

THE CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR POWERS

Through the medium of highly developed means of communication and transportation, we are increasingly exposed to an ever growing incidence of crime, violence, and carnal conflict. Events in even the remotest places on earth are exposed almost immediately. What should be the response of Christians when called upon by civil authorities to take part in such unrest and turmoil?

Submission to Those in Authority

Disciples of Christ are instructed by Paul to "be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates" (Titus 3:1), and Peter endorses this in his writings:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men (1 Pet. 2:13-15).

It is clearly enjoined upon Christians to render obedience to those in secular power - but such obedience is to be restricted to those matters which do not conflict with other divine instructions. This was recognized by the apostles when they said to those who would oppose their mission,

Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard...We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19-20, 5:29).

In his writings (Rom. 13:1-7), Paul discusses the relationship of the Christian to those in secular power. He states that rulers are instruments in God's hand who serve His purpose in the protection of saints and the suppression of those who do evil. Although not willingly subject to the will of God and even in pursuit of things contrary to the principles of Christianity, those rulers may serve the Lord's purpose in such matters as would be prohibited to Christians themselves.

The Nature of Christ's Kingdom

The kingdom of Christ, in which each child of God has his primary citizenship and to which he owes primary allegiance, is a kingdom unlike and rather in contrast to earthly kingdoms. As a faithful citizen of this superior kingdom, he is to be unspotted from the world, be a peculiar person, walk in light and reprove the works of darkness, be separate, abstain from all appearance of evil, love his enemy, and turn the other cheek. These characteristics are in contrast to the attitude of those who with carnal minds attempt to settle matters by means of war. The saint, therefore, cannot with God's approval participate in carnal warfare or other causes of like nature. Christ taught,

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36).

If in all the existence of man there was a cause which would justify violence, surely it would have been the defense of Christ; but even on this occasion, violence was condemned by Christ Himself.

The Scriptures unquestionably teach that the citizen of Christ's kingdom is to avoid use of the carnal sword.

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other...But love ye your enemies, and do good...and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful (Luke 6:27-29, 35-36).

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 (Eph. 6:12).

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds) (2 Cor. 10:3-4).

Consequences of Such Carnal Involvement

In wielding the carnal sword one becomes a party to violence, and in doing so he puts himself in a position opposed to the spirit of Christianity.

In connection with such carnal relationship, one may be subject to swearing. Christ taught,

Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (Matt. 5:34-37).

We must in all fairness concede that swearing may sometimes be avoided by affirming or by making other acceptable provision. In view of his submission to be identified with such carnal matters, however, it might be rare to find a person who would also hold firm conviction about swearing.

In this relationship he would be identified with those engaged in all manner of corruption and whose intent is contrary to the nature of Christianity. As a member of such, one becomes an aid to its evil purposes. The Scriptures teach that we should "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11), that we should not "be partaker of other men's sins; keep thyself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22), and that we should "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17).

In this environment one is exposed to such corrupt influence as would tend to have serious harmful effect upon his purity of thought, speech, and manner of life. Paul taught, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33).

As a party to carnal warfare one would be greatly hindered in his Christian service. The disciple of Christ is to assemble with fellow disciples upon the first day of the week. In such carnal relationship, one has little control over where he may be and may often find himself where there are no faithful Christians. A soldier is considered an instrument to be used by his superiors in such way as may be deemed best for the state.

He would usually be so out-numbered by those who oppose his convictions that he could expect little regard or provision for his conscience.

In such service a Christian would be hindered in the free exercise of his duty to teach others and to set an influential example for truth. How could he tell his comrades that Christ came to save all men, and then harm or assist others to harm persons for whom Christ died? How could he preach a saving gospel when he is a party to destruction? How could he exhort his fellow soldiers to love their enemies and do good to those who do them harm when his own presence serves to hinder and harm the enemy? It would be difficult to imagine a soldier exhorting his fellow soldiers before entering into battle by such words as these:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19-21).

Lest We Tarnish the Image of Christ's Cause

We should be humbly thankful to our Lord for provisions available in this and other nations which permit a Christian to avoid participation in carnal warfare. It is not my purpose to remove the carnal sword from the state, for there it may serve the Lord's purpose in such matters as would be prohibited to Christians themselves; but for a citizen of Christ's kingdom to leave his noble calling and serve in such a carnal relationship is to soil the honor of "*that worthy name by the which ye are called*" (Jas. 2:7).

HARRY COBB
P.O. Box 75
Wedowee, AL 36278

COUNT THE COST (LK 14:28)

"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16, NKJV). This was the "not-so-subtle" message of Jesus to the church at Laodicea. A similar message was issued to the church of Ephesus (Rev. 2:4-5).

In our day of casual, convenient Christianity, Jesus' words may seem overly severe. Would He actually sever and discontinue relationship if they continued in a lifestyle lacking in diligence and zeal toward Him? We should not be surprised, because Jesus never minimized the cost of discipleship. In fact, He taught frankly about it, explaining that one simply could not be His disciple if he/she did not give Him priority over earthly relationships, take up their cross, deny self, and follow Him (Lk. 14:26-33, Lk. 9:23). The teachings on service (Matt. 20:26-28, Lk. 17:10), sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), and suffering (2 Tim. 3:12) further dispel any notion that apathy and indifference are acceptable.

If we are concerned that Jesus' message would discourage people from becoming disciples, we might consider that Jesus surely knew this. At a time in His life when He saw many reject Him for his difficult demands, Jesus asked some of His closest disciples, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:67, NKJV) Peter's response addresses the very heart of the issue, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (vss 68-69, NKJV).

Our response today regarding the apathy that seeks to claim us is simply the same as Peter's. Therefore, we subject ourselves willingly to the cost of discipleship, for we "consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

MIKE PANNELL
Coleman, OK

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
April 3 - 6	Ashlock Near Celina, TN	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
April 4 - 8	Liberty Liberty, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
April 4 - 8	Owens Road Prattville, AL	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)

April 4 - 10	Goochtown Eubank, KY	Rodney Sneed & Aaron Keeton
April 8 - 10	Valley Valley, AL	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)
April 17 - 20	Oak Grove Eubank, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
April 17 - 20	West Broad Street Wedowee, AL	Don Avaritt (Vilonia, AR)
April 21 - 24	Mt. Zion Crab Orchard, KY	Hunter Bulger (Fort Deposit, AL)
April 22 - 24	Pleasant Ridge Woodbury, TN	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. According to Moses in Deuteronomy, who died in the thirty eight years from the time they left Kadesh Barnea until they crossed the Zered Valley?
2. Why did Saul originally send for David?
3. Why did Elihu, Job's fourth visitor, wait until everyone had spoken before he addressed Job and the others?
4. In Acts 15, a controversy arose which resulted in an official letter being taken to the new converts at Antioch. What was being debated?
5. In closing his I Corinthians letter, Paul mentioned that he wanted to visit the Corinthians but planned to stay in what city until Pentecost?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. According to Exodus, the altar of burnt offering was overlaid with what material? BRONZE (Exodus 38:2-3)

2. In Second Chronicles, who were Jachin and Boaz? THE
PILLARS OF THE TEMPLE (2 Chron. 3:17)
3. What three examples of vanity did Jeremiah say Zion would
display in the day of desolation? CLOTHING ITSELF IN
CRIMSON, ADORNING ITSELF IN GOLD, ENLARGING ITS EYES WITH
PAINT (Jer. 4:30)
4. Who said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it will
be sufficient for us"? PHILLIP (John 14:8)
5. What does the letter from Paul to Philemon concern? A
RUNAWAY SLAVE THAT BELONGED TO PHILEMON (Phm. 1:10-16)