

SESSION 3: STUDENT

DISTINGUISH YOURSELF AS *RULED* FROM YOURSELF AS “*RULER*”

OPENING

Trust not in rulers; they are but mortal;
Earth-born they are and soon decay.
Vain are their counsels at life's last portal,
When the dark grave engulfs its prey.
Since mortals can no help afford,
Place all your trust in Christ our Lord.
Alleluia, alleluia!

—“Praise the Almighty” (*LSB* 797:2)

INTRODUCTION

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” said our Lord, “and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). But who, exactly, is “Caesar” in the United States of America?

This country has never had a leader quite like a Roman emperor. Of course, we have government at federal, state, and local levels, with legislative, executive, and judicial powers separated. This overall apparatus is “Caesar” in a sense, and we Christians should duly submit to our government. Should our government require us to do something sinful, we as Christians are to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Nonetheless, the government is still to be recognized; we as citizens are “ruled” by it.

Yet in another sense, in the United States, citizens are also “rulers”—not individually, but corporately. Ours is a constitutional republic in which those who hold public office are sworn to submit to a governing authority higher than themselves. The body politic holds government officials accountable in several ways—one being when we cast our ballots during election years.

This lesson’s distinction simply would not apply to many nations. American citizens have the privilege of being “*ruler*” as well as *ruled*, and for that Christians can thank God. With privilege comes responsibility, though, on both sides of this distinction.

QUESTIONS

Q1. To whom does 1 Peter 2:13–14, 17 say Christians should be subject, and why? See also Proverbs 24:21 and John 19:11. Apply these passages to your role as a Christian citizen who is *ruled* by the government.

Q2. In the last session, we examined Romans 13:1: “There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” Those institutions Paul is referring to include not only monarchies and aristocracies but also republics such as ours. Here, in addition to *being ruled*, the people also *rule* through elected officials. However, from God’s Word we know better than to think of the people as the ultimate source of political power. We recognize that God has authorized our government. In countries like ours, He has entrusted power, so to speak, to people such as ourselves who are in positions to vote and exercise other legitimate forms of influence. It might be said, then, that we the people “commission” the government, but we do not *create* it. Why is this an important fact for Christians in America to keep in mind?

Q3. List the personal qualities you need as a Christian who is a “ruling” citizen, especially as you vote. See Proverbs 20:28; 25:2, 4–5; 29:4, 12, 14; Romans 12:19; Galatians 5:22–23.

Q4. The previous question was about *personal* qualities of a Christian voter. Now consider: as a Christian, what *outlook* do you bring as you vote and otherwise participate as a citizen? See Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:4; 1 Peter 2:11–12, 15–16, 19–20.

Q5. Both being *ruled* and “*rulers*,” Christians who are citizens of the United States consider religious liberty important. Why? How should we use our religious freedoms?

CONCLUSION

In 1965, a seminary professor who also held a political office wrote that a life of merely paying taxes, obeying laws, and keeping out of trouble really stands opposed to democracy as well as to Christianity. He explained, “Only in a totalitarian state can a man be satisfied with a negative view of citizenship which calls for obedience and nothing else.” Then, too, “A negative view of citizenship violates Christianity because Christianity calls men to a life that not only avoids evil but also is dedicated to doing good.”¹

“Rulers,” as well as ruled, we need to repent if we are not involved. Interestingly, we also need to repent when we *are* involved! This will be the subject of our final session.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, You have given us this good land as our heritage. Grant that we remember Your generosity and constantly do Your will. Bless our land with honest industry, truthful education, and an honorable way of life. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion, from pride and arrogance, and from every evil course of action. Grant that we, who came from many nations with many different languages, may become a united people. Support us in defending our liberties, and give those to whom we have entrusted the authority of government the spirit of wisdom, that there may be justice and peace in our land. When times are prosperous, may our hearts be thankful, and in troubled times do not let our trust in You fail; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

¹ Paul G. Elbrecht, *The Christian Encounters Politics and Government* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 68–69.