

(1 Peter - Part 23): The Christians Relation to Government

by A.W. Tozer

Christians should submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, but not obey laws that conflict with God's laws, and the Church rises above all governments.

Duration: 29:42

Scripture: Hebrews 12:22

Topics: "Government"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the Christians' relation to government, specifically emphasizing peaceful obedience to authority. The preacher highlights that these instructions from Peter should be understood in light of other scriptures, as truth is not found in one verse alone. The sermon emphasizes that while the ideal is to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, the reality is that rulers are fallen beings and human practice is not perfect. The preacher also mentions that expecting perfection in marriage, politics, teaching, or any aspect of life is unrealistic due to the fallen nature of humanity.

Transcript

In the 2nd of 1 Peter, the Spirit says, 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, he may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, as free, but as the servants of God. That's 1 Peter 2, 13 to 16, inclusive.

Last week we considered the Christian's relation to society, conceived simply as his relation to the Gentiles, the unconverted, roundabouted. Today, we consider the Christian's relation to government. And again, only broad principles are laid down.

The application of those principles will be left to the prayerful, spiritual, watchful Christian. Now, human government is of divine order. This is far something otherwise than the old doctrine of the divine right of kings, which placed kings over their people, as a very God, and gave them full authority of life and death, and they could be as arbitrary, as contrary, as cruel, and as oppressive as they chose, and they justified it on the grounds that no one had a right to complain against the anointment of the Lord.

That is one thing, but that is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible, however, does teach human government. Beginning with the book of Genesis or earlier, you will find human government.

In Genesis 9, it is clearly laid down. And the government, the idea of human government laid down by the Lord, has developed from the family idea. The father, as the paternal source of the family, and thus as head of the family, and naturally as protector, defender, and breadwinner of the family, was the first ruler.

And then this idea of someone who has a right to do it, who earns that right by protecting, defending, and winning living for the family, then is spread to the tribe, as you will find developed in the books of the Old Testament, and then to the village, and then to the largest city. And in some instances in old times, a city was a government in itself, as Athens and Sparta, for instance. And then to the nation, and then finally to empires.

Now, in the Bible, the king ideal is very prominent. In fact, it's only fair to say that there isn't any other kind of government recognized in the Bible, except the government overhead, usually called a king, over an obedient and happy people. The word king, curiously enough, comes from the word kin, K-I-N.

Now, up around this part of the country, you rarely hear the word kinfolk used, or kin, my relations or my relatives, we say. But if you go south, you will find it very common to say his kinfolk. None of my kin are living, or none of my kin was present.

You will hear that often, because it is the old word for someone of very close relation to you, usually a blood relative. And so we add a G on it, and we have king, curiously I say. Kin, that is a relative, one of our own people.

And then the word king carries not only the idea of kinship, but it also means a noble one, meaning that a king in the Old Testament ideal was a close relative who was very noble, and who was promoted to rulership because of his nobility and his blood relation. Like a father as protector and head of the family, motivated by love for his family, so the king, under the Old Testament concept, was one who was motivated by love and who was related to the people, not the usurper from the outside, but one who was of blood relation and was very noble of character. Now, some people object very strenuously to the king-god concept of the Bible, where we see him sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and that God is a great king over all the earth, where Christ is called King of Kings as well as Lord of Lords.

That runs like a silver or golden thread through the entire Bible on through to the end. And some people object very strenuously to that. They say that the old idea of the divine right of kings dominates scriptures, and for that reason the whole phraseology should be changed and the present concept of God as a king is based upon a primitive and false idea of human government.

But, my friends, it accords entirely with the true concept of kingliness. A king is a noble head of his people, deriving his glory not from the servile obedience of his people, but from the happiness and prosperity of his people. You read the 72nd Psalm, where the king comes from heaven to rule over the whole earth.

Read the 11th chapter of Isaiah, where the Lord anoints Jesus as king over the earth. You will find there that the glory of the king as king derives from the prosperity and freedom and happiness of his people. And that is the Old Testament concept of the king.

And the whole Bible is shot through with this. And this ideal, however, in human practice is not perfect, because rulers are men and men are fallen. There isn't anything perfect.

You read the newspapers, all of these bleeding hearts that answer the questions my husband has runned away, what shall I do? And they are always talking about a perfect marriage. You can't have a perfect marriage because the two that make up the marriage are fallen beings. They want a perfect politician.

You'll never have a perfect politician because every politician, even if he rises to the stature of statesman, he is still a fallen man. You'll never have a perfect teacher nor a perfect child. You'll never have a perfect human because humans are people and people have fallen.

So the concept of rulership, while it is divine and while government is divine, you'll never find any form of government that is not imperfect somewhere, because those who rule, whether they be in a democracy or a monarchy, are human and humans are fallen and fallen men are selfish and selfish men are bad. But of course not all bad, so that there have been noble men. There have been kings of England that shone as bright stars and queens, and England looks back with nostalgic yearning to those great golden years when noble and righteous kings ruled.

The same, I suppose, is true in all countries. I remember what the famous sonorous old Dr. Samuel Johnson once said. They were discussing politics and the right form of government, and he clearly wrote and began with that famous, Sir, it is.

He said, Sir, I perceive that it matters little what form of government prevails in a country. The people will be happy if only the rulers be righteous men. That's worthy to be written down on the halls of Congress and everywhere throughout the world.

The people will be happy if our leaders are righteous men. But they are not all righteous men because they are humans and they are subject to temptation the same as everybody else. Now, Peter herein joins us.

Peaceful obedience to government. This is to be understood, these words of Peter, by other scriptures. Always remember that the truth is never to be discovered by saying it is written.

Truth is to be discovered by saying it is written, and again it is written. Truth is never found in one verse. Truth is found in one verse, plus another verse, plus another verse, plus another verse, until the whole truth of God lies before you.

If you take one verse and make that to be supreme and crowd out everything else, unless you can teach any kind of crazy doctrine in the world, there is no God, said a verse in the Bible. And people will actually, mind you, even in this day in which we live, in offices and places where people work, they'll attack a young Christian who doesn't know much yet about the Bible and say, Well, the Bible says there is no God. But the truth is not to be found in one verse, there is no God.

The truth is to be found in that verse, plus all other verses. And if you will read the rest of that verse, you will find it says, The fool has said in his heart there is no God. Somebody said, God's created.

I know that because God had a source. God came from somewhere. And you smile and say, What kind of theology is that? Well, it says the Bible says God came from demons.

So God was a demonite. Again, we have foolishness because they take one verse and do not add anything to it. I remember one little lady who was a Christian.

She was a maid in a home, and she saw a nice piece of jewelry that she liked, and she just latched on to it. They discovered the theft and faced her with it. She smiled and said, Well, I'm a Christian, and I took it because it's mine.

And they said, How do you get that way now? How do you reason that way? Well, she said, Doesn't Paul say, All things are yours? So she figured if all things were hers, she might as well take what belonged to her. Now, that's a misuse of scripture. So when we read, Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be unto the king or unto the governors or unto the rulers.

Submit yourself for the Lord's sake. We're not to take that as being all the sides there are. We're to take that as being one side of a great truth, necessary and right and proper to be obeyed, but to be understood along with other truth.

Now, for instance, Peter himself, the very man who wrote these words for our text, one time was in a jam with the authorities. He had preached and prayed and had gotten in trouble, and when the authorities took him aside and said, We enjoin you, never preach again in the name of Jesus. Peter put his chin out and said, I leave it to your judgment whether it is better to obey God than man.

And then he promptly went out and began to preach. The very Peter who said, Submit yourself to every ordinance of God, refused to obey an ordinance, or every ordinance of man, refused to obey an ordinance of man when it conflicted with the word of God. So you see, there you have it, my brethren.

It is perfectly right that I should park my nonexistent car in the right place, keep traffic laws, pay income tax, and keep the laws of the country. But if the laws of the country ever told me I couldn't pay, then, as Shakespeare said of another, it is better observed in the breach than in the observance. And by breaking a law that tells me I can't be good, I am a better Christian than if I kept it.

But how many laws are there in our country? How many laws were there in the days of Paul, for that matter, that told people they couldn't be good? For the most part, even in the worst of countries, laws are made to keep people straight and in line and righteous, and right as good as human fallen men can be. And therefore there is rarely a conflict between human ordinances and the laws of God. But wherever that conflict occurs, then there must be disobedience.

And there comes a time when the only good people may be in jail. You know, as I've said, jails were made by good people to put bad people in. Because the bad people were in the minority, and by putting them in jail you took them out of circulation.

And the good people reluctantly made jails to put bad people in. But it's conceivable that a nation can degenerate morally and politically to a point where the majority are bad. And in that case, only the good people are in jail.

They just take away the jails from the good people and put the good people in them. That happened in Russia, that happened in Germany, and I think that's happening in China now. Now, this rule that we read this morning is twofold.

Laws governing social relations and civil regulations are to be obeyed without question. Christians are never to be lawbreakers. They are to lead good, peaceable, and peaceful, law-abiding lives.

And in doing that they will silence their detractors. But the other side of that is that laws interfering with our duties to God are to be held non-obligatory by all Christians. Daniel was in Babylon, and he was given a high position there as a good, honest, law-abiding, decent man.

And he served his God without breaking the laws of God, and he kept the laws of Babylon. And then one day a bad law was passed, a law that told him he couldn't pray. And he broke that law without ever even asking whether he should.

He just broke it right in the middle, threw one piece here and the other piece there, and kept right on praying toward Jerusalem. Of course, they put him in a den of lions. It didn't do him any harm.

He came out all right. God Almighty, the King of all the kings, overruled the embarrassed king and saved Daniel. He didn't always do it so.

There have been martyrs by the tens of thousands who have had to give their lives to obey the laws of God in a society that said the laws of God were bad and forbade them to obey them. So now I think we have it here. It's so simple that a wayfaring man need not err therein.

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme or unto governors as them that are sent by him. So is the will of God that withwildering he put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. And insofar as the laws of man do not conflict with the laws of God, a Christian's duty is to be law-abiding.

But as soon as they conflict with the laws of God, the Christian's duty is to be a lawbreaker instantly. The moment they tell me from Washington that I can't preach the gospel, it'll be my sacred duty to preach the gospel and go to jail. But I'm glad for our country, and I'm glad we don't have that problem.

I'm glad nobody's waiting downstairs to arrest me when I go down there. I hope. At least I'm not expecting them there.

And I'm glad that there's nobody that tells me I can't. But if that day should ever come, or if I were thrust into a nation where it should be so, then it would be my duty to disobey the laws. Now, the reason for this, of course, is that God is above all, and Christ transcends all nations and all laws and all countries.

I might add here, though it is a repetition of a paragraph in yesterday's broadcast, let us beware trying to nationalize Christianity. There's grave danger that we do this, that we fuse Christianity with politics and use the gospel of Christ as a tool for political ends. Remember it never dare be so.

Truth is master itself, and is never to be used as a tool to an end that lies outside of truth. We have some noble politicians in our day. I heard of one of them.

I read it in a little script in Time magazine. I don't take that magazine, but somebody told me there was something in it about Billy Graham, so I bought it and read it, and I got this. In one little script there, it said that a certain politician was running for governor.

No, for the Senate. And he came out ferociously on the platform that read like this, If it's right, I'm for it. Courage there, brother, I'm telling you, courage there.

That makes George Wood and look to his niche in our hearts. If it's right, I'm for it. There are still those who use right as a means to political ends.

And there are still those who so fuse and confuse Christianity with some form of government that one is made to stand for the other. It's always bad, brethren. Hitler tried to use Christianity as a tool of the state, and he went down.

Stalin also tried it, and he went down. Murchison, that's the way you pronounce that poor fellow's name, is trying it, and he'll go down, and it'll always be true that God Almighty, the Sovereign King, will not permit little men to make truth a tool towards selfish ends. So let's never equate Christianity with any politicalism, Americanism, democracy, freedom, or any otherism.

To do so is to misunderstand Christ completely and go astray in interpretation of the whole will of God in redemption. There was democracy before Christ was born in Bethlehem or died on the cross. And there has been flourishing Christianity in lands where there was no democracy.

So Christianity and democracy are not the same, though certainly the kindly ameliorating influences of the Christian gospel have softened men and raised the sense of appreciation for the individual and given us the freedom we do have yet left in the world. And so far as Christianity has allowed to soften and touch the hearts of man, we still have what we call the free world. But the two are not the same.

Now, the Church rises above all governments. Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, said Jesus in that last day. And the psalm says, Crowns and thrones may wither, kingdoms rise and wane, but the Church of Jesus constant will remain.

And in 25 Matthew it says, When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all his angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them. The sheep were separated from the goats, and he put the goats on his left hand, the sheep on his right. And he'll issue the words of doom and blessing.

He rises above all the nations, stands aloof from it all and above it all. So we are pilgrims in a nation. We happen to be pilgrims in a nation which I without, I trust without any undue patriotic emotion, believe to be the greatest nation and the best still nation in the world.

And we're grateful for that. But Christianity has flourished in the courts of Caesar. Christianity has flourished under the flashing sword of the headman.

Christianity is still flourishing in China. Don't let them tell you it isn't. It's underground, certainly.

It's gone underground. And there are still in Russia stolid old boot-wearing Musics who believe in God the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord. If you think that the Russian Orthodox Church never produced any saints, come up to my library and look over some of my books.

I can give you teaching that is as good as anything Dr. Simpson ever uttered. Coming from the steppes and plains and bogs of old Russia. They only think they've killed Christianity, brethren.

They've stopped our forward progress. They've driven out our missionaries. They've subverted some of our leaders.

They've killed some of our leaders and closed church doors. But they haven't killed the Holy Ghost. And they haven't trampled out the seed of the gospel anywhere over there.

I got a letter the other day from Barthel. Maybe it appeared in the Weekly. I don't know whether it's out yet or not, that particular issue.

But he said to me, I read your editorial in which you said, don't let's give up China. And he said, I've been thinking the same thing now for a long time and I'm daily waiting for that political turn that will loose China and give the gospel a chance again to rush in and take over. And I believe that time will come.

Unless we're so near the end that our Lord shall come first. But one or two things will come. Either Christ will come in the glory or free China will yet have the gospel.

Too many of those old, yellow, slant-eyed saints have watered China with their purple tears to give up 400 million, is it, Chinese to the devil. So the gospel of Christ rises above all isms and political views and parties and all the rest. While we're here in the middle of these swirling waters, we do the best we can to support the best party we know and live in obedience and be good and law-abiding, always knowing we're here only for a little while.

Always knowing that this goodness we see about us in a political way isn't Christianity. It's only something that God in his sovereign providence has brought to pass for the last days. All this financial prosperity God has given in order there might be money to evangelize in the last days.

All this political freedom God has given in order that we might send missionaries in the last days. But Americanism isn't Christianity. The kingdom of God has no nationality.

The kingdom of God has only the human race within its broad framework, and the Son of Man as its head and king. Now we are gathered, and will gather, and do now gather unto the new creation. Could I read it again? I quote it so often, maybe you get tired of hearing it.

Ye are come unto Mount Zion, unto the city of the living God, to heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel. So this is the new creation that transcends national lines, linguistic lines, racial lines, rises above it all, unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God. As we go on now into the communion service, we celebrate the coming unto this holy Zion, and the blood of Jesus that speaks better things than that of Abel, and the blood of the everlasting covenant which seals our peace with God.

Brethren, I hope that we're properly appreciative of all this. I hope that we're not guilty of ingratitude or even carelessness in thinking about all this. Thankful to God for political freedom that enables us to operate without a threat of jail or death, but more thankful to God for that national line transcending, racial race transcending gospel that brings us into the kingdom of the new creation and makes us sons and daughters of God.

This we celebrate in the communion.

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