



The Reflector

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Our Responsibility to Our Government

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Conscientious Christians are in a quandary about what to do with a government that is increasingly becoming out of touch with the traditional values upon which America was founded. Many are wondering, what they can do to change the trend away from “Judeo-Christian values” toward humanism. They are also wondering if they should honor such a government by submitting and paying taxes to it. They, like Lot, “vex their souls” as they observe the government sanctioned and, all too often, government promoted immorality. Many of them work hard to bring about a change for the better through the election process, only to have their hopes dashed by defeat. All too often, even if the ones they supported win the election, once they take office turn out to be no better or even worse than those who were in office. It seems that ethical and moral corruption is no respecter of political parties. So what is a Christian to do?

The first thing he needs to do is remember that his generation is not the first to have to wrestle with this problem. In fact, every generation of Christians from the very beginning have faced this problem. The first Christians lived under one of the more immoral and oppressive government imaginable – the Roman empire. The immorality of the Caesars would shock the sensibilities of anyone with a sense of decency about him. Their antagonism from time to time against Christians, is one of the more documented facts of history. Yet, it was to those first century Christians, that the Lord’s words and apostles writings were addressed concerning their responsibility

to civil government. We have those words recorded in the New Testament and they apply to us today as much as they did to them. The fact that our government officials leave a lot to be desired in their personal and public lives does not relieve us of our responsibility to follow the instructions concerning governments left to us in the pages of holy writ.

Firstly, we are taught to recognize that civil powers are *ordained* of God. Not just certain civil powers, but all. “The powers that be are ordained of God.” (Romans 13: 1-2).

Secondly, we are taught that they are the *servants* of God. (Romans 13: 4). As servants of God, they are serving under the “King of kings and Lord of lords.” This phrase was applied to the heads of some of the great ancient empires in the Old Testament. It was applied to the King of Babylon and the King of Persia (Ezra 7: 12; Daniel 2:37, 38). The idea was that these great rulers had dominion over other rulers in their vast empires. Similar language was applied to God, depicting His dominion over all the kings and nations of the earth. (Psalm 22: 28; Daniel 2: 21; 4:17, 25-32; 5: 21).

Civil rulers serve as God’s avengers upon the earth. The Christian must not avenge himself. He must leave that to God. (Romans 12; 19- 21). God’s ultimate vengeance will be played out at the great Judgment Day. But in the meantime, he has an avenger that will execute God’s temporal judgment upon evildoers. That avenger is civil power (Romans 13: 4). So it is not the business of the

Christian to “get even” nor to take the law into his own hands. But instead, he should do good to those that despitefully uses him and turn it over to God to take vengeance. That He will do either through the civil powers, or defer it until He comes again to judge the world. Even ungodly governments are servants of God in that they serve His purposes as punishers of all evildoers, even though they themselves may be evildoers. Assyria was a good example of this principle. Assyria was a brutal power, but it became God’s servant to punish ungodly Israel (Isaiah 10: 5-7). Likewise Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was an evil and ruthless despot, but God called him “my servant” as the one chosen to punish Judah for her apostasy (Jeremiah 25: 9; 27: 6).

Thirdly, we are to conscientiously obey their laws (Romans 13: 5; 1 Peter 2: 13-17). Paul makes it clear that obeying their laws is tantamount to obeying God’s ordinance (Romans 13: 2). There is only one revealed

exception – that is when civil laws contradict God’s other laws (Acts 5: 29).

Fourthly, we are to pay all taxes, customs, etc., due to the governments under which we live. (Romans 13: 7; Matthew 22: 21).

Fifthly, we are pray for them (1 Timothy 2: 1, 2).

Sixthly, we may exercise *rights* given by the them. Paul did not hesitate to exercise, and at times to demand his right to protection as a Roman citizen. (Acts 16: 27, 38; 25: 11).

As bad as government seems to be sometimes even bad government is better than no government. As frustrating as all the evils we see in the governments of this world can be, we as Christians cannot allow ourselves to refuse or to neglect a sacred command to “honor the king” (1 Peter 2: 21) – even if that “king” is not the one we would have chosen.

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Welcome, Mr. President

Kent Heaton

Election Day has passed and the nation has elected a new president. Every four years our country is subjected to the grueling process of selecting a candidate to fill the job of President. He now takes the reign of leadership for this country. A great deal of people will be disappointed in the selection; more will be pleased. Save the coming of the Lord the sun will rise upon a new day and life will go on. Life is funny that way. When the year 2000 herald the coming of a new millennium people thought the world was going to come to an end. During this political year many believed that with the election of the president the country would disintegrate into a whirlpool of chaos. Life goes on.

After the flood the Lord proclaimed, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). The circle of life goes on regardless of the political, economic or social upheavals of our time. This

election will change the country as much as any election. At the days end man still has the same needs. The view one has of the President, his view of himself and his view of God will determine what life will be like.

Peter commanded through the Holy Spirit to “fear God and honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17). Rome did not have elections like we do so the king under consideration (probably Nero) was not the most wholesome person to have in power. However because governmental authority is established by God (Romans 13) then we have an obligation to be subject to the king; or President as in our case. The wise man wrote, “Fear the Lord and the king” (Proverbs 24:21).

Peter wrote in the context the manner of life of the Christian should be a model for others to follow. “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they

“speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. 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—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God” (1 Peter 2:11-16).

Whether we like the one elected President or not we are to be subject to them. People of God do not revile and bring accusation against those in authority (2 Peter 2:10,11; Romans 13:1-7). “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 13:7). Jesus taught the same lesson in Matthew 22:21.

The election of a President does not change our obligation to serve the true and living God. Peter proclaimed this truth in Acts 5:29 – “We ought to obey God rather than men.” We are to offer up “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Timothy 2:1-3). This is what is important in life. Welcome, Mr. President. All our prayers are with you. God bless America.

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Serving Caesar and God

Christians are citizens of two different countries. One is earthly, and the other is heavenly Rom.13:1-7; Phil.3:20-21, and Christians need to recognize that God has assigned them responsibilities in both realms. Most of the time a Christian can fulfill his responsibilities to each without conflict. But there are times when submission to the earthly becomes distasteful because it benefits the wicked at the expense of the Christian. The Christian is then placed in a dilemma, knowing that obedience to earthly authorities will not make it easy to serve God. What should a Christian do in such circumstances?

I believe Jesus gives us the answer in Matt.22:15- 22. The Jews bitterly detested the fact they are under the domination of Rome and had to submit to their rule. They didn’t like it, but felt powerless to resist. So, they posed a question to Jesus whom they despised even more than Rome. “Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” v.17. They felt that either way Jesus answered it He would be in trouble. He will either seem to be an insurrectionist against Rome or will be seen by the oppressed Jews to be a Roman sympathizer.

Jesus took a coin with Caesar’s inscription and

pointed out to the people that while they were subject to Rome they were also subject to God. So, they were to render the taxes that were due Rome regardless of how they used the money. Paul, later in Rom.13:1-7, teaches Christians (then and now) they must respect and be obedient to whatever government they are under, and pay taxes even if it is used to persecute them. In fact he later tells Timothy (and us also) to pray for those in position of leadership regardless of who they are, or how they act 1.Tim.2:1-2. Even if we don’t agree with how the government acts we show our respect for God by being good citizens in our earthly country. We conduct ourselves as Christians on earth so we can show ourselves to also be good citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Remember, we are Christians whether the people around us are or not.

From Buckhorn (MS) Teacher, Tommy Thornhill, Editor

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Becoming “Official” Christians

Harold Carswell

Official: something or someone prescribed or recognized as authorized...

Last year I had the opportunity to talk to a group of young Christians. The question was asked how many of them believed they were sinners (condemned to eternal punishment) before they obeyed the gospel of Christ? I was surprised to find that only one of a group of about 15 answered “yes” to the question. I then proceeded to view some scriptures that told of our condition before we become Christians.

1. Romans 3:23; Romans 5:8-10 etc... After looking at passages from God’s word only two more would acknowledge that they had previously been sinners before obeying the gospel and was condemned to eternal punishment if they had not. I must tell you I was somewhat shocked to say the least. I must say that further examination and conversation did not convince them that they as well as all men are sinners and in desperate need of a saviour before they become Christians through obedience to the gospel of Christ.

As I thought and continue to think of this discussion, it becomes very apparent that something is seriously wrong when Christians don’t realize their need to be Christians before they become Christians! I would think that this sentiment would be shared by all of us as older Christians. I do not for one moment believe this situation is unique to just this group of teenagers but is common among a vast many others also. I wonder if these as well as so many others thought that when they were “baptized into Christ” they were simply “officially or publicly” making it known that they were Christians instead of making the decision to become Christians?

Many denominations believe and practice that baptism is simply an “outward show of an inward grace”. In other words one is actually saved before baptism and baptism is just a public showing of that already acquired salvation. I wonder if that mentally is present to whatever degree even among Christians? This may very well explain the above situation. The scripture very plainly teach that baptism is essential to salvation.

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.” **Mark 16:16**

It is however also essential that all those who are baptized understand what the Bible teaches about what baptism means relative to their condition before it occurs and what it means after it occurs. Baptism is but one step a person has to take in order to be saved and along with faith, repentance, and confessing Christ, all are equally essential to obtaining eternal life. The scriptures go on to teach that one must be faithful in order not to lose that salvation received (Romans 6:1-23; 2 Peter 1:4-10; 1 John 1:6-10). We become alive through Him. But notice that as we are told that we have been made alive, we are also told that we were dead (Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:10-13). We must accept all that the scriptures teach regarding becoming a Christians including what we were before that...

“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

The blame for this lack of understanding must be laid at our feet as parents, grandparents, etc. We spend so much time being “proud” that we fail to be honest. We spend so much time telling them all how “good” they are we fail to see that no one is so good as to warrant salvation (**Matthew 19:17**). We must not allow our children to be immersed simply because they want to serve on the Lord’s table, or because other young people have, or because they want to partake of the Lord’s Supper, etc... Their reasons must be just as Biblical as their response. They must obey the gospel because they are sinners and need salvation in order to go to heaven or to avoid hell. If they or you cannot admit that they are not becoming Christians but instead “church of Christ-ers”, which is denominational to its very core!

No one “officially” becomes a Christian; all who obey the gospel of Christ are made Christians by the kindness, mercy and forgiveness of God. All people are either, safe, saved, or lost and it must be determined by the word of God of course, what that condition is or they will be the latter.

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