

How Happy are you?

"Rejoice in the lord always: and again I say rejoice." (Phil. 4:4)

Look at all of the blessing that Christians have. The material blessings are available for everyone and they are without number. We live in a country that is well blessed with material things, freedom, beauty of all kinds - and how long could the list be! Even the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, and the ground that we walk upon are blessing from God. In addition to these things Christians have the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God and fellow Christians, and the hope of an eternity in the presence of God. God has written to us about the assurance of His love, the blessedness of His hope, and the wonders of salvation. We can, by adhering to His word, bask in the sunshine of His love.

When we look around us and observe fellow Christians, what do we see and hear? There is murmuring and complaining. There is worry about mundane things and things that we cannot do anything about, and we complain about everything in sight.

We must learn to exercise our minds, and learn to separate the good from the evil. God says "rejoice" and we need to be learning how.

- by Tom Wheeler

God Comes First (Matthew 6:33)

Loving Him with our whole heart is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-37). We say it and sing it, but do we practice it? What do our calendars say? What about those Sundays when the kids have a ball game or when we are on vacation - does He come first those Sundays? What do our checkbooks say? Does He come first in finances or is He somewhere down the list, perhaps even beneath what we spend on recreation? What do our closets say? Do our wardrobes reflect godliness or worldliness? In the Apostle's words, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18).

- by Frank Himmel

Christians and Government

Let's face it — none of us agrees with the government about everything it does. We don't always appreciate what our leaders say or do. We may strongly disagree with some of their policies. And, if we're honest, we don't particularly enjoy paying taxes!

So, what should Christians do? The Bible gives us clear answers:

- We Are To Submit. Paul wrote: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Romans 13:1). Peter said: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13). That doesn't mean we must agree with everything the government does. It means we are to be law-abiding citizens and respect the authority God has allowed government to exercise.
- We Are To Pray. Paul also instructed Christians: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made... for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Notice that he didn't say to pray only for leaders we like. We should specifically pray that their decisions will allow us to "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:2).
- We Are To Pay Our Taxes. Jesus was asked about paying taxes to Caesar. His answer was simple: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Paul made the same point: "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due" (Romans 13:7). Nobody likes paying taxes. But our feelings about taxes don't change our responsibility to obey God's Word.

There is something we must keep in mind when reading these passages. The government in Paul's day was Rome. Rome was hardly a model government. It was cruel, immoral, oppressive,

and corrupt. Christians suffered greatly under its rule. And yet, the inspired writers still commanded Christians to submit to government, pray for those in authority, and pay their taxes.

We sometimes hear, "But our government is corrupt." So was Rome. "I don't agree with our leaders." The early Christians didn't agree with everything Caesar did either. "I don't like what my tax money is being used for." The first-century Christian didn't get to choose how Caesar spent the money.

The point is not that we must approve of everything our government does. We don't. We can disagree. We can vote. We can respectfully speak out. We can work for better government. But we cannot use our disagreement as an excuse to ignore God's commands.

We should be good citizens because God tells us to be good citizens. We should respect authority because God tells us to respect authority. We should pray for our leaders because God tells us to pray for them.

If the government crosses the line and commands us to disobey God, we must stand with the apostles: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Until that line is crossed, let's be the kind of citizens — and especially the kind of Christians — that God wants us to be.

- by Greg Gwin