

A CHRISTIAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

In recent years many nations have been sharply divided over political controversies. As Christians, we should understand two key points related to government and politics. First, we should know what our attitude toward existing governments should be. Second, we should know what our attitude should be individually as Christians and corporately as the church toward involvement in political activities.

Our Attitude toward Governmental Authority

God is the unique authority in the universe, and today, as Lord of lords and King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ, the ascended and exalted God-man, reigns over the entire universe, including all human affairs (Prov. 21:1; Dan. 4:17; Rev. 17:14; Acts 10:36; Matt. 28:18). Nevertheless, God, in His governmental arrangement, has chosen to delegate a measure of authority to men (Gen. 9:5-6). As Christians, we should acknowledge those authorities as God's representatives and submit to them. The Lord Jesus Himself acknowledged the authority of human government as coming from God (John 19:11) and submitted Himself to that authority, even in being crucified unrighteously.

Submission to secular authority is the explicit teaching of the apostles. In Romans 13:1 Paul wrote, "Let every person be subject to the authorities over him, for there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are ordained by God." Similarly, Paul told Titus to remind the believers "to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work" (Titus 3:1). Such words are unambiguous and without qualification. Peter taught the same thing, saying, "Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether to a king as being supreme, or to governors as being sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and praise of those who do good" (1 Pet. 2:14-15). He added, "Fear God. Honor the king" (v. 17b). The "king" at the time Peter wrote this Epistle was the depraved emperor Caesar Nero.

According to Romans 13:7, Christians bear four responsibilities with respect to human government: to give tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom is due, fear to whom fear is due, and honor to whom honor is due; this is the proper attitude of a believer toward human government. This matches the Lord's word in Mark 12:17 when He said, "The things that are Caesar's render to Caesar." God has appointed earthly governments to take charge of earthly affairs, so we should pay whatever the government requires us to pay materially (Rom. 13:6). No matter who occupies a position of authority, we should honor that person as God's representative and pray for him "that we may lead a tranquil life in all godliness and gravity" (1 Pet. 2:17; 1 Tim. 2:1-4). If a government oppresses us due to our faith, the most we can do is escape, as Joseph and his family did when Herod ordered all the babies under two years old to be killed (Matt. 2:13-14).

Our Attitude toward Political Involvement

Concerning involvement in politics, we should likewise follow the pattern of the Lord Jesus and the New Testament apostles. While our Lord sojourned on earth, there were those who desired to make Him an earthly king, but He withdrew from them (John 6:15). These ones followed Him but turned away after He presented Himself to them as the bread of life (vv. 35, 66). The Lord Jesus was unswerving in His intent to accomplish the work for which He had been sent (Isa. 50:7; Luke 9:51). That work was to bring in the reality of the kingdom by living out God in humanity, accomplishing redemption through His death, and regenerating His believers in resurrection to be the members of the Body of Christ (John 1:18; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:3). Because His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), the Lord Jesus did not touch politics or seek earthly power, even refusing Satan's offer of an earthly kingdom (Matt. 4:8-10). As the Lord's disciples, we should follow His pattern, as the apostles did in the New Testament. There is no record that any of them became involved in the politics of the world's governments.

Watchman Nee was consistent throughout his ministry on this point. In one of his early publications, he wrote:

While the world rejects His rightful authority, He is waiting for another day when He will assume His position. For this reason, His saints should join with Him in His rejection on earth. Since He has been despised and rejected by man, we should not seek to reign among men! We should disassociate ourselves from the politics of the world and should wait exclusively for the Lord who will replace the present world government with His own power and kingdom. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 5: The Christian (3)*, 565-566)

While Watchman Nee was visiting Europe in 1938, he was invited to offer a prayer at the Keswick Convention in England regarding the war that was going on between Japan and China. In that prayer he said, "We do not pray for Japan. We do not pray for China. But we pray for the interests of Thy Son in China and in Japan" (*The Keswick Convention: 1938*, 246). In 1948, as civil war raged throughout China, he told those who gathered for his Kuling training, "Victory and loss in political power are of little concern to us. We should change our attitude. We should not criticize, curse, or slander" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 59: Miscellaneous Records of the Kuling Training (1)*, 78). Later in the Kuling training he said:

Just as Christ maintained His position on earth, a Christian should do the same. Christians should not organize political activities, nor should they take advantage of the political system. Everything the Lord avoided in this world should be avoided by Christians, and everything that the Lord partook of in this world should be shared by Christians. We should be the same as He. This is the Christian position. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 60: Miscellaneous Records of the Kuling Training (2)*, 430)

Because the nature of the kingdom of God is spiritual and heavenly, not physical and earthly, Christians should not seek power in the political realm (Mark 10:42-43; Luke 12:14; Heb. 11:13-16; 1 Pet. 2:11; Matt. 7:1). As Christians we should not fall prey to political agendas but should follow the Lord's example to care solely for God's interests and kingdom, which are not of this world (John 18:36; Phil. 3:20). The world of politics is part of the satanic world system. As believers we have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13).

According to history, the church was severely compromised when Constantine made Christianity the official religion of Rome, thus aligning the church with worldly political power. Witness Lee commented, "Once the church gets involved in politics, the church loses its nature as the Body of Christ and becomes no church" (*God's New Testament Economy*, 107). To involve the church in politics is to change the nature of the church and cause it to lose its standing (Rev. 2:13). The church is above politics; it rules over the earth with the Head in the heavenlies with the divine power. The exalted Christ as the Head is executing His governmental administration on the throne in the heavens through the church as His Body on the earth, which cooperates with the Head as a universal man (Eph. 2:6).

On the one hand, saints who involve themselves in political activism in parts of the earth that are not friendly to the Christian faith run the risk of giving ground to associate the church with opposition to governmental authority, thus inviting repression. On the other hand, believers should freely exercise their rights as citizens in democratic countries by voting in elections, though even then their participation should be with God's interests in view. The church's work is spiritual, and the church appeals to the Lord's sovereign rule through prayer with a view to advancing His economy, not any political agenda. As Brother Lee wrote in a footnote to Romans 13:1, "God ordains the authorities over man in order to maintain peace and security in human society so that He may have the time and the opportunity to preach the gospel, to save sinners, and to build the church for the spread of His kingdom." May we trust in the Lord's sovereignty, live the God-man life in tranquility and godliness, and labor together with the Lord and with all the churches for His great goal, hastening His return and bringing in His eternal kingdom among men (Rev. 11:15).