

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."

1 Timothy 2:1-2 (ESV)



## Marietta church of Christ

8150 Driggers St.  
Jacksonville, FL 32220

### Times of Worship

Sunday:

9 am - Bible Classes / 10 am - Worship / 5 pm - Worship

Wednesday:

7 pm - Bible Study/Worship

Evangelist: Devin Barber

[www.mariettacoc.com](http://www.mariettacoc.com)



### The Christian and Civil Government

When we study the Bible it is important to realize that the way people conceived of things in ancient times is not always the way that we conceive of things today. For example, we make a sharp distinction between a person's religious life and his civic life, between spiritual duties and secular duties. But the ancients did not separate these concepts. As we consider what God's word teaches about a Christian's responsibility to civil government, we will improve our understanding if we consider the Biblical teaching within the context of the ancient perspective.

The term *religion* suggests to our minds something more than what ancient worshipers envisioned and it omits something that they saw as essential. We commonly define religion as "a system of belief," implying that a person who practices a religion does so because he has chosen a particular system of doctrines and way of life. The ancients had no such word or concept. Not only was there no "separation of church and state," but the distinction itself would have been meaningless to the ancient mind. A Greek man living at Delphi paid homage to the god Apollo whether he believed in Apollo's real existence or not (and many philosophically-minded Greeks and Romans did not believe in the gods). In the ancient world it was a person's nationality that determined what gods he worshiped and how the rituals were conducted. Religion, culture and politics were all one and the same.

The above facts help us to appreciate how innovative the gospel of Christ was as it spread throughout the 1st Century world. The gospel called upon individuals in every society to believe in one true God and to implement a form of worship and ethical way of life that God revealed. The teaching of Jesus did not impose a particular culture upon the nations of the world; it was something that a person could practice in any society, within any culture. Though Christianity denounced all false gods, erroneous doctrines and immoral lifestyles, it did not seek to reorder societies as such. It sought to reform the thinking and behavior of individual people. Centuries earlier, Alexander the Great and the Grecian Empire Hellenized the world by building gymnasiums, athletic arenas and other institutions of Greek culture in the lands they conquered. But Jesus Christ conquered the hearts of individuals, capturing one conscience at a time. Rather than restructuring social institutions, Jesus commanded people to live within their respective societies in a way that reflected the moral and spiritual principles of God.

The gospel of Christ did not change a person's earthly citizenship. It neither created, nor negated social responsibility. Peter was a Jew before he became a Christian, and he remained one afterward. Paul was a Jew as well as a Roman citizen before and after he obeyed the gospel. The baptism of Sergius Paulus did not require him to step down as proconsul of Cyprus ([Acts 13:12](#)), nor did a soldier's conversion mean that he had to cease his military service on behalf of the government ([Luke 3:14](#); [Acts 10:1, 16:27-33](#)). What the gospel did require was that every disciple carry out his social duties in accordance with Jesus' teaching, thereby acting as lights in the world ([Mt. 5:14-16](#)).

The gospel also taught that, in addition to one's earthly citizenship, every Christian was a citizen of the heavenly kingdom, the spiritual community of God. This, again, was a novel concept. A Christian served a God who was not one of the traditional deities of his nation's history and he engaged in worship acts that had nothing to do with civil allegiance. Thus, Christianity presented a unique distinction between one's relationship to Deity and one's relationship to society – a difference between religion and culture.

The gospel of Jesus Christ demarcates two distinctive realms of responsibility, one religious and one social. On one level, Christians are to be an active part of their society. But on a higher plane, spiritually and morally, we are to not to be of this world ([John 17:14](#)). Ultimately, we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, and we anticipate the future return of our Lord – a time of the dissolution of all human societies and governments, and the sole continuation of the perfected, eternal kingdom of God.

Written by; Marty Pickup

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