

The Attitude of the Christian Toward Civil Government

Introduction

At this writing there is much apparent reason for gloom and pessimism when we consider the state of our civil government. We can see almost no statesmanship being demonstrated. We are not ruled by statesmen, but by politicians. It has been well said that while a statesman bases his actions on what is best for the future, the politician bases his actions on what will cause him to be reelected. Elected officials today are much more interested in public opinion poll results than in what is right and decent. Open lying and immorality are tolerated in even the highest political office in our nation. When an elected official does try to do what is right he is often viciously attacked by the media and by the entertainment industry elite. There has been an almost complete abandonment of what used to be commonly accepted moral values which had their roots in our Judeo-Christian heritage. We are operating under the “post-modern” philosophy that there is no absolute right and wrong. The primary value today seems to be material prosperity. The only “sin” today seems to be in criticizing someone for doing wrong.

These things are reminiscent of what was said long ago in Isaiah 5:20-23 “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!”

All this is very disturbing, even frightening. A French visitor to our nation in the 1800’s, Alexis de Tocqueville, said that America was great, because America was good. He said that when we ceased to be good we would cease to be great. A great statesman once said that when a people ceased to govern themselves (by governing, he meant exercising self-control), they would be governed by tyrants.

Considering these sobering and ominous events, what should the attitude of a true Christian be?

Mourning

A very appropriate response would be to deeply **mourn**. It is not befitting for us to ignore the circumstances. However, this is exactly what people are tempted to do when faced with very unpleasant situations. I appreciate what Patrick Henry said in his *Call To Arms* in 1775: “It is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth...Are we disposed to be of the number of those, who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern our temporal salvation? For my part, whatever **anguish of spirit** it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst and provide for it.”

We must face the present condition of our land, and as we do we will be compelled to acknowledge our **deep sorrow**. Righteous people have always done this. Solomon said in Proverbs 29:2 “When the

righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people **mourn.**” David was so grieved when he saw the conduct of the ungodly that he said in Psalm 119: 136 “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.” He said further in Psalm 119:158 “I beheld the transgressors, and was **grieved**; because they kept not thy word.”

Sometimes, when a loved one dies, some people put off mourning for awhile. It takes them time to actually grasp the fact of the great loss. Sooner or later, however, for their own emotional health, they must acknowledge the crushing loss. They must face the unpleasant facts. Then they can give themselves to weeping and mourning. In doing so, they often experience healing and find great comfort and strength in God’s consolation. Have you yet grieved for the desperate situation of our nation? If not, I would suggest that you seek to do so. Pour out your grief before our great God. He is mindful of those who are broken hearted.

Not Our Real Home

Another thing that Christians must do is to realize that this earthly existence is not our permanent home. We must be good and loyal citizens, but our everlasting abode is not of this world. I love the United States. I am thankful to have been born here. I often get misty-eyed when I sing or hear played *God Bless America* and other patriotic songs. One of my favorite hobbies is to read American history. George Washington, Robert E. Lee, and other men and women of integrity who have helped shape our nation, are among my favorite heroes and heroines. However, this kind of patriotism can only go so far. Our nation has never been perfect. We have had a precipitous decline in our values and in our decency in recent years. No one knows what the future holds for our nation, but the signs are anything but encouraging.

However, this should not send us into dismay. We were not designed to live in the present condition forever. This is a very temporary mode of existence. The Bible believer knows that we are just traveling through this life to our permanent and glorious heavenly kingdom. This is very evident from several Scriptures. Speaking of Old Testament saints Hebrews 11:13 says “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were **strangers and pilgrims on the earth.**” It also says of these saints in Hebrews 11:16 “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly...” Peter admonishes the saints on this same basis in 1 Peter 2:11 “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as **strangers and pilgrims**, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul...”

It is well to insert here that there is a vast difference between a **pilgrim** and a **vagabond**. A pilgrim is away from home, but he has a goal, a destination. A vagabond, on the other hand, is an “aimless wanderer.” The Christian knows that he is not at home in this present state of affairs. However, he knows where he is going. He is heading toward his heavenly home. This gives him a great deal of hope when conditions become very difficult and unpleasant in his present situation. He knows that, sooner or later, he will be home and all will be well.

Even though our government is very corrupt and there is much cause for sadness, we must remember that the people of God have often lived in even worse situations. The Roman Empire was very corrupt in the times of the Apostle Paul. Some of our leaders are very corrupt, but they are not any more corrupt than was Nero, who eventually had Paul executed. Living under these conditions, however, did not dampen the zeal and enthusiasm that this great man had for the cause of Christ. Paul did not spend

his days in depression. He had great energy and joy as he preached the message of salvation. One of the reasons for this was because he knew that he was not really home. Now Paul was a Roman citizen. This was a great privilege which got him out of serious trouble on more than one occasion. I am sure that Paul valued his Roman citizenship. This meant nothing to him, however, in comparison to his heavenly citizenship. He wrote in Philippians 3:20 "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." The word translated "conversation" here is *politeuma* which means "citizenship." Yes, Paul's citizenship is in heaven. So is the permanent citizenship of every other child of God. The realization of this will help us to keep the proper perspective as our society likely plunges further and further into darkness.

God is in Control

Another thing that the child of God must constantly keep in mind is the fact that God has not relinquished the control of the universe which He created. We may not understand why He allows certain things to go on, but He has a purpose in it all. God is not disturbed like we sometimes are. There is a very interesting and comforting passage in Psalm 2:2-4, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." This Scripture teaches us that the Lord of heaven and earth is going to "have the last laugh."

God, for His own inscrutable but wise purposes, often allows wicked men to do some reprehensible things, but even then He is ultimately in control. The wise man made this very plain in Proverbs 21:1 when he said "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."

The universe of human affairs is not spinning out of control. It is just as true today as it was in the day that Nebuchadnezzar spoke it in Daniel 4:35, "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

God raised Pharaoh up and He destroyed him when it suited His purpose. Sennacherib made great and obscene boasts against Judah. He seemed to be invincible. He was defeated by an angel of God and had to return home in shame. His own sons slew him as he was worshipping his pagan god in Assyria. (See 2 Chronicles 32). Wicked Haman was determined to destroy God's chosen people. God so directed affairs that this evil man was hanged in his own yard on the gallows he had built for the purpose of murdering another man.

The Lord said in Proverbs 8:15 "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice." Yes, God is in control. Daniel said in Chapter 2, verse 21 of the book that bears his name "he removeth kings, and setteth up kings..."

Yes, we must remember that no matter how dark the situation may seem, our Omnipotent God is the Mighty King Who is really running this universe!

God Sometimes Uses the Wicked

Another comforting fact is that throughout history our sovereign Lord has sometimes used those who were not His children to do those things that benefited His people. One of the most dramatic examples of this is Cyrus, king of Persia. He always remained a pagan and never embraced the true religion of Jehovah, but he was used of God in a very interesting way on behalf of His people. The entire episode of the case of Cyrus greatly magnifies the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men. Speaking through Isaiah, God called Cyrus **by name** some 150 years before he was even born! (Isaiah 44:28). He predicted that Cyrus would rebuild the Temple, even though the Temple had not yet even been destroyed as Isaiah wrote! Reading 2 Chronicles 36:23 and Ezra 1: 1-4, we learn that Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem, and issued a decree authorizing the rebuilding of the Temple. What a mighty God that we serve. He even uses the wicked for His own purposes. Other pagans have been used by God for the good of His people. The Pharaoh who reigned when Joseph rose to prominence in Egypt permitted the children of Israel to live in the land of Goshen. God can still work like that today. We would prefer to have believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to rule over us, but God can and does direct the hearts of those who are not.

Strategic Positions of the Saints

Not only does God sometimes dispose pagans to help His people, He often places His own children in positions of influence. There are many examples of this in Scripture and in history. One of the most prominent is that of Joseph. Every Bible reader is familiar with the dramatic way in which Joseph was elevated to the second most important position in Egypt, which was the greatest political power on earth at that time. God's **omniscience**, particularly His **foreknowledge**, is gloriously seen here. Joseph was a member of an obscure tribal community located in Palestine, a far cry from the throne of Egypt. He was a young man of great integrity. The Lord required him to go through thirteen very hard years as He molded him for the job He wanted him to do. When Joseph finally came into a position of power he was in a unique position to help his people.

We must remember that this is not just a beautiful story. This is an actual historical account. God can still place some of His people in important positions from which they can assist His children. As the song has it: "He's just the same today. He's just the same today. The God who lived in the olden times is just the same today."

Another Old Testament saint who found himself in a unique position from whence he could help God's people was Nehemiah. He was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah received permission from the king to go to Jerusalem. He supervised the rebuilding of the city walls, even using timbers that were donated from the royal forests.

Still another Old Testament saint who was placed in a very vital position from whence she could help her people was Esther, who became Queen of Persia. When the Jews in the Persian Empire were threatened with extermination, Esther was able to save them.

Many more examples could be given from the Old Testament of God's children who were put in positions of power and influence in pagan governments. We will give one example of this from the New Testament. The Apostle Paul was under household arrest in Rome. He was incarcerated in a location very near the heart of government. He boldly preached the gospel and constantly witnessed to everyone he met. Evidently some very important people were converted to Christianity. When Paul was closing his letter to the church at Philippi, he said in Philippians 4:22 "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of **Caesar's household**." It does not take much imagination to realize that the servants of Caesar were in a very good position from which to assist the cause of Christ.

The Power of a Godly Life

Most, if not all of those who will be reading this are just average people. We are not in positions from which we can exert much influence. What can we do in these turbulent times? Well, the answer is that there is a lot that we can do that is **very important**. One of the most effective things that we can do is to live lives in obedience to the Word of God. As we do this we will inevitably have a good influence on the society about us. This is at least a part of what Jesus meant when He said in Matthew 5:16 to "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." We may not think we are doing much good, but people are always watching us. We will have a great influence by our consistent, day-after-day examples of personal godliness. In this way we can exercise as "the light of the world," and as the "salt of the earth."

However, as important as this influence on others is, much more importantly God is watching us! As is said in Proverbs 15:3 "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Does it make any difference what kinds of lives we live? We can learn the answer by observing Abraham talking with the Lord over the destiny of Sodom. Abraham pled with God to not destroy the righteous with the wicked. God very graciously allowed Abraham to discourse with Him and agreed to not destroy the city if as few as ten righteous were found there. Sadly not even that small number of righteous individuals were found, and God utterly destroyed the place.

I am convinced that one of the reasons the Lord has not already totally destroyed our nation is because He knows there are some righteous people here. Ironically, the wicked continually harass the righteous, not knowing that the averting of terrible judgment is owing to their existence here. I encourage each of you who read this to renew your commitment to walking with God in obedience. The very best way to be a good citizen is to be an obedient Christian.

Prayer

One of the most potent weapons in our spiritual arsenal is prayer. Prayer for civil government should be a very high priority for God's children. Paul instructed us in 1 Timothy 2:1-3 "I exhort therefore, that, **first of all**, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour..." We have no idea how important it is to pray for those who rule over us. There are some good men who are in high positions of government. They are under pressures that very few of us can even imagine. We live in a day when the media viciously and dishonestly assaults those public figures who make public stands for Biblical or even decent standards. These good men and women need our prayer support.

There are still a few good people left in office. I was thrilled to read the statement of a good man from a western state who recently made a very unpopular stand for what was right. His political enemies have vowed to make sure he loses his political office. I would like to give a few of his comments concerning this situation:

I wanted my little girls to know that when the roll was called their father served with colleagues who counted it a privilege to risk political fortunes in defense of the Constitution. Today, I am more resolute in that opinion. From the time I was a little boy, it was my dream to one day serve in the Congress of the United States. My dream was fulfilled two years ago...The pundits keep telling me that my stand on this issue puts my political fortunes in jeopardy. So be it.

That revelation produces from me no flinching. There is a simple reason why: I know that in life dreams come and dreams go. But conscience is forever. I can live with the concept of not serving in Congress. I cannot live with the idea of remaining in Congress at the expense of doing what I believe to be right.

There are good, decent men and women in government who covet and deserve our prayers. How diligent are you in regularly praying for them?

When we pray for those who rule over us we are engaging in **spiritual warfare**. There is a very vivid example of this in the Book of Daniel. God's people were in captivity. The prophesied time of their release was near at hand. Daniel understood this and began to pray. Gabriel, a high-ranking angel appeared and told him that the Lord had heard Daniel's prayers. There was some difficulty in the spirit world. The "prince of Persia" who was probably a demon, was doing everything he could to prevent the release of God's people from captivity. This demon prince was working on the mind of the king who held God's chosen people captive. There was a titanic struggle going on in the spirit world. Of course, right eventually prevailed and the captivity came to an end. The prayers of Daniel and others played a very important part in this great spiritual struggle.

Does this sound a little weird? Does it sound a little far fetched. If it does, get your Bible out and carefully read the ninth and tenth chapters of Daniel. I am convinced that if we could see into the spirit

world around our nation's capital, we would be amazed at what we saw. The Apostle Paul was speaking of things like this when he said in Ephesians 6:12 "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

I encourage each of you who read this to be more diligent in prayer for those who rule over us. This should be a high priority.

Conclusion

We must not despair. We must not be cynical. We must not be spiritually lazy. We must not "put our heads in the sand." We must do what we can and refuse to worry about what we can't do.

The stakes are high. The issues are great. Our whole way of life is changing before our eyes. What will the future hold for the nation in which our children and grandchildren must live? How long will we enjoy the religious liberty that we so much take for granted?

If we do lose our freedoms will we have a guilty conscience because we were spiritually lazy and did not do what we could while we still had the opportunity?