

The
**CHRISTIAN'S
ATTITUDE**
Toward
GOVERNMENT

by
JOHN BLOORE

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The Christian's Attitude Toward Government

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IN considering this important subject, it may be well first of all to call attention to two lines of teaching which bear upon the Christian's relation, positionally and practically.

It must always be kept in mind what Christians are as believers in Christ in respect to position, calling, and destiny; this is all heavenly as to acceptance, relationship, and possessions.

The person who has believed the gospel of God concerning His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and was buried, and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15: 1-3), is saved, since in Christ there is redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Such a person is "accepted in the Beloved"—in Christ who is now at the right hand of God's throne in heaven (Eph. 1: 6, 7, 20; Heb. 1: 3; 8: 1; 9: 24; 10: 12; 1 Pet. 1: 18-20; 3: 18, 22). Thus the Christian's *acceptance* is heavenly.

The Christian's *relationship* as in Christ is also heavenly, since this is established with Him where He is now seated. Christians are called His "joint-heirs," and He calls them His "brethren": they are "partakers of the heavenly calling" and belong to "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Rom. 8: 17; Heb. 2: 11; 3: 1; 12: 22). Hence their "citizenship" or "commonwealth is in heaven from whence also we look for the Saviour,

the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20, R. V.). Christians have "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10, R.V.). When He so comes they will be "changed" to bear the image of the heavenly Man (1 Cor. 15:47-52; Phil. 3:21).

Again, as with this acceptance and relationship, so the Christian's abiding *possessions* are heavenly. His inheritance is "reserved in heaven" (1 Pet. 1:4); his hope is "laid up in heaven" where "Christ is seated on the right hand of God" (Col. 1:5; 3:1); it is there that he will have "the kingdom and glory" to which God has called him, and in expectation of which he rejoices (1 Thess. 2:12; Rom. 5:2; 8:17-19).

It is in the light of these precious truths that Peter calls Christians "strangers and pilgrims" (1 Pet. 2:11). Pilgrims are those who travel in a foreign country; they have their own to go to, but are not in it as yet; they are not aimless wanderers, they know their destination. The Christian is as a visitor in a foreign land, his home is in heaven. But he is equally a stranger, one without a fixed abiding-place or any special rights in the place of his sojourn; it is the status of an alien rather than a citizen. Thus the Lord affirms of Christians, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:16-20).

To this line of truth also belongs the *position* in which God views the Christian. He is one of that company of which it is said: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). This is that order of "new creation" which shall be fully

brought to pass when the change already spoken of is accomplished. But Christians are already of this order as subjects of God's workmanship in saving grace (Eph. 2: 4-10).

This gives us one line of truth in relation to the Christian. But we suggested that there were two, and the other has to do with our present condition as still living in this world; for though not of it as to our spiritual life and calling, we are *in* it and must of necessity engage in much that belongs to *this* creation. This also brings us into contact with the present system of things—the world-order of man's building. This necessity, however, is not to vitiate the Christian truth we have just reviewed, for that truth is to have its bearing upon the character, spirit, mind and action of the Christian in those necessary contacts in the world. As another has said:

“He who possesses life as risen with Christ (Col. 3) may pass through this world, and do many things that others do. He eats, works, suffers; but as to his life and its objects, he is not of this world, even as Christ was not of this world. Christ risen and ascended up on high is his life. He subdues his flesh, he mortifies it, for in point of fact he is down here, but he does not live in it [that is, as being governed by the lusts of the flesh which rule the world. Compare 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Peter 2: 11, 12.]”

Thus Peter beseeches Christians “as strangers and pilgrims to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Their supreme task is “to live so as to please God” (1 Thess. 4: 1), as it is said, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10: 31).

It is thus that the grace of God instructs us, "that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2: 11, 12).

Now this relates to our daily work, whether as servants or masters; our family relations growing out of God's ordinance for men and women—husband and wife, parents and children; and our place under and in relation to government. All of these, including human government, are of God's institution for mankind; they are recognized as continuing for the Christian, hence the Scriptures give instructions regarding them all. Furthermore, the Christian place as in Christ, of which we have previously spoken, does not abrogate any of them for us, or absolve us from filling out our measure of responsibility under God in each of these spheres of relation—daily work that we may live reputably (1 Thess. 4: 11, 12); human relations ordained of God (Eph., chaps. 5, 6; Col., chaps. 3, 4); and human government (Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Titus 3:1, 2, 8).

These things being so, it follows that we have a duty to perform and a responsibility to fulfill in relation to human government. Considering the scriptures mentioned, we may gather the following:

1. In Romans 13, human government is viewed as *God's* institution. It was established in Noah's day (Gen. 9: 5, 6). So then God has decreed government by man's hand.

2. In 1 Peter 2: 13, government is spoken of as *man's* institution. This brings in the *form* the decreed government may take. This is allowed of God to vary under the shaping hand of man, but even so the Christian will always remember that God "ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giv-

eth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" (Dan. 4: 17, 25).

3. In any case *subjection* is enjoined. Note the Christian's "well-doing" is in connection with this subjection (1 Pet. 2:15). He is to pay "tribute" because of the service rendered by the government. He is to render to all their dues—tribute, custom,* fear, honor. These are earthly responsibilities in which he is to act so as to honor God in all things, and give no occasion for an enemy of the truth to speak reproachfully. He is to "adorn the teaching of our Saviour God in all things" (Titus 2:10). As part of what this means, the apostle says, "Put them in mind to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient to rule, to be ready to do every good work, to speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, to be mild, showing all meekness to all men" (Titus 3: 1, 2). And in this connection also he says: "The word is faithful, and I desire that thou insist strenuously on these things, that they who have believed God may take care to pay diligent attention to good works. These things are good and profitable to men" (Titus 3: 8). This is part of the teaching of God which Christians are to adorn.

4. Now the office work of government is clearly stated for the Christian's guidance. His subjection is to be to that which the government does to carry out its responsibilities. Notice first that those authorities "that exist are set up by God" (Rom. 13: 1). Romans 13: 2 shows the seriousness of opposition to the authority. This is declared to be resistance to "the ordinance of God:

* The word for tribute refers to the annual tax upon persons and their property, that for custom refers to the toll levied on merchandise and travelers; the former is also applied to what a subject nation would pay to its overlord.

and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment." Rulers are not a terror to a good work, but to an evil one. Christians are to practise good that they may have their praise, for the authority established in their hand "is God's minister for good." It holds the sword in its hand as God's minister (vers. 3, 4). Submission is necessary on account of conscience, for Christians are God's servants (ver. 5 with 1 Pet. 2: 16). These rulers are called "God's officers" (Rom. 13: 6). Peter says they are "for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well." Our subjection in well-doing is "the will of God" for us (1 Pet. 2: 14, 15). It may be suggestive to remind ourselves that when these instructions were written the Roman Empire ruled (Nero), and several examples of its rulers are found in the history of the Acts.

5. In the light of those scriptures we have considered, it must be clear that the Christian's attitude toward government is to be one of *subjection* to such laws as it may make. The one limitation to that subjection would arise should human government require by its laws that the Christian deny the faith which he as such confesses. Then the Word of God must take precedence to the word of men. Such circumstances call for obedience to God rather than man. Then it is that the Christian must consider the rulers to have taken up rebellion against God who has set them up. To obey them in demands which require the faith to be denied, God to be blasphemed, idols to be worshipped, would be deliberate wickedness on the part of the Christian, who is told to "keep aloof from every form of evil" and "hold fast to the good" (1 Thess. 5: 21, 22). He is to hold fast the Word and not deny the name of Christ (2 Tim.

1:13). As worthy examples, think of the noble three in the day of the great Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:12-18), Daniel himself (chap. 6:10), of Peter and John in the Acts (chaps. 4:19; 5:29), and of martyrs unnumbered since Stephen's day (Acts 7). Under such conditions the Christian could only *refuse obedience*, while *submitting* to any form of punishment which might be decreed for such refusal. In this case the Christian is not to *resist evil*, but suffer for righteousness' sake and as a Christian, after the pattern of Christ Himself "who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed His cause to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). He taught "not to resist evil" (Matt. 5:39). In such circumstances the word to the Christian is, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4:19).

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In conclusion, it should be a matter of deep thankfulness to God that in this land we live under that form of government, the principles of which, more than many others, provide for such conditions of national life as most fully make possible the outworking of government in man's hand in accordance with God's thought of it as a present agency for good to mankind. Those principles are embodied in the great historic documents which form the foundation upon which the government of these United States is built. These principles sprang from the gradual and persistent spread of Christian influences by which many conditions have been ameliorated and many changes wrought for the benefit of mankind. It

is a fact that the government founded on these principles affords the greatest measure of opportunity, liberty, and protection for Christians to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness, carrying out their ambassadorship for Christ in living and preaching the gospel of God. For all of this we should be deeply thankful, despite the always present element of human frailty and imperfection in administration.

Today these principles of the Government under which we live according to the providential disposition of God, are being viciously attacked. An ideology which in its principles, organization, and operation is utterly destructive of such principles of ethical conduct, social relations, and humanitarian service as have grown up through the centuries out of the Christian concept of God and man, strives today to rule the world according to its anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and utterly pagan philosophy. This has given birth to the greatest and grimmest emergency in our history. In view of the character of this emergency, Christians cannot fail to feel the necessity laid upon them for whatever measure of service it is possible to render, as the Government may require by the laws made to meet the great need of the hour.

We may well mourn over the debasing effects of materialism, the policies of selfishness, and worst of all the widespread forgetfulness of God, which have so sadly marred the national life. When God is forgotten, as so largely in the counsels of the nations, and there is a general abandonment to the material, physical, sensual, and boastful confidence in the tangible resources of field and wood and mine, resources of God's giving, then there arises out of the baser elements

of human life such a spectacle of inhumanity, tyranny, enslavement, and murder as today stalks through the invaded nations and casts its shadow over the whole world. This departure from God, and ridiculing of His truth, with baseless confidence in mere human sufficiency and power became so general that God who still rules must let the nations learn the baneful results of such a course. Because America was not guiltless this juggernaut of paganism has reached its shores. The coins we handle every day bear the legend, "IN GOD WE TRUST." In what God?

We Christians cannot escape from our measure of responsibility for these conditions. We must feel, along with all others, the weight of God's mighty hand in corrective judgment. There is only one recourse: it is humiliation, confession, and intercession. This too must be part of our daily service to the nation (1 Tim. 2: 1-4). God must be sought after in brokenness of spirit and contrition, and His merciful intervention implored. But that intervention can only come when the rod of His righteous chastening has brought humiliation to the pride and unbelief that refused to give Him the rightful place.

Let every Christian heed the words of the great apostle of Christianity written to his son in the faith, Timothy:

"Exercise thyself unto piety; for bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but piety is profitable for everything, having promise of life, of the present one, and that to come. The word is faithful and worthy of all acceptance; for, for this we labor and suffer reproach, because we hope in a living God, who is preserver of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4: 8-10).