

The Christian's Duty To Government

"I exhort therefore, first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high places, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God ..." (1 Tim. 2:1-4a).

The issue of church and state has been around for a long while. The strong feelings against mixing state and religion together arises from several sources. Catholicism's holding sway over much of the western world for centuries in years past, the combination of which brought much evil to men: the threat the Muslim religion poses to the world because of its entrenchment in the governments of the Middle East, Far East and African nations is the grave concern of our present time. These illustrate the threat to peace and safety when church and state are combined. Our Lord never intended nor condoned the combination of the two. Pilate's concern of Christ's claim to be king was mollified when Jesus answered his question, *"Art thou a king, then?"* by saying, *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (Jn. 18:36). Yet, Christians have responsibility to their governments, no matter where they live. Our Lord and His apostles have instructed us of a threefold duty we have to our country.

First, Christians are obligated to obey the laws of the land where they live. Paul wrote brethren in the capital city of the Roman Empire: *"Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God and the powers that be are ordained of God"* (Rom. 13:1) The apostle warned, *"Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinances of God, and they that withstand shall receive to themselves just punishment"* (Rom. 13:2). In his letter to Titus, Paul wrote, *"Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work ..." (Titus 3:1).* These instructions were echoed by Peter when he said, *"Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as sent by him ..." (1 Pet. 2:13-14a).* However, neither Paul nor Peter meant that no matter the instructions our government gives, we must obey. Their clear examples show that when government sought to bind Christians to things contrary to God's law, God's law is supreme. Jewish rulers commanded the apostles to speak no more in the name of Christ and they responded, *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to harken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye. We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."* Later Peter said, *"We must obey God rather than men"* (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

The second duty Christ have to government is to pay taxes. The rulers told Pilate Jesus had forbade "*to give tribute to Caesar*": a blatant lie for Jesus had said, when questioned about this issue, "*Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's and unto God, the things which are God's*" (Lk. 22:3; Mt. 22:16-22). No doubt there are things our government spends our tax dollars on which are contrary to Gods' laws (just as the Roman government of Jesus' day did), but government is God's minister to protect the innocent and punish the offender and Christians cannot evade our obligations to pay tribute to them.

Finally, Christians have a duty to pray for rulers. The apostle uses the terms supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgiving all of which are to be made for kings and all that are in high places. The end is that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. Our lawmakers, our President, and all national and state authorities need our prayers. Prayers for them to have wisdom and determination to rule in such a way that Christians may live a life unobstructed by government in the practice and exercise of their faith. Was there ever a time when our nation's rulers needed God's help and blessing more than our present age? I think not.

While Paul specifically mentions rulers and men in authority as needing and deserving our prayers, he made it clear that we are to pray for all men. "*The fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much in its working*" (James 5:16). Let us not be remiss in fulfilling this third duty each of us have toward government, for dangers in both our freedom of religion and national liberty are real. Pray without ceasing!

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