

# These Things We Believe Study

## Mt. Zion Church Bible Study

Taken from

**A Remedy for Itching Ears** written by

Dr. Jesse T. Williams, Jr., Pastor

Convent Avenue Baptist Church

Harlem, New York

## Lesson 6: Civil Government and Social Justice



Lesson written by

**Dr. Ken Patterson, Pastor**

We Have a Vision to Be Intentionally Learning!

**Introduction:** The following lesson explores the concept that Christian life includes engaging in everyday matters of justice for all people. To accomplish this requirement, Christians possess spiritual gifts provided by the Holy Spirit. As Christians utilize the blessing of gifts and talents, opportunity arises to stand for those often marginalized. The purpose of protecting the weakest and most vulnerable must balance with God’s will and His expectations for righteous living. For example, no Christian would support stealing or armed robbery. However, Christians should support the humane treatment of criminals. By the end of this lesson, students will be able to identify their role as citizens of Heaven and Earth and how that looks in terms of behavior.



Scriptures for this lesson

Daniel 2: 21

Romans 13: 1-2

Proverbs 2: 11

Esther 3-6

## I. Dual Citizenship?

**Remixed Article XVI:** We believe that governmental officials on all levels are supposed to be servants who are appointed and affirmed by God to serve and maintain order in human society. God is sovereign over all government leaders, and Christians should pray for those who occupy political positions of leadership on all levels. Christians are both heavenly citizens and earthly citizens; and just as we are accountable for following God’s law, we should also respect the law of the land. If the law of the land is unjust, then we must work as agents of change and transformation empowered by God to change the law and the positions of governmental leaders as appropriate.

When we consider what it means to be citizens, it is in the context of our place within a governmental structure. We are to be governed by our local government, but we under the ultimate authority of God’s leadership.

Article 16 provides our belief statement that God places and uses leaders to further His plans. In Daniel 2: 21 we read that God is the one who deposes kings and raises others up. Romans 13: 1-2 also

---

*Christians should engage in their government. This includes holding leaders accountable for their actions and standing for the word of God when leaders do not treat people fairly.*

---

identifies that “no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”

All leaders, whether we consider them good or bad are under the authority of God. Even when there are leaders who do not lead correctly, we must know that God can use them for His purpose. He is still in charge!

Scripture illuminates this idea in Proverbs 2: 11:

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

Beyonce’ said girls run the world. In reality it has been and always will be God who runs not only the world, but the entirety of existence!

Christians have a right and responsibility to engage in the activities of our government at the most basic level, which includes holding our leaders accountable, voting, paying attention to how leaders provide for all citizens, and questioning leaders when they are making ungodly choices.

**Discuss with the group the importance of Christians participating in civic activities.**

- Why should we be aware of what is happening in our government?
- How does awareness of your government’s actions allow you to fulfill God’s work?

You have learned that Christians are to be in the world and not of the world. To be in the world means we have jobs and families and live in houses, etc. We are people with a calling to use our lives to help others. In many ways, when we participate in government we have the ability to work for Jesus. This does not mean you must run for office. It means you watch what officials do and speak up when wrong occurs.

As we participate in government we give voice to “thus says the Lord” and we are able to set the example for how people are to be treated.

In one of Jesus’ most scathing rebukes recorded in Matthew 23: 23, He says:

<sup>23</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

If Jesus paid attention to how the leaders behaved towards the most vulnerable of our society, we too should show concern and ensure that we utilize Godly approaches to help people.

What are some ways you can engage in your local government or local area to help those who may not have a voice?



Action	Impact

## II. How God Utilizes Leaders!

One must consider ways in which God utilizes leaders for His purpose. In light of God’s ultimate design to bring mankind back into relationship with Him, one can see an example of this in King Cyrus who reigned during the time of Ezra. Readers will note that King Cyrus was not a follower of God, but God moved on

his heart to allow those in Babylonian captivity (Nebuchadnezzar's time) to return to their Jerusalem and begin the process of rebuilding the temple. Positive King who was sympathetic to the needs of God's people even though he did not follow God. Likewise, Nehemiah, a few years later receives permission from Artaxerxes to go back and rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. God used the Persian kings even though they did not submit themselves as followers of God.

An example of God using an evil leader for His means is found in Exodus 1. In Exodus 1: 8 a new Pharaoh comes to power and oppresses (enslaves) the people of God. (Bad leader who does not follow God and treats God's people poorly) He and the leaders after him oppress God's people for over 400 years. Sounds bad right? But a closer analysis of the situation brings us back to the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 15: 13.

Notice the promise:

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD said to him [Abraham], "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. <sup>14</sup> But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup> In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

We see that God used Pharaoh to accomplish His plan. Exodus 12: 35-36 and Joshua 10: 5, and 42 indicate that the promise God made to Abraham was fulfilled but it began with a cruel and ungodly leader.

### **Exodus 12: 35-36**

<sup>35</sup> The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. <sup>36</sup> The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

### **Joshua 10: 5, 42**

<sup>5</sup> Then the five kings of the Amorites—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon—joined forces. They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it.

<sup>42</sup> All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.

Activity: Use Genesis 15: 13-16 to complete the chart. Then discuss with the group your results!

How does God use Pharaoh?	To what end?

We must remember God is in control of everything! Therefore, our purpose is to examine the signs of the times to trace God’s work. Too often we miss what God is doing because we are too close to the situation. Our prayer time should include a request for God to reveal His handiwork. This will allow us to understand more closely the power he wields over all creation.

### III. Civil Disobedience Means?

Civil Disobedience has been taken out of context in current times. It has been used as a tool to manipulate people for the benefit of small groups of people. Often, there has been a lack of *civility* on both sides of an issue which is by definition not what God supports.

Historical figures such as Socrates, Henry David Thoreau, Ghandi, or Dr. King, Jr. advocated for civil disobedience. Their suggestion was of non-violent responses to unjust and unreasonable laws. For example, Thoreau opposed President James K. Polk’s policy of returning runaway slaves to their masters and the Mexican American War. His non-violent response was to write the now famous essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* and to not pay his taxes. The result was he was jailed, but he brought attention to the issues of the unjust policies of the day. Likewise, Dr. King, Jr. realized that in order to change unjust laws, utilizing the legal system and highlighting wrong through peaceful protest provided the means to change for African Americans (and all minorities).

The legislation which came from these acts cost some their lives and caused others to be at odds with their government.

Guess what? Jesus participated in acts of civil disobedience. He opposed the behaviors of the Jewish leaders (Pharisees and others). He spoke out against their mistreatment of people who they claimed they were leading to God. He criticized the abuses of the tax collecting system. He confronted the manipulative teachings of God’s word that led to benefit of some rather than righteousness for all!

Following Jesus’ example, we can learn how to engage with our leaders from a Godly viewpoint rather than our own opinions or preferences.

- What issues do you see today that could be highlighted and potentially changed if the people of God gathered and spoke to powers?
- What vision does your church have for serving people? This may be the area where you want to begin.

### Closing Activity

Read Esther 4: 1-16. Write the meaning of verses 8, 11, and 13-16. How does this issue align with Article XVI (16) ?


This aligns with today’s lesson by:


Closing Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for being the ultimate leader and letting us know that we have a responsibility to stand for you when we see wrong. In Jesus’ name, amen.