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TWO KINGDOMS

A multitude of laws in a country is like a great number of physicians, a sign of weakness and malady. Voltaire

Christians in every age have been faced with the dilemma of dual citizenship. On the one hand we are citizens of heaven where there is no law but the "law of love." On the other hand we live in a world where only a remnant belong to this heavenly kingdom. Many people in this world are so utterly perverse that Peter describes them as ". . . natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed . . ." (II Pet. 2:12).

How vividly I recall the 14th of July 1966 when eight student nurses were brutally murdered by Richard Speck. Then only a few days later on August 1, 1966, an architectural student named Charles J. Whitman barricaded himself in the University of Texas tower and killed fifteen people and wounded 31 others with a high powered rifle.

It is not my business to sit in judgment on either of these men with regard to their eternal destiny. Fortunately, Jesus Christ is the ultimate

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judge of that. It is, however, quite obvious that neither of these men could be reasoned with at the time they were committing their crimes.

Richard Speck murdered the student nurses one at a time. As each was taken from the room, the others no doubt felt like they would certainly be able to reason with this man and talk him out of doing anything irrational. They were wrong. Some men are like "brute beasts." You can no more reason with some men than you can reason with a lion or a bear. Even Jesus warned us against casting our pearls before swine. Swine do not have the capacity to appreciate a pearl and, therefore, they would only trample the pearl under their feet and turn around and seek to destroy you.

The same was true with Charles Whitman. He had been an exemplary student and fine citizen until he went beserk and began shooting innocent people. After being gunned down by police, an autopsy revealed the presence of a brain tumor which may help to explain his irrational behavior.

Be that as it may, it is quite obvious that we cannot expect non-Christian people to behave like Christian people. And even Christian people may succumb to some circumstance which renders them irrational or in some capacity not responsible for their actions.

A close friend and one of the finest Christian men I know was hospitalized some years ago for kidney stones. During his hospitalization he had a reaction to his medication and became violent. He later told me that he would have thrown an orderly out of the window if he had been able to do so.

In order to protect society from destructive elements from within and without, God has ordained civil government. The laws of man do not make men righteous, but they do present an alternative to anarchy.

Therefore, Paul wrote to the Romans,

Let every soul be subject unto the high powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Rom. 13:1-2).

The Emperor of Rome was not a Christian . . . and later would even unjustly condemn the Apostle Paul himself to a cruel death. Even a bad government, however, is preferable to no government at all.

Anarchy in a Lifeboat

At 11:50 p.m. on Sunday, March 9, 1942, a ship called the "Rooseboom" was sunk by a Japanese torpedo in the South Pacific. A lifeboat that was designed to hold 28 people was crowded with 135 survivors. Eighty of the survivors were jammed inside the boat and fifty-five more were in the water clinging to the boat for safety.

Twenty-six days later only five people were alive to be rescued. Initially there was a semblance of order as the Captain of the Rooseboom was on board. He gave the orders and as long as he was obeyed, circumstances were as good as could be expected.

Each person was to receive a tablespoon of water at sunup and a spoonful of tinned milk and water at night. A 12-ounce tin of bully beef would be shared by 12 people each day. To lessen the unbearable overcrowding, every man who was not injured was to spend five hours in the water every day clinging to the boat or to the lifelines.

Gradually, however, people began to lose sight of community needs and to think of their own survival. The Dutch Captain was stabbed to death by his engineer who subsequently jumped overboard to his death.

Now it was every man for himself. Since people reasoned that the fewer the people there were to eat and drink the rations the greater were their chances of survival . . . they began to kill one another. More and more people "mysteriously" disappeared. One night there were twenty such disappearances. Some people went beserk and killed themselves . . . others went beserk and killed others. Since weapons were few, a jagged bully beef tin might suffice to cut the throat of an unsuspecting victim. As the situation became more desperate some of these murders were even committed in broad daylight.

The word "anarchy" is a compound of two different Greek words, "an" meaning "without" and "archos" meaning "ruler." Anarchy is a condition where there is no ruler and every person does that which is right in his own eyes. Such a condition is so deplorable and destructive that even a bad government is preferable to no government at all.

Anarchy is bad anywhere . . . but its cruel effects are more easily seen in a lifeboat with men slashing at one another's throats with jagged tin cans.

Law in the Book of Romans

The Greek word for law is “nomos.” It occurs 68 times in the book of Romans. Perhaps we can summarize the teaching about “law” in the book of Romans with these few brief references.

Rom. 5:13 “For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.”

Rom. 2:13 “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.”

Rom. 3:20 “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight. . . .”

Rom. 4:15 “Because the law worketh wrath. . . .”

Rom. 3:21 “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested. . . .”

Rom. 6:14 “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

Rom. 7:4 “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ”;

Rom. 8:3-4 “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Rom. 13:8 “Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.”

Christians Are Like Sheep

The analogy of shepherd and sheep is used many times in the Scriptures to describe the relationship of Christ and His church.

Jesus said in John 10:27, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

There is no need for fences for those who are committed to hear the Shepherd’s voice and to follow Him. Jesus does not rule us by coercion. He does not make us follow Him by force.

Upon one occasion a great number of Jesus’ disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Jesus turned to the twelve and said,

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“Will ye also go away?” (John 6:67). They did not! The force which kept them from doing so, however, was not an external one. They were not “conformed” by a power without, but “transformed” by a power within.

Not Everyone Is Like Sheep

Again we call to your attention the words of the Apostle Peter as he spoke of those who “despise government” and are “presumptuous” and “self-willed.” These individuals are not afraid to speak evil of “dignities,” and are like brute beasts instead of sheep (II Pet. 2:10-12).

These corrupted individuals do not hear and obey the voice of the Shepherd. Like animals they must be corralled and restrained by external force.

This is the reason why God ordained civil government. The law of Moses was given as a “schoolmaster” to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith, but human laws are given to restrain wicked men and to protect society from the destructive influence of anarchy.

The Use of Force

As we have mentioned, Jesus does not use force to coerce people into following Him, but human governments use force to control the unconverted and immature. Therefore Romans 13 continues,

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. 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 (Rom. 13:3-4).

The Christian is not exempt from obeying these civil authorities. So Paul states that we “must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake” (vs. 5). That is, not only because we are afraid of punishment, but because we know it is the right thing to do.

The next verse explains that this is the reason why we pay taxes, because civil authorities are “God’s ministers” attending to the business of protecting society.

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Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour (Rom. 13:7).

Under normal circumstances the Christian is an ideal citizen. He is respectful, responsive, and obedient to civil authorities. He pays his taxes with no intent to defraud his government.

He is instructed by Scripture to,

Submit . . . 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 . . . (I Pet. 2-13-14).

The Dilemma

So the devout Christian is sometimes faced with a dilemma. He wants to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, but upon some occasions a civil government may require something of the Christian which is in direct violation of the will of God.

For example, the Christians in the Jerusalem church were commanded not to preach or to teach in the name of Jesus. In this instance Peter himself cried out, "We ought to obey God rather than men." If God commands us to preach and men tell us not to . . . we have a clear mandate and a Scriptural example, for civil disobedience.

Other cases may not be quite so clear. Suppose, for example, you were in the armed forces of Argentina and your government commanded you to shoot at the British . . . or vice versa. If we conclude that a Christian can belong to the armed forces of his native land, which some believers would deny, is there any point at which this believer should refuse to obey his government? If so, where is it?

Because believers are perpetually at different stages of spiritual growth and development, it is doubtful that we will ever draw the line in identically the same places.

The Need for Law

Throughout most of this volume we have pointed out that the law of Moses was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we

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might be justified by faith. We have shown that in Christ we have a righteousness without law. We are members of a heavenly kingdom that functions without force and coercion from without. We are members of a body of which Christ is the head. We are sheep in the fold of which Christ is the Good Shepherd. We are citizens of the Kingdom of which Christ is the King.

It is imperative, however, that we avoid the mistake of thinking that the absence of law in our heavenly kingdom argues for a lack of law in the kingdoms of men.

Someday the Kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdoms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . . until that day I fear that we shall perpetually be in need of human laws to restrain those godless elements in society.

I have to concur with Voltaire, "A multitude of laws in a country is like a great number of physicians, a sign of weakness and malady."

At the same time, however, I must conclude that society is very very sick and until it is healed by Jesus we will need our laws just like we need our physicians.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why can we not expect non-Christian people to live like Christians?
2. When is a Christian justified in protecting himself, or his rights?
3. In what way do some people become like animals?
4. How should these people be treated?
5. Under what circumstances may Christians commit acts of civil disobedience?
6. In Romans 12:19 we are told that vengeance belongs to God. In Romans 13 we are told that the representative of the State beareth not the sword in vain. Explain.
7. Can a Christian be a good citizen in a communist country?
8. Give an example of "casting pearls before swine."
9. What kind of a community could function well without laws?
10. How does the Kingdom of Christ differ from human kingdoms?

