

Classic Christian Writings:

Christ is "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). He is the Ruler of earth's rulers and the Governor over earth's governments (Psa. 22:28; Eph. 1:20-21). His authority over all earthly governments is made available in His name to the Church – the assembly of His believing people (Rev. 1:5-6). As Moses stretched forth his rod on God's behalf over Egypt, so the Church by its prayers stretches forth Christ's authority over the nations and their rulers.

In his First Epistle to Timothy, Paul instructs Timothy in the proper order and administration of the local church, which he calls "God's house" (See 1 Timothy 3:14-15). In chapter two he gives directions for the church's ministry of prayer:

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and 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; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

"First of all," Paul calls for "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks...." If we were to choose one term to cover all four activities, it would be prayer. The first duty of Christians meeting in fellowship is prayer. It is also their primary outreach.

In verse two Paul says that prayer is to be offered "for all men." This agrees with the prophecy of Isaiah 56:7 where God says, "...Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." God is concerned with "all men" and "all people," and He expects His people to share His concern.

After "all men," the first specific topic for prayer is "kings, and all that are in authority." This may be summed up in the single word, the government. When praying for the government, what specific petition are we exhorted to make? Paul's answer is: "...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Does the kind of government we live under affect the way we live? Obviously it does. Therefore, if we desire a good way of life, logic and self-interest alike indicate that we should pray for our government.

Continuing in 1 Timothy 2, Paul says in verse three, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour...." The pronoun this refers back to the topic of verse 2, which we have summarized as "good government." If we replace the pronoun this by the phrase to which it refers, we arrive at the following statement: "Good government is good and acceptable in the sight of God." More simply still, "Good government is the will of God."

Here is a statement with the most far-reaching consequences. Do we really believe it? To judge by the words and actions of many Christians, they have little or no expectations of good government. They are more or less resigned to the fact that the government will be inefficient, wasteful, arbitrary, corrupt, unjust. For my part I have studied this question long and carefully in the light of logic and of Scripture, and I have come to a deep conviction concerning God's will in this area: The will of God is good government.

Why God Desires Good Government

Moving on to verse four, we find that Paul states the reason why good government is the will of God: God desires "...all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." God desires the salvation of all men so intensely that He made it possible by the supreme sacrifice of history, the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Through faith in Christ's atonement, salvation has been made available to all men. However, for men "to be saved," they must first "come to the knowledge of the truth" concerning Christ's atonement. This is possible only if they have the Gospel preached to them.

Paul presents this issue very plainly in Romans 10:13-14: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Unless the Gospel is preached to them, men cannot avail themselves of the salvation purchased for them by Christ's atonement.

We may sum up the logic of this very simply. God desires "all men to be saved." For this it is necessary for them to "come to the knowledge of the truth." "Knowledge of the truth" comes only through the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore God desires the Gospel to be preached to all men.

What kind of government makes it easier to preach the Gospel? Good government or bad government? To obtain an answer to this question, we may briefly contrast the effects of good and bad government, in so far as they relate to the preaching of the Gospel.

On the one hand, good government maintains law and order, it keeps communications open, it preserves civil liberty, it protects freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. Good government, without becoming involved in religious controversy, provides a climate in which the Gospel can be preached effectively.

On the other hand, bad government allows the breakdown of law and order, permits unsafe travel conditions and poor communications, and imposes unjust and arbitrary restrictions. In all these ways, although in varying degrees, bad government hinders the effective preaching of the truth. At its worst, bad government either restricts or totally suppresses the universal right of all men to believe in God and to express their faith by public worship and proclamation. In one degree or another, we see these conditions in countries today.

Our conclusion therefore is that good government facilitates the preaching of the gospel, while bad government hinders it. For this reason, good government is the will of God.

Praying with the Knowledge of God's Will

The last sentence of the above paragraph has the most far-reaching consequences for our prayers. In all effective praying the decisive issue is the knowledge of God's will. If we know that what we are praying for is according to God's will, then we have faith to claim it. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him [God], that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

John's teaching in this passage revolves around the knowledge of God's will. Provided that we know we are praying in full accord with God's will, we may know that "we have" whatsoever we prayed for. The use of the present tense "we have" does not necessarily indicate an immediate manifestation of the thing that we prayed for, but it does indicate an immediate assurance that the thing is already granted to us by God. Thereafter the amount of time taken for its actual manifestation cannot affect this initial assurance.

This agrees with the teaching of Mark 11:24: "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them [more properly, believe that ye already received them], and ye shall have them." Receiving comes at the very moment of praying. After that, the actual manifestation of that which we have received follows at the appropriate time.

To comprehend fully what we can accomplish by praying for our government, we need to combine the teaching of John with that of Paul. The result is as follows:

1. If we pray for anything knowing that it is according to God's will, we have the assurance that the thing is granted to us.
2. Good government is according to God's will.
3. If we know this and pray for good government, we have the assurance that good government is granted to us.

God has made it possible for Christians by their prayers to insure good government. Christians who fail to exercise this God-given authority are gravely delinquent – both toward God and toward their country.

Christians are not held responsible by God to criticize their government, but they are held responsible to pray for it. So long as they fail to pray, Christians have no right to criticize. Most political leaders and administrators are more faithful in the discharge of their secular duties than Christians are in the discharge of their spiritual duties. Furthermore, if Christians would seriously begin to intercede, they would soon find less to criticize.

I am persuaded that the root of the problem with most Christians is not lack of will, but lack of knowledge. Let this fact first be clearly established: Good government is God's will. This will provide both the faith and the incentive that Christians need to pray effectively for their government.

What if Christians find themselves under a government that is evil? It may be corrupt, inefficient, wasteful, or again it may be actively cruel and oppressive toward Christians. How are Christians to react? God's Word

gives them no liberty either to complain or to disobey. It does, however, impose upon them a solemn obligation to pray for their government. If they will humble themselves before God and meet His conditions, He will then hear their prayers and will for their sakes bring about a change of government that will ensure the fulfillment of His purposes and the best interests of His people (2 Chr. 7:14).

What God Requires in Those Who Rule

Since it is within the power of Christians to determine by their prayers the kind of government that they are to live under, it is important that we know what kind of government to pray for. What are God's main requirements in one who governs? The answer to this question is given by the Holy Spirit through the lips of David in Second Samuel:

"The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (2 Sam. 23:2-4).

Two simple requirements for a ruler are here stated: He must be just, and he must rule in the fear of God. No doubt there is a prophetic reference here to the kingdom of Christ, and these words will find their complete and final fulfillment only in Christ. Nevertheless, the general principle is firmly established and applied to every man who exercises government. God's two requirements are that he shall be just and God-fearing. Whenever such a man is raised up to rule, God promises that blessings will follow: "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain."

All Christians should agree upon one basic principle: to withhold their votes from any candidates who do not fulfill the moral requirements established by Scripture. The result would be to raise the standards of government throughout the whole nation. Christians under any system of government are responsible to pray for the rulers of their nation, and in this way to exercise a decisive influence upon the course of government.