

Christians and the Government

May a Christian serve in the government? May Christians vote in elections in their country? May Christians salute the flag of their nation and sing the national anthem? These questions are asked because Christians are aware that some politicians are dishonest and some government officials are corrupt. What does the Bible say?

When Jesus lived upon the earth, His nation (Israel) was ruled by Rome. The Jews hated the Romans. Roman officials often were corrupt and oppressive. On one occasion when the Pharisees wanted to get Jesus in trouble, they asked Him a question: *“Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?”* (Matthew 22:15-22) If Jesus said it was wrong to pay taxes, He would be in trouble with the Roman rulers. If He said it was good to pay taxes, He would be in trouble with the Jews. They thought He was trapped. Jesus asked them to bring a Roman coin to Him. He asked them whose picture and name were on the coin. They replied, “Caesar’s.” Then Jesus replied: *“Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the*

things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

Every Christian lives in two kingdoms (nations). One kingdom is spiritual. The other kingdom is physical. We are citizens of the kingdom of Christ, which is the church of Christ (Matthew 16:18-19; Colossians 1:13). At the same time, we are citizens of an earthly nation such as Zambia, France, China, etc. We must be good citizens in each kingdom. We have duties to fulfill in each kingdom.

The apostle Paul also lived during the time that Rome ruled much of the world. He was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29). Nero, one of the most corrupt rulers who ever lived, was on the throne when Paul wrote: *“Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same: for he is a 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 a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because*

of the wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. For this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God’s service, attending continually upon this very thing. Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” (Romans 13:1-7).

The apostle Peter also commanded Christians to *“Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well. For so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”* (1 Peter 2:13-17).

Sometimes the question is asked: “What if the government commands Christians to do something which is against God’s law? What if the government forbade Christians to worship God? What should we do?” If there is a conflict between man’s law and God’s law, then God’s law must be obeyed! The Jewish officials arrested the apostles for preaching Christ. They said to them: *“... We strictly charged you not to teach in this name: and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring*

this man's blood upon us. But Peter and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:28-29). We must obey both God's law and man's law. If there is a conflict, then God's law must be obeyed even if we must disobey man's law. This is the only exception!

Some say worldly people can serve in the government, but Christians cannot. The Bible does not teach this. God has just one law. It is for all men. If it is wrong for a Christian to serve in the government, it would be wrong for anyone. If it is right for a non-Christian to serve in the government, it would be right for a Christian to do the same.

Surely, there are many temptations to do wrong if one has authority over his fellow men. It is easy to abuse power. There are also temptations to get rich by using one's authority in a dishonest way. Christians must be honest and fair in all their dealings with their fellow men. This is true in business. It is also true in government.

Must a Christian pay taxes? May a Christian show respect for his nation by saluting the flag and singing the national anthem? May he vote in an election? May he serve in a government or political office? The answer to all these questions

is “yes.” However, a Christian must put God and His kingdom first (Matthew 6:33). He must also be honest in all things (2 Corinthians 8:21).



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