

## The Christian’s Attitude Toward Civil Government

*John Isaac Edwards*

**I**t’s a good time to remind ourselves of Bible teaching concerning the Christian and civil government. As a Christian, what should be my attitude toward civil government?

**Recognize Civil Government Is a Divine Institution.** Paul wrote, “...For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1). Other expressions in this chapter underscore the fact that the authorities that exist are appointed by God: “the ordinance of God” (v. 2), “the minister of God” (v. 4) and “God’s ministers” (v. 6). Jesus said to Pilate, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above...” (John 19:11). Peter mentioned “the king” and “governors” as being sent by the Lord (1 Peter 2:13-14). Attitudes and responsibilities that follow stem from this fundamental concept.

**Be Subject.** The Christian is commanded, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers...” (Romans 13:1). Paul instructed Titus, “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1). Peter declared, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors...” (1 Peter 2:14). When addressing subjection of servants to masters, he said, “...not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankwor-

thy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (1 Peter 2:18-20). All of us can learn a lesson from Christ along this line (1 Peter 2:21-24). To resist the power is to resist the ordinance of God (Romans 13:4). We are to “be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake” (Romans 13:5). “For this cause pay ye tribute also...Render therefore to all their dues...” (Romans 13:6-7). “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). The Christian is to be a law-abiding, tax-paying citizen. Remember these statements were made while the Roman Empire ruled the world and Christians were suffering for doing good. We may not agree with the form of government or some of the laws passed, but if obedience to those do not conflict with our obedience to God’s laws then we are to be subject. Where there is a conflict, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

**Realize Civil Government “Beareth Not the Sword in Vain.”** “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Ro-

mans 13:4). The sword is a symbol of capital punishment and of warfare, and government has the right to make use of it. Know your rights, live within them, and appeal to them when necessary. Remember Paul who said, “For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them, I appeal unto Caesar” (Acts 25:11).

**Do That Which Is Good.** Civil government exists for two reasons, basically: to punish evildoers and praise them that do well (1 Peter 2:14). Romans 13:3 records, “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.” The most patriotic thing a Christian can do for his country is to do good, be a Christian in every sense of the word, be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14). “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

**Show Honour.** Solomon advised, “My son, fear thou the Lord and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change” (Proverbs 24:21). Peter penned, “...Honour the king” (1 Peter 2:17). He characterized those who “despise government” in this way: “...Presumptu-

ous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities” (2 Peter 2:10). Speaking evil and engaging in a brawl are a spiritual “not” and fail to show honour (Titus 3:2).

**Pray.** Paul exhorted that “...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” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). The Lord through Jeremiah admonished Israel of old, “And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace” (Jeremiah 29:7). The Lord hears the cry of His people (1 Peter 3:12).

Rulers come and go and times change, but God is in control. He sets up men as kings and deposes them as He wills. “Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings...” (Daniel 2:20-21). “...to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Daniel 4:17). Let us not forget that the Lord is in His temple; He is on His throne (Psalm 11:4).

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