

1 Peter 2:13-16 (KJV) *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.*

Last week we looked at how we, as Christians, have a social responsibility to each other and to society as a whole. Today, we are told also that we have a political responsibility as well.

This week we are told that we have the duty, as Christians, to be responsible citizens. We have the duty to obey the laws of the land. We are to submit to authority; that by doing so we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

We are told also not to use freedom as a cloak for maliciousness but rather use it as servants of God.

That is an awesome responsibility. We are actually told to be Christian citizens.

What all does that mean to you and to me? What is it to be a Christian citizen? What would society be if it were run by Christian citizens?

To answer that question, permit me to read you a passage from C. S. Lewis. It is from Mere Christianity Book III Chapter 3. Listen carefully. What you hear may surprise you.

All the same, the New Testament, without going into details, gives us a pretty clear hint of what a fully Christian society would be like. Perhaps it gives us more than we can take. It tells us that there are to be no passengers or parasites: if man does not work, he ought not to eat. Everyone is to work with his own hands, and what is more, every one's work is to produce something good: there will be no manufacture of silly luxuries and then of sillier advertisements to persuade us to buy them. And there is to be no "swank" or "side," no putting on airs. To that extent a Christian

society would be what we now call Leftist. On the other hand, it is always insisting on obedience-obedience (and outward marks of respect) from all of us to properly appointed magistrates, from children to parents, and (I am afraid this is going to be very unpopular) from wives to husbands. Thirdly, it is to be a cheerful society: full of singing and rejoicing, and regarding worry or anxiety as wrong. Courtesy is one of the Christian virtues; and the New Testament hates what it calls "busybodies."

If there were such a society in existence and you or I visited it, I think we should come away with a curious impression. We should feel that its economic life was very socialistic and, in that sense, "advanced," but that its family life and its code of manners were rather old-fashioned-perhaps even ceremonious and aristocratic. Each of us would like some bits of it, but I am afraid very few of us would like the whole thing. That is just what one would expect if Christianity is the total plan for the human machine. We have all departed from that total plan in different ways, and each of us wants to make out that his own modification of the original plan is the plan itself. You will find this again and again about anything that is really Christian: everyone is attracted by bits of it and wants to pick out those bits and leave the rest. That is why we do not get much further: and that is why people who are fighting for quite opposite things can both say they are fighting for Christianity.

In other words, we have to make our own "Christian Society." We have to carve out our own peculiar way of living in a very complex and secular, even pagan, world.

But we have to take the whole plan in order for it to work. We cannot "cherry-pick" what we like and what we do not like in living a Christ driven life. It is not a cafeteria approach to life. We have to follow ALL the rules. We have to eat ALL the vegetables, even the broccoli.

And part of that way of living requires that we give away everything in our lives that is not necessary. That means everything. It is like the story of the rich young ruler.

Matthew 19:21-22 (KJV) *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*

We also have the example of the early Church as described in the Acts of the Apostles.

Acts 4:34-35 (KJV) *Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*

Going back to C. S. Lewis again, let's listen to what he has to say about giving.

One more point and I am done. In the passage where the New Testament says that everyone must work, it gives as a reason "in order that he may have something to give to those in need." Charity-giving to the poor-is an essential part of Christian morality: in the frightening parable of the sheep and the goats it seems to be the point on which everything turns. Some people nowadays say that charity ought to be unnecessary and that instead of giving to the poor we ought to be producing a society in which there were no poor to give to. They may be quite right in saying that we ought to produce that kind of society. But if anyone thinks that, as a consequence, you can stop giving in the meantime, then he has parted company with all Christian morality. I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.

That is Christian responsibility. That is Christian social responsibility to those that are less fortunate than we are.

Christian citizenship demands no less of us than Christian social responsibility. In our choices politically we have to be informed as to what are the real issues that affect all economic levels not just the poor and not just the rich. Each one of us has the duty to study the issues and to make our judgments on those issues through the filter of our Christian duty to our fellow man, through our Christian social obligation, through our Christian social morality.

Today's society in its immorality has put profit ahead of the general welfare, accumulation of wealth ahead of the general good, greed instead of generosity. That, my brothers and sisters, is what is called the world. We are called to be not of the world. We are called to set an example to others by our love and that love includes the welfare of others not just ourselves.

We are faced today in our world with some hard issues and difficult decisions to make. But those decisions should not be made to the detriment of the general public. Those decisions should not be made to the harm of the sick and the elderly.

There are certain elements in this country that would do so. There are certain elements in this country that would make you decide on these crucial issues on the basis of false and misleading statements. Joseph Goebbels stated that if you repeat a lie long enough it will become the truth. Let me also remind you that the Nazis never won an election. They came to power on the basis of being able to put together rallies.

We need to realize that what is happening in our country today is one group trying to gain power through fear. That is not the Christian way. We do not fear what this world is doing.

Our only fear should be our fear of the judgment when we have to answer how we looked after the less fortunate and the weak.

Amen.