

## Romans 13:1-10

There has been a lot of debate about what is required of people to become an Australian citizen. The debate has been escalated by the revelation that a number of our parliamentary members have only just realised that they hold dual citizenship.

Well, dual citizenship was not new to the Apostle Paul. In fact that is exactly what he wanted. He was a Roman citizen of the Empire by birth (Acts 22:26-28) and he wanted to be a good Roman Citizen. He was also a citizen of heaven from which he awaited a Saviour, by new birth (Phil 3:19-20) and he wanted to be a good Citizen of heaven. Well, did that pose problems for the apostle? The answer is, "No" and "Yes". No in the matter of principle for he wished to be a loyal citizen but Yes in the matter of practice for in the end he suffered at the hands of the Roman Emperor and, if tradition is right, was executed by him.

In the reading for today Paul outlines three duties of the Christian Citizen.

**Firstly the Christian Citizen is to be subject to governing authorities.**

### **13:1-5**

When Paul was writing to the church at Rome and calling upon them to be good citizens he was writing to the church in the capital city of the vast and pagan empire. Their gods were idols. There was no sense in which the empire could be called Christian yet his first command is to honour the authorities.

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Why? Because God is sovereign. This empire and its emperor and its governing authorities were not in place by chance. They were in place because God had ordained it so. They had been put there by God to mete out justice. The governing authorities task is to punish the wrong doer and approve those who do good so that people may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is why the apostle will later write that Christians ought especially to pray for kings and all who are in high positions. It is in such calm circumstances that people are more likely to reflect on life and come to a knowledge of God and enjoy all the blessings that he bestows (1. Tim 2:1-6).

However having said that, Christians must also read the times. There will be times when governing authorities will be the very instruments of Satan. The Christian above all others will be alert to this. It was the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, who committed the most gross injustice of all time when he crucified the only truly sinless man who ever lived, Jesus, the Christ. And it was another Apostle John who some 40 years after Romans was written, would write Revelation and view the power of Rome as the beast who rose out of the sea to make war on the saints (Rev 13: 1-10).

But the general rule is that we are to be subject to governing authorities because they have been appointed by God and also because their mandate is to punish the wrongdoer. We certainly don't want to be on the receiving end of lawful punishment and we certainly don't want to violate our conscience by disobeying an institution set in place by God.

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### **Secondly the Christian Citizen is to give authorities their due. 13:7**

Since God has placed people in positions of power and authority over us they are his chosen servants and as such we are to give them due honour and respect. It is really helpful when those in authority conduct themselves with a high sense of duty and awareness of the dignity and importance of the office they occupy by God's mercy. However even if they don't, it is our duty to respect the office even if we find it difficult to respect the person in the office.

And this giving of due honour is to be practical. Where taxes and revenue are to be paid we are to do so. In exhorting us to do so Paul had good precedence in the Lord Jesus' teaching and example.

When the Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap Jesus in front of a Jerusalem crowd he was asked whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. His teaching was to follow the principle of rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's (Mk 12:13-17). While no nation likes to be subject to another nation the Romans certainly brought benefit to the world with its Pax Romana. Pirates were banished from the seas by their navy and robbers from the roadways by their army and trade was made possible all round the Mediterranean. However such good order comes at a cost and taxes need to be paid to maintain such good order.

And what Jesus preached he also practiced. It is noteworthy that the only toll collector among the disciples, Matthew, records that Jesus ensured that he and Peter paid the collectors of the half-shekel tax (Matt 17:24-27).

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### **Thirdly the Christian Citizen is to love his neighbour.13:8-10**

Being a good citizen however means more than honouring those in authority. It also means being a good neighbour to his fellow citizens. In this matter the commandments that God gave Israel at Mt Sinai is a good guide to good citizenship. Refraining from adultery, murder, stealing and coveting are marks of healthy neighbourly behaviour and if such outward conduct is motivated and driven by a genuine love of neighbour then lawful conduct between citizens will prevail.

### **Conclusion:**

For Paul and the apostles their desire was to be good citizens here on earth and the way for them to do that was to be good citizens of heaven by honouring those in authority and loving their neighbour.

However it cannot be always quite that simple. There will be times when the authorities and fellow citizens will demand what is contrary to God's demands and obviously our prior loyalty is to our God and his Christ. Peter and John faced that situation when the Jewish Council forbade them to speak no more to anyone in the name of Jesus Christ. They replied we cannot but speak of what they had seen and heard.

This too was the challenge faced by Paul, the very writer of this letter to the Romans. Would he quietly submit to the Emperor Nero and desist from his loyalty to the other King Jesus. He chose Jesus and with his choice came martyrdom from the Emperor he tried to honour.