

2009-10-36 Romans 13:4 The government has an important part in God's plan.  
Pentecost 6 July 4, 2010

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.  
God's Word to give us thankfulness and to pray for our government is written in Romans 13:4  
These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Citizens, in Christ,

Dual citizenship is when people claim two countries as their home. St. Paul was able to claim this. As a Jew, he called Israel his home. As a resident of Tarsus, he claimed Roman citizenship. Paul used his dual status to his advantage as he shared the Gospel on his missionary journeys. As Christians, we are dual citizens, too. We claim the USA as our country and also, through faith in Christ, our citizenship is in heaven. We'll think about the blessings we have as dual citizens and pray that God would give us thankful and prayerful hearts that we are in both. Our theme is:

### **The government has an important role in God's plan.**

**First, what are the blessings of government according to God?** The government *"is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."* (v.4) God has authority over everyone and He will judge of all people at the end of time. To help people better understand His justice, God has given governments a limited authority. The government can't bring people to faith in Christ. That is the authority of the Church through the Word and sacraments. The government is about laws and punishment for those who do wrong. Jesus told governor Pilate, *"You would have no power over Me if it were not given to you from above."* (John 19:11) In the case of Pilate, we see that God's authority was misused. But even when officials fail to do their duty, God is successful in completing His plan to save us.

What does God expect the government to do? It is to show power so that people fear it. The innocent don't need to fear. But when people are breaking the law and get caught, there is fear about arrest, fines and punishment. God even gives the government authority to use the sword, to execute people in extreme cases, not just to stop the one breaking the law, but to put fear in others so they don't break the same law.

On the positive side, the government should defend law-abiding citizens. It should be making laws that create order, stability, and bring peace to people. One author wrote, "Government at its best promotes peace and safety so that Christians can do their work, raise their family, and build God's kingdom." (M. Henry) What a blessing to live in America where we can live our Christian lives without persecution and we freely proclaim our faith in Christ. While there are many countries that ban any outward confession or symbol of Christ, our church has a web-site where we share the truths of Christ. We openly are telling people in our community to bring their children to VBS to hear about the Savior. Each week we openly worship God without fear, while there are many countries in the world where Christians must meet in secret. How blessed to have the kind of government that we have!

Martin Luther wrote, "God wills that we honor the government as His servant, through which He gives valuable blessings on us.... If you knew that someone had saved your child's life you would be heartily thankful to him. Why are you not thankful to your government which daily protects you, your [spouse], and children from murder? If the government did not check the wicked people, when would we be safe? .... As you love your children, so you should love your country." (Treasury of Themes and Illustrations)

Throughout history we see how God used governments, no matter how wicked, to accomplish His purpose. God used the empire of Babylon to punish the idolatrous people of Judah, taking them into exile. Once in Babylon, some of the people repented and trusted the Lord. They prospered as good citizens under the rule of the Babylonians so that 70 years later they could return to the land of Israel as a strong people. Later, God had Caesar Augustus issue a decree for a census so that Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. God kept the young Jesus and His family safe from harm under the good government of Egypt. God later used the evil Roman government to stop pirating on land and sea so that missionaries like Paul could safely travel. God accomplished all this through governments.

**Second, how does God want us to respond?** *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.”* (v.1) Note that Paul wrote “everyone”, each Christian citizen is responsible to obey. To break the laws of the government is to rebel against God Himself. Some will ask what about when the government makes laws that oppose God’s will? There are times when a government protects the guilty and harms the innocent, like in the case of abortion. We should use every legal means and use every forum and vote to change a law that promotes evil. We should not purposely do evil to stop evil. The Bible states *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* (Romans 12:21) There will be times in the future, most likely with homosexuality, when we will have to take a stand, like the three men at Daniel’s time who would not worship the idol of a king. Moses parents did not obey the law to throw their baby boy into the Nile river to die. They kept Moses alive, following God’s command.

Daniel was forbidden to pray to anyone but the king. But he kept on praying to God, not just for himself, but for the king! We must also pray for our government. Paul tells us to pray for all in authority (1Timothy 2:1) We pray that God would give leaders wisdom to make laws based on natural law, sound reason, experience, and common sense! We realize that our officials are weak and sinful human beings who at times don’t come close to representing God as they should. We plead with God to forgive them for the evil they have done or allowed. At the same time we should thank God for those who faithfully serve on town councils, or as judges, governors, legislators, and for national leaders who stand up for what’s right. We thank God for the police and service men and women who are risking their lives for so that we might have peace and order in our country. We pray for their protection. And if we have the ability or patience to serve in the government, God help us to do so. Like Daniel of old, we can show what it means to live godly lives. We can raise the level of morals by our example. Yet, we know we cannot create heaven on earth.

**Third, what is our ultimate purpose in honoring our government?** Our first purpose is to show trust in our God who through Christ’s sacrifice made us His children. Since God worked everything out in the past, giving His Son to save us despite the wicked governments of the Jews and Romans, we can support our government trusting that God will accomplish His good purpose!

With peace and freedom in our land we can accomplish our goal of reaching people with the news of Christ. We don’t want to give Christianity a bad name or discredit Christ or His Word. Remember that one thief on the cross next to Jesus criticized Him. But, the other thief as he was punished by the government realized his sins against God. He confessed, *“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.”*(Luke 23:41) The law had done its work by his death sentence. That is when Christ assured him, *“You will be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:43)

So, as dual citizens, we will pray for God’s work to be accomplished through the government for peace and order and to stop evil from spreading. At the same time we will pray for and support the Gospel of Christ. Paul wrote, *“I urge... that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--for ...all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1Timothy 2:1-4)* God will accomplish His good purpose. Let us continue to be a part of it, by His grace in Christ, in this world and the next. Amen.