

# BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



## FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

***Religious Freedom and Separation of Church and State***  
Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7;  
1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-17

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

## Leaders' Responsibilities:

**Important:** Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.
2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)
3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

## Prior to this Coming Session:

### **Gathering Time Leader:**

### **Bible Study Leader:**

Prior to the study, prepare two sets of cards and a chart. Label the chart by writing "Christian" on one half and "Citizen" on the other half. On each card, indicate a specific responsibility we have as Christians and/or as citizens of our countries, e.g. voting, paying taxes, driving within the speed limit, loving your neighbour, giving a tithe,

©2001-2009, Eternal Interactive, LLC, All Rights Reserved. [www.homechurchonline.com](http://www.homechurchonline.com)

2

*Religious Freedom and Separation of Church and State – 05-14-08-en*

Unless otherwise noted, scripture taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. All rights reserved throughout the world. Used by permission of International Bible Society.

gathering for corporate worship. You can think of a few more to add. See the full explanation of the activity near the end of the *Teaching Plan*.

**Worship Time Leader:**

**Music Sources:**

“Create In Me a Clean Heart” #39 *Maranatha Praise* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.

“A Shield About Me” #23 *Maranatha Praise* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.

“Because He Lives” #20 *Maranatha Praise* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.

# 1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

**Gathering Time:** (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

## ***Religious Freedom and Separation of Church and State***

### **Focal Text**

Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Peter 2:13-17

### **Background Text**

Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Matthew 6:6-7,24; 16:26; 22:15-22; John 8:36; Acts 3:1-4:22; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Galatians 5:1,13; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:8-17; 4:12-19

### **Main Idea**

The church should not seek to use the state for its purposes. The state should not commandeer the church for political ends. The state should not favour one religion above another.

### **Question to Explore**

How do biblical teachings apply to our relationship to our government?

### **Teaching Aim**

To help the class identify ways biblical teachings on religious liberty and the separation of church and state relate to their government

### **Gathering together:**

Sing “**Create in Me a Clean Heart**” #39, *Maranatha Praise*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.

Read Psalm 51: 10-12.

### **First thoughts:**

**Leader:** Comment on the reality that as we consider our relationship as Christians to whatever government we live under we must allow for differing opinions on what is the correct solution to various issues. A clean heart and a steadfast spirit can guide us as we examine today Biblical teachings about our relationship to government.

Pray for consideration for one another’s views and discernment as we study God’s Word, today.

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

# 2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

**Note to the Bible Study Leader:** Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

## Teacher Preparation

### *Religious Freedom and Separation of Church and State*

#### **Focal Text**

Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Peter 2:13-17

#### **Background Text**

Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Matthew 6:6-7,24; 16:26; 22:15-22; John 8:36; Acts 3:1-4:22; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Galatians 5:1,13; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:8-17; 4:12-19

#### **Main Idea**

The church should not seek to use the state for its purposes. The state should not commandeer the church for political ends. The state should not favour one religion above another.

#### **Question to Explore**

How do biblical teachings apply to our relationship to our government?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To help the class identify ways biblical teachings on religious liberty and the separation of church and state relate to their government

#### **Introduction to your personal study:**

There is a story told about a man who was arrested for being a Christian. When the man was brought to trial, the judge looked at the evidence and pronounced his verdict. “You are found guilty of being a Christian!”– or, perhaps he pronounced – “You are found **not** guilty of being a Christian!”

As I sit writing this morning, I wonder what the verdict would be in my life and the lives of all those that read this writing. Would we be found ‘guilty’ of being a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ?

As you prepare to teach this lesson, examine your life to decide if there is enough evidence to find you guilty of being a Christian.

It is not the intention of this writer to place a guilt trip on anyone, but it is his intention that we all examine our lives and decide if we are facsimiles of Jesus! Or are we just window-dressings that never put Christ first when it really counts?

Some of us live in very restrictive situations while others live in more open situations; but the question still stands: “Is there enough evidence to convict you of being a Christian?” If your government interferes with religious liberties or make it illegal to follow Jesus, do people see enough of Christ in your life and the way you live to sense the difference between you and the non-Christians around you?

## **Background:**

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you as well.

As in all of these studies that focus on our beliefs, this one makes use of several important passages from God’s Word. We must be ever mindful and cautious to not depend on one particular text that may have been written for a specific group in time, place, culture, and situation. Rather, we must look as broadly as possible in the Bible to discover, through the leading of God’s Spirit, that which God wants us to learn and follow regarding freedom of religion and the separation of church and state – or any other beliefs that we hold. **It is too easy for us to see the teachings of the Bible through the eyes of our own dearly beloved nation and culture – instead of seeing our culture through the teachings of the Bible.**

And, we must carefully ascertain the context of the verses and situation in which the particular passage we are studying was written. The entire Bible is true and without error. But Paul also admonishes his young pastor friend, Timothy, to correctly handle the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

## **Focusing on the Meaning:**

### **Matthew 22:15-22 The Trap (Separation of church and state)**

In this passage we again see the Pharisees and Scribes trying to trap Jesus. They do not want to hear the truth and they are only in search of a contradiction, which they can use against him. This contradiction could either be against Caesar or against the beliefs of the church. Blasphemy would be the charge if Jesus sides with Caesar, and civil law would be broken if he rules against Caesar.

The Pharisees have joined forces with the Herodians. These two groups are usually in direct antagonism to each other. They have joined here in Jerusalem to trap Jesus by presenting a question about paying tribute to Caesar that seems impossible to answer. They had also joined before in Galilee to plot against Jesus' life. The Herodians represent a 'national group' against a foreign government. The coalition with the Pharisees would seem natural if they were against Caesar or any other new national group.

Regardless of the coalition mixture, they came to trap Jesus with what was thought to be an impossible question to answer.

In the preamble to the question, the phrasing used by the Pharisees is important; "Teacher", "man of integrity", "you teach the way of God" and "you aren't swayed by men". These men of tricks are baiting the trap. They have used a very common trick in an argument. They have stated the truth, thus trying to put a smoke screen up around what they truly want to say. These men did not believe what they said. The truth is: **1)** Yes, Jesus is a teacher of God's Word and plans. **2)** Yes, Jesus does not care what any man will say about him; he only desires to do God's work. The smoke screen involved trying to trick Jesus from seeing their true motives.

The question is posed. ***"Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"*** The answer to this question could be considered a corner stone to our religious freedom. Is the church subject to the government? Is the government subject to the church or are they independent of each other?

Jesus' teaching on this subject may seem clear to us, but we must not allow the line to become clouded. Remember the question was posed to trick Jesus and give the Pharisees an opportunity to bring charges against Jesus.

Jesus' response indicates that we have some responsibility to the government when he says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's". This responsibility is not carte blanche; there are some significant restrictions. You and I owe allegiance to God first. Nothing should come before our allegiance to God. Then, if it is our responsibility to do something towards the government, we owe our support to that government.

This passage does not clear up the question of the state's relationship to the church. It does indicate that there is a separation, but also some responsibility to the state.

### **Acts 5:27-29 The Truth Will Set You Free**

This passage will cause many that read it some difficulty. These verses draw another line in the sand for the Christian. It separates those who blindly follow the teachings of the church or religious bodies and those who follow the Lordship of God and Jesus.

Here again, the disciples ran into problems because they were teaching in the synagogue. Their message would have caused them problems with the Sanhedrin

wherever they might have taught it. They not only taught the truth of Jesus' death, but they also taught that to follow Jesus was to put others first and themselves last. This teaching would have been hard for the church leaders to follow.

The passage seems very clear. We as Christians do not follow man's teaching if it is against what God teaches. In other words, if the government requires us to do something contrary to what the Bible specifically teaches, we must resist. This passage demonstrates that we must give a clear gospel presentation when the opportunity is presented. As we share the gospel we may come into conflict with what others believe or teach, but we must be true to Jesus' teaching and share the gospel at all costs.

**SPECIAL NOTE TO YOU AS A TEACHER: The following "acrostic" offers you and your church a simple way to explain the way to salvation. We recommend that every youth and adult learn it and practice sharing it until it becomes a part of every Christian's life. Then, when God offers one of you the opportunity to share the Good News, you can do so – simply and with confidence. The "How To:" online booklet included in the website: [www.homechurchonline.com](http://www.homechurchonline.com) contains this aid to sharing the Gospel with others.**

The gospel message may very well bring us into conflict with others who do not profess that the steps to salvation are as simple as the ABC's. **A = Admit** you are a sinner. **B = Believe** that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins and rose again to give you eternal life. **C = Confess** Jesus as Lord and **Commit** to follow Him. There are no hoops to jump through or hills to climb. We must follow Him, and love others the way Jesus loved us first.

### **Romans 13:1-7 Obedience**

This text of Paul's consisting of only 144 words in the original transcript have troubled many readers. This is a very good instance of where we must understand the background of the writing before we can understand what is written.

In Paul's time the Jews had been forced to leave Rome in AD 49 by Claudius, the Roman emperor. But after his death in AD 54, his successor, Nero, had relaxed the order to banish the Jews. Many Jews had returned to Rome. At this time there was no official persecution of the Christians and what there was, came from the pagans and some Jews. When the Jews returned to Rome they may have had some resentment toward the Roman government. But it was important to have no further hostilities with the government. In this passage Paul gave instructions on how to relate to the government.

Paul did not set limits to our obedience or our justification for insurrection against the government. He simply said that like others, we must obey our rulers. We must trust God to deliver us from evil authorities that may at times be over us.

### **1 Timothy 2:1-3 The Intercessor**

For the Christian, prayer is the strongest tool. We are urged here to pray for all those in authority over us so that we can have order and good government. It was the practice in Judaism, up to the outbreak of the Jewish-Roman War (AD 66-70) to make sacrifices in the temple for the emperor. The Christians adopted the practice of praying for the leaders. This public prayer was done in the church. The reasons for the prayer were two fold: **1) “...that we may live peaceful and quiet lives....”** and **2) That we may please God.**

This is easy for one to say who has a fair form of government, but Paul said it and he was under ‘bloody’ Nero. It may be hard for you to understand this while living under a government that is oppressive. However, an oppressive government is better than no government at all. Do not discount what God is able to do even through ruthless governments. We can work hard to get our man or woman elected, but once the election has taken place it is our responsibility to lift that elected person up to God. We each have a responsibility to pray for our leaders regardless of their political persuasion.

The peaceful life was important because it gave stability and freedom, thus allowing the Christian faith to be spread. As Christians go about their worship they are to be praying for the salvation of their leaders because Christ desired no one to perish.

Prayer can save the sinner and change the direction of the government. Therefore, we must practice fervent prayer for the leaders.

### **1 Peter 2:13-17 Citizenship**

**vs. 13-14** In these verses the water truly hits the wheel. As I sit to write this material I am far from any persecution. My government does not censor what I write and I will not be put in jail for what I say. This passage is clear that even if all the above were not true I must exercise my citizenship. I have to be under authority of the government leaders.

**v. 15** Our lifestyle must be quiet so those who may want to speak against you can not. I find it interesting that people do watch you, even though you may not be aware of it. (Example: The neighbour keeps an eye on your home and notices when you have visitors.) It is God’s will that ignorance can be silenced by the good that you do. Christians must be about doing good at all times and at all costs. The motivation or the underlying reason for our action must be to help our fellow man, Christian or not.

**v. 16-17** I am free to do many different activities but there are some activities that I have chosen not to participate in. I must not use my freedom to be a cover up for evil. I have the freedom to break the law, but in doing so I can’t say that it is permissible to do evil because I am a Christian. I must accept responsibility for all my actions. Paul states it clearly; we are to be like a servant of God, doing God’s will.

Christians are called to respect all men because they were created in God's image. Christians must love fellow Christians and regard all men as those for whom Christ died.

It is interesting that we must reverence God and honour the king. The supreme authority is always God. We Christians must live like he is our Lord and Master. Paul lived in a difficult time, but he directed us to respect to the government regardless.

### **Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:**

The Bible teaching is clear that while Christians are under two sets of control, state and God, we must be citizens beyond reproach. We must try to follow the laws and live lives that show our respect of the government leaders. The separation of the church and state are imperative. Christians must step out and direct the government, not from under the disguise of the church but as citizens of the country. As Christians we must love our fellow Christian so there should be no disputes in the congregation that would allow disrespect to be cast on the believers. God is our supreme authority and we must always desire to live a life that follows his teaching and share the Gospel with all people.

### **For Personal Reflection:**

**What have I learned from this study?**

**What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

**What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

## **Bible Study Plan** (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

### ***Religious Freedom and Separation of Church and State***

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

**Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.**

#### **Focal Text**

Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Peter 2:13-17

#### **Background Text**

Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Matthew 6:6-7,24; 16:26; 22:15-22; John 8:36; Acts 3:1–4:22; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Galatians 5:1,13; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:8-17; 4:12-19

#### **Main Idea**

The church should not seek to use the state for its purposes. The state should not commandeer the church for political ends. The state should not favour one religion above another.

#### **Question to Explore**

How do biblical teachings apply to our relationship to our government?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To help the class identify ways biblical teachings on religious liberty and the separation of church and state relate to their government

#### **Connect with Life:**

On a large sheet of paper or whiteboard, with the help of the members, list the many different ways our lives are controlled by government.

Tell the group: “Please only state the ways. This is not the moment to attack the government for those controls. We only want a list to begin our lesson. We don’t want arguments between ourselves or bitter statements regarding the government.”

List the ways on the whiteboard, paper, or newsprint.

Underline any that might interfere with exercising our Christian responsibility.

### **Guide the Study:**

Ask a person to read Matthew 22:15-22.

Look for several opinions on this thought: “What do you think was the motive for the Pharisee’s using such flowery speech as they tried to trap Jesus?”

Then ask: “How does the way Jesus answered their question have implications for our lives today?”

Have another member read Acts 5:27-29.

Guide the group in discussing historic examples of times when Christians might not have followed the leadership of their government. Some members may be able to give more recent or personal examples.

Ask someone else to read Romans 13:1-7.

Share information about the background of this passage from your ***Teacher Preparation***.

Pose the question: “Are there ways that even an evil government could be used by God to perpetuate his kingdom?”

Request someone to read 1 Timothy 2:1-3.

Consider why it is necessary to pray for officials.

Lead the group to make a list of government officials in your area who are in need of prayer. **Spend some directed time in prayer for those on the list.**

(Prior to the study, prepare two sets of cards and a chart labelled ‘Christian’ on one half and ‘Citizen’ on the other half. On each card, indicate a specific responsibility we have as Christians and/or as citizens of our countries, e.g. voting, paying taxes, driving within the speed limit, loving your neighbour, giving a tithe, gathering for corporate worship).

Have someone read 1 Peter 2:13-17 from a newer translation of the scripture.

Pose this question: “What responsibilities do we have according to this scripture passage?”

Invite members to draw response cards from a bag and fill in the chart, discussing their choices as they do so.

### **Encourage Application:**

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to go away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Comment to the group: Let’s look at the same series of questions given in the youth application sheet. Let’s pretend for a moment and discuss the following as a group. Opinions are welcome. Differences of opinions are expected and welcome, as well. Please, no one argue, no one declare that they hold the only right answer.

What is the highest political office in our country?

What would you do if you were in that position?

What Christian beliefs would you understand to be essential for you to hold in office?

What are some of the difficulties you can imagine for Christian politicians in any country?

Ask someone to pray for God’s wisdom to rule our nation. And pray for Christians to be called by God to participate in government as much as possible, bringing Christian principles and wisdom to bear on the decisions needed to govern our people.

**Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time.** Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

# Youth!!! Take Ten

## Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

### ***Religious Freedom and Separation of Church and State***

**Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7;**

**1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-17**

**A youth will lead the following activity and comments.** No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

### **The Challenges of High Office**

What is the highest political office in your country? What would you do if you were in that position? What Christian beliefs would you understand to be essential for you to hold in office? What are some of the difficulties you can imagine for Christian politicians in any country?

# 3

Copy this section for the Worship Time leader.

## Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)

### ***Religious Freedom and Separation of Church and State***

**Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7;  
1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-17**

#### **Beginning the Service:**

Sing “**A Shield About Me**” #23, *Maranatha Praise*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.  
or “Footsteps of Jesus”

Read Psalm 28:7-9. (Ask a child or youth to read this passage. Ask them ahead of time if possible.)

Sing “**Because He Lives**” #20, *Maranatha Praise*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition or find the complete hymn in various hymnals.

#### **Offering:**

#### **Praying for the World:**

World disasters sometimes seem to come in “waves”, one after another until we think that a time of relative peace will never arrive. At times those disasters come literally in the form of tsunamis or earthquakes, fires, hurricanes, storms, and other conditions of our natural world. Other disasters are man-made. Hate, injustice, economic created poverty, etc. fuel war and other cruelties. Pray this week that God would subdue both kinds of disasters and that both kinds that do come would open doors for sharing the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, our Lord.

#### **Sharing Guide:**

**This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God’s call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.**

## Citizens of Two Kingdoms

An old song contains these words “This world is not my home; I’m just a passing through”. The words were written by people oppressed by slavery who understood that their life on earth might be difficult but they lived in anticipation of a better, happier time.

Nonetheless, while they lived on this earth they were subject to the laws of the country in which they lived. Where laws were seen as unjust, many fought and died to change those laws.

Moral developmental specialists are those who study the way in which moral decisions are made. Many see a growing understanding of moral development over a child’s growing up years. Very small children are guided by avoidance of punishment and reward for good behaviour. Although this is a normal stage for small children, it is an unhealthy way for adults to live their lives.

Growing children become aware of the benefits of receiving good things in exchange for doing good. Children may negotiate with their parents. They may clean their room, take out the garbage, and try to not quarrel with their siblings if or so that they will be able to play with a friend, go to a party, or watch TV.

Later, especially in teen years, behaviour is shaped by the expectations and approval of one’s peer group. Teens may actually make decisions which run counter to what they have been taught and what they actually believe in order to fit in with the group. Adults, too, are influenced by their peer group. Churches sometimes avoid hard decisions because they don’t wish to upset the harmony of the congregation by introducing issues on which they might not be in agreement.

The level of moral decision making which applies particularly to our study today is that of law and order. For any society to function there must be agreed upon laws which the majority of the society obeys. This is the reason for the admonition in Romans 13: 1-6. **“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established”** (v. 1). As we consider the many nations in which the ruling authorities commit atrocities against the citizens of that country, we are puzzled as to why the Romans chapter speaks so favourably about the established rule. Paul, too, lived under a government which persecuted many Christians and Jews. Slaves were treated as property – sold when needed or pampered when it was advantageous to the slave holder.

Surely, we ask, God did not mean for us to submit to unjust law and authority.

We need first to acknowledge that civilizations are built on agreed upon rules under which citizens live. We cannot individually decide what we will or will not do as we live in communities, provinces or nations. We understand today that even nations must submit from time to time to the intervention of the larger world community. “War crimes”

are tried and punished by a World Court. Many times those crimes have been committed by one group of people within a given country against another group.

Verse 5 of Romans 13 says **“Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.”** This verse moves us quickly from early moral development – fear of punishment to acknowledgement of law and beyond that to an understanding that we are able to guide our actions, with God’s aid, without those threats of punishment which law implies. We should do right because of an inner compulsion to live by the values of our Christian teaching.

From time to time, we will struggle with unjust laws or laws which reflect an understanding which differs from our understanding of Biblical truth. We must use all of the due process available to us to try to change those laws. We may write our elected representatives; we may even engage in the political process ourselves. If, in our zeal to change a law, we break a law—we must be willing to accept the consequences of having broken the law. There will, however, be those laws with which we do not agree, but must accept as the will of the society of which we are a part.

Ultimately, we are called upon to live **“peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness”** (1 Timothy 2:2). Our vision of right living goes beyond the law and order approach to a higher level of understanding guided by God’s word hidden in our hearts and written in our lives. No policeman should ever have to be on duty to keep the Christian in line.

All around the world today, Christians live under governments which are not sympathetic to the Christian way of life. We can live in anger at the government or we can do what we can to change things. Ultimately, we must live lives of holiness which so reflect the light of Christ that people are drawn to Him by our actions. It is not a time for retreat – removing ourselves from places of influence such as business and schools. But it is a time for living beyond man-made rules in the society in which we find ourselves.

Recently a friend of the writer of this Sharing Time watched from her office window as an angry crowd of 6,000 people filled the plaza in front of the presidential palace in her country. The people carried sticks and shouted and screamed for justice as they marched toward that seat of power which they felt had too long neglected their needs. This mother’s twenty-year-old son was days away from completing his obligatory two years of military service. But on this day he was standing guard immediately in front of the palace. Praying desperately for her son’s safety, the mother eventually made her way to the middle of the angry crowd searching for her son. Many hours later, she discovered that he had been attacked by the mob but not terribly injured and in the confusion of the afternoon had eventually made his way safely to their home. A few days later, discharged from the army, the two of them left the unresolved political issues of their home land to the safety of another country. From that safety, they pray for a peaceful resolution to complex issues.

Most issues facing governments are very complex. We see with limited vision only our point of view. Christians must pray for wisdom and discernment. We must also pray that we are aware that we live in two kingdoms and our heavenly kingdom awaits us at the end of this life. Paul in his letter to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 wrote ***“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”***

### **Call to Commitment:**

Like wealth, political stability is so uncertain that our hope must be in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Doing good and being generous as we trust in God equips us to live in the uncertain world of today and prepares for the life which is truly life which awaits us in the future.

Our study today might leave us with the impression that all we have discussed relates more to churches or Christian leaders than to you and me as individual Christians. Yet, like faith in Christ, we stand accountable before God as individual persons for our actions and attitudes regarding our governments. How does God expect us to act? Clearly the life of Christ provides the answer. We must act as Jesus acted. And we must commit to that example every day of our lives.

### **Concluding the Service:**

Let's make that commitment right now in prayer. Would everyone bow their heads with me as I pray:

**“Our Lord and our God, even now we commit our lives and our church to Your guidance. We pray that You will keep us from harm from unjust laws. But, even more, we pray for Your wisdom for our actions and our attitudes as we relate to our various governments. Make us patient, forgiving, and loving in all that we say, think, and do this week. We pray in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord. Amen.”**