the participation of Christians, so we need to be very grateful for those Christian politicians who serve, because Christians can only make a difference if they have a voice in our secular culture.

During WWII German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was not silent, but spoke out against Hitler and Nazism, and as a result paid the ultimate price by becoming a martyr for his faith. Bonhoeffer tells us that following Christ can be very costly, especially when it calls us to confront the sins within our society; however, isn’t that what it means to be a Christ follower, we serve at any cost. If it costs you nothing to be a Christ follower, maybe you need to determine if you are a Christ follower!

In closing – ask the Holy Spirit to convict your heart about being a good model citizen, about being honest and not complain about paying the taxes you owe, or complain about obeying all the laws and regulations that the government has put in

place for our protection and well-being. Then, remember to pray for our government and our leaders, because everything we do as believers is a spiritual issue!

Every time you are tempted to complain about something that is happening in Ottawa, or Toronto, or in your community, ask yourself these questions: *“Have I lifted my leaders and this country before God in prayer? Have I repented of my disrespect and disobedience of those in leadership? Have I thought about those around me, loving them as Christ calls me to love them? And, am I willing to provide a safe environment for all that I come in contact with, especially the most vulnerable in society?”*

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are committed to loving our neighbours in word and deed, and by our witness, and in the very structures that we put in place to guide us as a church body within this community. God has chosen to work through people to restrain evil, and the church is appointed to push back against all evil, wherever it may be found.

While COVID is a real health threat, it has become a distraction for the church, causing us to take our eyes off of Jesus. COVID has become a tool that Satan is using to cause fear, division, and disunity in the body of Christ, plus destroying our fellowship. So, as the church we need to get our focus back on the Kingdom of God, hosting His presence wherever we go, and stop playing Satan’s game. We need to turn our eyes upon Jesus and wait upon Him to give us guidance and wisdom, rather than being self-focused and defiant. We are to have compassion for one another, caring for the other, all because – we are commanded to LOVE without condition as God loves!