

Respect for Authorities (Government)



SABBATH—AUGUST 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 22:15-21; Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:13-15.

MEMORY VERSE: "You must obey the authorities. Then you will not be punished. You must also obey them because you know it is right" (Romans 13:5, NIV).

ONE OF THE GREATEST QUESTIONS THE CHURCH HAS is how to become involved in government. History is full of examples of churches that have kept silent (quiet) through great moral¹ and political² crises. But history also is full of sad examples of what happens when churches take political actions that put them on the side of evil.

This week, we will look at the hard question of how Christians should relate to the politics of the day. Christians live in all kinds of governments. So we can look only at broad principles.³ The Bible gives many of these principles. God knew the different situations His people would be in throughout history. So He gave principles broad enough for His people to use in these different situations.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What kind of influence should Christians have in society? How should Christians relate to politics?⁴ Should Christians be in government? What principles should we follow in trying to balance our responsibilities as citizens with our responsibilities to God?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 14.

¹moral—having to do with knowing what is right or wrong.

²political—having to do with the business of running a government.

³principles—basic rules that are the basis for more specific rules.

⁴politics—the business of running a government.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 8

**CARING ABOUT HOLY THINGS
(Matthew 5:13-16).**

Many Christians believe we should give up on the world. The world is so evil, so confused, and so far away from God's original purpose. There is no hope of bringing the world back to God's original purpose. When we are more involved with the world, we will have a greater chance of being "polluted" by the world. For people who want to remain faithful to God, the only choice is to withdraw from the world. This may sound good. But is it what the Bible says?

What part does God expect a Christian to have in society? Matthew 5:13-16.



Christians are to give a pleasant taste to the world around them.

Christians must do all they can to make a difference. They are to give a

more pleasant taste to the world around them. They are to give spiritual light. As someone once said: "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness!"

In early Adventist history, the question was: Would it be right for an Adventist Christian to vote? Today, most Seventh-day Adventists recognize that it is their right to vote. When Adventists vote, they can help promote values that are closest to God's values. How we do this is not always easy. Much depends upon our political and social situation, which can change greatly from country to country. What individual members believe about which program best supports God's values is different from person to person. These questions can be full of political dangers. For this reason, we as believers should be very careful in dealing with social and political issues.

How do you balance Matthew 5:13-16 with 2 Corinthians 6:17 and James 4:4?

The issue for most Christians is not trying to just improve the society we are in. Instead, we should figure out how to improve our society without giving up on Christian principles and responsibilities. We need to keep a balance between improving society and keeping our Christian principles and responsibilities. Keeping this balance is not always easy. Members need to seek God's leading and the advice of other people in how to have this balance.

MONDAY—AUGUST 9

**CHRISTIANS IN GOVERNMENT
(Daniel 1).**

Imagine that your nation is attacked by a foreign nation. This foreign nation defeats your army, kills thousands of people, bombs many cities, and takes many prisoners. Imagine that one of those prisoners becomes a favorite of the ruler who destroyed your nation. And he serves that ruler faithfully for many years. Most people would judge this person to be a traitor. Would you?

What Bible character is like the prisoner? Daniel 1.

Daniel's story brings up many interesting questions about faithful people who are in high government positions.

What other Bible hero became a powerful political figure? Genesis 41:41-49.

Politics offer many traps for any Christian. But there have been Christians who have faithfully served in government. Even in our own church, Seventh-day Adventists have been involved in government. For many years, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian served as the prime minister of Uganda. In Papua, New Guinea, Seventh-day Adventists form a large percentage of the population. So there are many church mem-

bers there in high government positions. The same is true for several of the small island states in the Pacific. Even in countries where Adventists are fewer, we find Seventh-day Adventists as members of Parliament⁵ or other government institutions.



Joseph taught us how to be good political figures.

We believe that God's law shows us His character. So why would we be better off living in a nation where Christians are involved in government? What dangers arise when people try to use government to push through religious programs and ideas?

TUESDAY—AUGUST 10

**OBEDIENCE, YES . . . BUT
(Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-5).**

What attitude⁶ toward political leaders do Romans 13:1-5 and 1 Peter 2:13-15 advise Christians to have?

⁵parliament—a high group such as the Senate in the United States that makes laws.

⁶attitude—how you think and feel about something.

How do Acts 5:29 and Romans 13:7 help us better understand Romans 13:1-5 and 1 Peter 2:13-15?

Christians everywhere should be good citizens. They should obey the laws of their country. They are to give their country all due honor, respect, and tax (Romans 13:6, 7). At the same time, they are to answer to God. God is government. We must remember that Paul and Peter died at the hands of the same government they were telling Christians to obey, because Peter and Paul obeyed God first. Respect for government and obedience to the government have their limits.

One powerful example comes from the history of the United States. In the nineteenth century (1800s), the issue of slavery was dividing Christians in the United States. Ellen G. White made it no secret as to where she stood.

“If the laws of government do not agree with God’s word and law, we are to obey God. It does not matter what will happen. If the law of our land requires us to return a slave to his master, we are not to obey that law. We must accept the results of breaking this law. The slave is not the property of any man. God is the slave’s Master. Man has no right to take God’s workmanship (a human) into his hands, and claim him (a human) as his (the master’s) own.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 201, 202.

There are many examples of disobedience against government.

Some people break the law of their land to bring about political change. What dangers await Christians who disobey the laws of their government to bring about change? What situations might come up when it is our Christian duty to bring about change?

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 11

PAYING TAXES (Matthew 22:15-21).

Few people like to pay high taxes. But in any modern society, government must have large amounts of money to pay for education, basic health care, roads, tunnels, bridges, police, armies, et cetera. We may argue whether taxes should be as high as they are. But we cannot question the right of government to tax us.

What did Jesus and Paul say about the right of government to tax people? Matthew 22:15-21; Romans 13:6, 7.

The tax in Matthew 22 was “payable into the Roman emperor’s treasury. Every citizen of the country from the time that citizen became an adult until the age of sixty-five was required to pay the tax. The Jews did not like to pay the tax to Rome, because the tax reminded them they were not under a Jewish government.

“Paying taxes was still a question in the early church. So Paul found it necessary to tell Christians to pay taxes.

Government is blessed by God. And the payment of taxes is to be made 'for the sake of conscience.'⁷—Adapted from Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Oxford, Eng.: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 439.

What other principle comes up when we deal with our taxes? Luke 16:10-12; 2 Corinthians 13:7.



No person can serve both God and money.

We must be honest in all our business deals. We must also be honest about what we receive from the government and what we pay to the government. It is dishonest to claim a benefit we do not deserve. It is dishonest to hold back what we owe the government.

We may look for legal ways to lower our taxes. But making false claims and fooling the government is dishonest. It is the same as stealing from our employer⁸ or our neighbor. A Christian cannot be expected to smile when his or her taxes are higher than expected. But he or she can be expected to be honest.

Suppose you have cheated on your taxes in the past. What can you do to make it right?

THURSDAY—AUGUST 12

**PROMOTING CHRISTIAN VALUES
(Daniel 2:24-27).**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always been strongly opposed to government meddling in church affairs. Individual church members may choose to serve their country in a high office. But the Adventist Church believes that a religious organization should stay away from politics.

This does not mean that the church has no interest in the values of society. The church should speak out on moral issues that influence society. But it is wrong to force some of our values on other people. It also would be wrong not to tell and show other people the values we believe would make the world a better place. It is not always easy to find a balance between not forcing our values on society and presenting a strong witness.

⁷conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with a desire to do right.

⁸employer—a person or company who hires people to work.

What examples can we find in the Bible of faithful people who tried to bring about a change in government?

Esther 7:1-7 _____

Daniel 2:24-27 _____

Exodus 5:1-3 _____



Moses and Aaron tried to change Egypt's government.

The Bible is full of examples of prophets who tried to influence government. The prophets tried to get governments to follow God. The situation back then was very different from any situation we face today. But there is nothing wrong with Christians trying to influence positive moral and social changes. One hard question arises about what

changes a church should try to make. Another question is how a church should try to bring about these changes. Not everything that is sinful should be made illegal. This is something Christians throughout history have not always understood. Where to draw the line has been, and still is, a difficult question for the church. This is a topic that we need to deal with very carefully.

Are you a strong supporter of the church being involved in politics? Or do you think the church should stay away from politics? What reasons do you have for your answer?

FRIDAY—AUGUST 13

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Jesus’ answer was a direct and honest answer to the question (Matthew 22:15-21). Jesus held in His hand the Roman coin. On one side of the coin were stamped the name and image of Caesar (the ruler). Jesus said that since they were living under the protection of the Roman power, they should obey that power. They should obey as long as obeying did not conflict with their loyalty to God. People should peacefully obey the laws of the land. But they should at all times give their first loyalty to God.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 602.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Ellen White was active in the temperance⁹ movement in the United

⁹temperance—a movement that wanted to stop the sale of alcohol.

States. She was strongly in favor of stopping the sale of alcohol. So she encouraged people to vote for prohibition¹⁰—even if the vote was held on Sabbath. “ ‘Shall we vote for prohibition?’ she asked. ‘Yes, to every man, everywhere,’ she answered. ‘And perhaps I shall shock some of you if I say to vote on the Sabbath day for prohibition if you cannot vote on any other day.’ ” —A. L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Lonely Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1984), vol. 1, p. 160. Discuss Ellen White’s quote in view of this week’s lesson.

2. Is it right, or even a duty, for the church to speak out on some moral issues,

especially when speaking out may pull the church into a political fight?

3. Jesus lived during a time of great political dishonesty. But He did not say a lot about this political dishonesty. What lessons can we learn from His example?

SUMMARY: Christians are citizens of heaven first. But they are also citizens of their own country. They are to accept their part of the responsibility all citizens should share. They should follow the principle of giving the government what belongs to it. They should also follow the principle of giving to God what is His. These principles give Christians a broad outline (guide) to follow anywhere they live.

¹⁰prohibition—a law passed stopping the sale of alcohol.