

# CHRISTIAN AND CITIZEN OBLIGATION

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## **PREAMBLE**

CHRISTIANS: We ...*"are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light"*; (1 Peter 2:9 NKJV).

Our Citizenship is in Heaven;  
Philippians 3:20, Hebrew 12:23 &  
Ephesians 2:19

Christian possess  
dual citizenship

A Christian still belong to a native or naturalized member of a state or other political community, thus owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to protection from it. Example I am a Nigerian Citizen. Our beloved brother Paul was a Roman Citizen by birth. Acts 22:28-29. See also Acts 21:39.

Today we shall be looking at citizens' obligation {duty, commitment, responsibility, requirement etc..} to the State or government. One may be tempted to ask... *"Is it ever ok for Christians to disobey the law"*? Christians should always obey the law except those laws that are at variance with God's Law. People should obey the law. Social order is good, and our laws preserve the social order. If people only obeyed the laws they like, the result would be chaos, a state of extreme confusion and disorder. Let us look at the key drivers that necessitate us as Christians to always obey the law, in all cases.

## **God created Government; all authority is from God (Romans 13:1-7)**

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.

Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. >>>

*But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor". (Romans 13:1-7 NKJV)*

Christians show submission to God by submitting to authorities God created. The Christian understanding of government begins with recognizing where it came from. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 13 that, "there is no authority except from God." Every God-ordained social institution including the government, the church, and the family were created by God to serve different roles. Each has a unique purpose. One of the ways Christians show submission to God is by submitting to the authorities that God has created.

### **Christians should obey the law because God demands it. (1 Peter 2:13-15)**

"Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men"-- (1 Peter 2:13-15 NKJV)

God calls Christians to be obedient, faithful citizens, even in cases of bad leadership. Though it's a practical necessity for all people to obey the law, for Christians it is also part of our discipleship. The Apostle Peter instructs us in 1 Peter 2, to "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good."

These instructions to obey the law were written to Christians living in the Roman Empire under Nero, one of the most wicked rulers the world has ever seen. So, the duty to obey the law applies even when bad people are in authority. Nigeria is not exempted as we have had couple of wicked leaders as well.

### **Working within the law to challenge bad laws is not only acceptable for Christians, it may be an obligation**

Does that mean Christians have to obey any law, even if it's bad? Challenging a law is one way of submitting to it. Christians throughout history have refused to accept the status quo and worked within the law to change the law.

The Apostle Paul defended his personal legal rights as a Roman citizen. *"Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. **And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"** When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, **"Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."** Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes." The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." (Acts 22:23-28 NKJV).*

It was directly contrary to the Roman law, to bind and scourge a Roman citizen. This brings to bear the need for us to be knowledgeable of our fundamental rights as citizens of Nigeria. If Paul was ignorant of the law he could have been punished as a slave.

William Wilberforce worked to change the law and eliminate the injustice of slavery.

An obnoxious law was made in Nigeria recently – CAMA 20, (Companies and Allied Matters Act). A fine piece of legislation which enhances better business climate and promotes MSMEs, The Act provides a regulatory framework for how businesses should be carried out in the country. Sadly, a part of it tends to infringe on the right of the Churches in Nigeria. The impacted churches challenged the law in the court seeking proper interpretation of the Law and review of the infringed sections. **Using the law to challenge the law is not only acceptable for Christians, it may be an obligation.**

### **Is there ever a time when Christians must disobey the law?**

Christians cannot obey man's laws if it conflicts with God's law. Both scripture and church history are filled with evidence that the duty to obey man's law ends when it calls for disobedience to God's law. Sometimes Christians must disobey man's law in order to obey God. The same Apostle Peter who told the church to "Be subject to every human institution" was told by the political leaders of his day to stop telling people about Jesus. He did not comply.

As the book of Acts records, Peter proclaimed, "We must obey God rather than men" and he continued to do the things God commanded instead of man's instruction. .... *"Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:28-29 NKJV)*

Beside Peter, there are many examples in the Bible of those who upheld the commandments of God instead of the directives of Men. When Pharaoh commanded the Egyptian midwives to put newborn Hebrew baby boys to death, they refused and God approved of their disobedience (Exodus 1:17, 21) Jamieson-Fausset Brown commentary on Exodus 1:17 put it this way...."But the midwives feared God--Their faith inspired them with such courage as to risk their lives, by disobeying the mandate of a cruel tyrant; but it was blended with weakness, which made them shrink from speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth".

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship a golden statue and God rewarded their obedience by rescuing them from a furnace. (Daniel 3:13-27)

Queen Esther became a hero when she disobeyed the law by going to see King Ahasuerus without being invited in an effort to save the Jews from genocide (Esth. 4:16).

The prophet Daniel, likewise, disobeyed a law that prohibited him from praying to God. (Dan 6:10)

In the Fourth Century, one Saint Augustine explained that in some cases Christians must disobey the law because **"an unjust law is no law at all."** This is very correct as any law made by Man that conflicts with commandments of God is no law. While a speed limit of 50 km/h within towns on major highways rather than 100 km/h might be frustrating, there's no conflict with God's law. However, a law prohibiting worship or requiring abortions or requiring Same Sex marriage would conflict with God's law and therefore Christians would have a duty to disobey.

Jesus said to give to Caesar that which is Caesar's. We should do this gladly, but under no circumstances should we give to Caesar that which is God's.

***"Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? "Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:17-21 NKJV)***

**Faithful Christians are called to higher duties - Being good Citizens of our Nation and good examples to others as a source of light**

Good Christianity and Good Citizenship go hand in hand. To be a good Christian is to be also a good citizen of one's nation. Not necessarily does it imply the same the other way round: not always is the good citizen a good Christian. But a Good Christian is supposed to be also a Good Citizen. Let us always learn from this example demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ at Capernaum Temple.

“When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" Peter said to Him, "From strangers." **Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."** (Matthew 17:24-27 NKJV)

Matthew 17:24-27 gave me great insight on the meaning of blameless.

Albert Barnes NT Commentary on Verse 27; “Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them”, put it thus,” lest they should think that we despise the temple and its service, and thus provoke needless opposition, though we are not under obligation to pay it, yet it is best to pay it to them”.

William Barclay, on his critical explanation note on Jesus paying the tax of the Temple for himself and for Peter in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 17:24-27)- which by right he shouldn't pay because it is the house of God, the house of his Father (cf.Lk 2:49) – Shows that....

- i) We all are called to exercise that higher duty of not only doing our duties, but also going beyond our duties.
- ii) And in so doing will necessitate our not giving bad example to others in our families and communities to imitate.
- iii) Or not becoming a stumbling block for others in becoming good Christians and Good Citizens.

We all are called to do our duties and go beyond it to be not only good Christians and good Citizens of our nation, but also to be good examples to others that they may see our light and do the same.

## CONCLUSION

Though it is a practical necessity for all people to obey the law, for Christians it is also part of our discipleship. Christians should always obey the law except those laws that are at variance with God's Law. Using the law to challenge the law is not only acceptable for Christians, it may be an obligation. Our Citizen's obligation as children of God is to obey the legitimate law always and not being compelled to do so; do not only obey the law because a law enforcement officer is present or pay tax because the FIRS team is chasing you. **We are called not only to be faithful Christians but also to be good citizens of our Nation.**