

I read two articles recently that got me thinking—one in Friends Journal¹, the other in Seattle Times²
Robin Rohr in Friends Journal talked about how we think we are separate...

She talked about America's sin—she didn't call it that, those are my words
When 9/11 happened, people were shocked and angry that it could happen here in the US
While much of the world lives with the reality of such acts of violence—we don't
We think the US is above that—it only happens over there—not here—we're separate
Or my neighborhood is safe—I wouldn't live in *that* neighborhood
We expect—even demand—that we can be kept safe and are upset at any failure to do so
With every failure, laws are written and lawsuits enforce that it won't happen again
We even expect that with our health—demanding that the health system keep me healthy
It's what gives rise to racism—we think we aren't like that, we aren't racist
Yet our white privilege holds us separate and above the pain of racism
Even in Scripture, we see this idea of being separate
The Israelites feel like a special and separate people—set apart as the people of God
Scripture was clear that it is their responsibility to care for the foreigners among them
'...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Matthew 25:40 NRSV
She goes on to say that we're all one story—one human story
As one story—we must see ourselves as connected—living the human experience together

As Americans we need to confess our sin of separateness—hubris that we are above others, special
At our best, we do that well and we do see ourselves connected
Immediately after 9/11 people drew together in support
Today with Standing Rock, many have gathered to share in the protest

On one hand we do know this well, but another article brought out how separate we still remain
On the Seattle Times Opinion Page, David Brooks said, "You can be a taxpayer or you can be a citizen."
As a taxpayer—your primary identity is as an individual looking after self-interests
It is normal for us to figure out how to pay as little tax as possible
But we live in a web of "giving and getting"—you give to your job, your employer gives to you
You give to your neighborhood, your neighborhood gives to you
You give to your government and your government gives to you
If we focus on the individual self-interest, we negate this web of giving and receiving
We can't trust our neighbors, employers, or governments to do right by us
Anything that isn't prohibited is permissible and we are suspicious and defensive
We no longer think of ourselves as citizens in the sense of being part of something larger
And infinitely more important to which we have serious responsibilities
We do still think of ourselves as citizens in the sense of being beneficiaries
Focus on our rights, the nation's responsibility to me, and my share of the American pie
Rather citizenship calls us to be grateful for our shared connection and all that we do together
We all pull together and do our fair share to serve the common good
We don't take advantage of every loophole
Feeling a special privilege, the wealthy know it won't hurt to pay their fair share in taxes

¹ Robin Rohr, *We Think We're Separate*, Friends Journal, October 1, 2016, <http://www.friendsjournal.org/we-think-were-separate/>

² David Brooks, *Trump, taxes and citizenship*, Seattle Times, October 5, 2016, Reprint from the New York Times, October 4, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/04/opinion/trump-taxes-and-citizenship.html?_r=0

That's also why you pay taxes—so that an orderly way of life can be maintained. Fulfill your obligations as a citizen. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders. Romans 13:6-7 MSG

If we set as bedrock our human connection, our shared story, and our citizenship of a greater whole
We will open ourselves to a better way of living—not only for ourselves, but for all people
We pay taxes with gratitude, rather than frustration
We respond to difficulty with compassion and working together, rather than demands
We lay down “my rights” for the good of the whole
 For one thing, “my rights” is nowhere to be found in scripture!
We work for the good of everyone, knowing that when all are treated fairly, we all benefit
 Meaning good education for all, adequate incomes for all, healthcare for all
We stand together and “have each other’s back”

While we are citizens of the Kingdom of God—we live in a particular time and place on earth
We are also citizens of this world and we must not see ourselves as above it or separate
We must take our full place as citizens, working together for the good of all

Romans 12:9-13:10 from The Message Bible

Notice the context—I’m intentionally reading the “before and after” passages
Notice that the comments about citizenship are bookended by comments about love
 We need to see the citizen part in light of the comments on love
Also remember that chapters, paragraphs, sections, headings, etc. are a recent addition

Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. Insofar as there is peace and order, it's God's order. So live responsibly as a citizen. If you're irresponsible to the state, then you're irresponsible with God, and God will hold you responsible. Duly constituted authorities are only a threat if you're trying to get by with something. Decent citizens should have nothing to fear.

Do you want to be on good terms with the government? Be a responsible citizen and you'll get on just fine, the government working to your advantage. But if you're breaking the rules right and left, watch out. The police aren't there just to be admired in their uniforms. God also has an interest in keeping order, and he uses them to do it.

That's why you must live responsibly--not just to avoid punishment but also because it's the right way to live. That's also why you pay taxes--so that an orderly way of life can be maintained. Fulfill your obligations as a citizen. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders.

Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along. The law code--don't sleep with another person's

spouse, don't take someone's life, don't take what isn't yours, don't always be wanting what you don't have, and any other "don't" you can think of--finally adds up to this: Love other people as well as you do yourself. You can't go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love.

Romans 12:9-13:10 MSG