

## Articles and Sermons :: DEMOCRACY---A Scriptural Perspective

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There is among Christians the popular belief that democracy is the best form of government. But from God's viewpoint (according to the Scriptures) no form of civil government is better than any other. It is God who raises up various governments to accomplish His purposes for the history of mankind.

One dictionary defines democracy as "government in which the people hold the ruling power either directly or through elected representatives; rule by the ruled." Regarding government, "rule by the ruled" is the ultimate manifestation of humanism just short of anarchy. There is only one form of government that truly pleases God, and that is monarchical rule by the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

Regardless of whether the government is totalitarian or democratic, or anything between, Christians are commanded by God to submit to those in authority over them in everything that is not contrary to the Scriptures.

The New Testament makes this clear: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves" (Rm. 13:1-2). And, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors" (1 Peter 2:13-14).

In light of these clear teachings of Scripture, how does the birth of the United States of America measure up? The thirteen British colonies were under the rule of the king of England. But after a while the colonists rebelled against the king and the taxes imposed by him. Once established, colonial Americans no longer wanted to be colonists, they wanted to be independent. They wanted to be free from the rule of the king, and were willing to revolt and die for the cause. This behavior, though inexcusable, is understandable for unsaved and spiritually dead men. But we as Christians need to see how God looks at what happened in early America and how this has influenced the thinking of the Church.

Thomas Jefferson drew up the Declaration of Independence. But he, as well as many other contemporary patriots and statesmen (such as Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin), was a Deist---he was not a Christian. The Creator and the God that Jefferson referred to in the famous document was at best only a vague concept, and not based on a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ nor God our Father. These men were as unsaved and spiritually dead as any other men without the Spirit of Christ.

The Declaration says that when people deem it necessary (for example, because of an abusive or despotic government) "it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government." This may sound reasonable and justifiable, but it is directly opposed to the Word of God. God's ways are much higher than man's ways. It should not matter to us as Christians whether the governments under which God has placed us to serve Him are tyrannical or not, or whether the taxation is extremely high or not, we should still submit to them. Only when we are asked to do something that is contrary to the Scriptures should we humbly say, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

High or "unjust" taxes, mistreatment, even persecution or enslavement is no reason to rebel against those in authority over us. Peter wrote, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority" (1 Pet. 2:13). "...If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:20-21).

A Christian is to obey those in authority over him, even his master if he is a slave. God enjoins through Paul, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything" (Col. 3:22). And in the epistle to Titus the inspired apostle wrote, "Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything" (Titus 2:9).

Scripture instructs us to pray for, not rebel against, those in authority over us. If we pray according to God's will He will bring about the needed changes. For even "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21:1). This holds true regardless of the authorities God has placed over us, whether parents or husbands or kings.

Rebellion is an awful sin in the sight of God, whether a slave against his master, a child against his parents, a wife against her husband, or a colony against its king. In fact, God says that "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Sam. 15:23).

In the Old Dispensation men of God such as Joseph, Nehemiah, and Daniel were placed by God in prominent positions within civil government. They were significant figures in God's plan to accomplish His purposes, their deeds filling many pages of Scripture. But God has shown us that regardless of the form of civil government, or whether or not His people are in key positions, all human governments fall short of His requirements. Man, because of the sinful nature, is hopelessly incapable of ruling himself. This has been demonstrated time and again throughout secular history and with the rise and fall of kings and judges recorded in the Old Testament.

Christians must see that since Jesus died on the Cross and ascended into heaven, those who are His disciples have a much higher calling than the Old Testament saints. We should be separate from the governments of this world; we are to serve the King of kings whose kingdom is not of this world.

In this dispensation it is not the calling of God's people to get involved in the political process nor the functions of civil government. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). We are strangers and pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11); we are sojourners, not settlers (1 Peter 1:17). God has not called us to try to make this a better world in which to live. "This world," Paul wrote, "in its present form is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:31). The work of the Church is to call people out of this world system by evangelizing the unsaved and making disciples of the converts. Except for caring for our widows and orphans, et cetera, there is nothing else for the Church to do.

The leaders of the sixteenth-century Reformation did not see the important difference between the Old and the New Dispensation regarding separation between Church and State. To this day many conservative leaders in the Church have been wrongly influenced by the teachings of some of those reformers. The attempts by some of them to establish a theocracy led them to compromise with the world rather than stand in contradistinction to it.

Christians who think that God has called them to run for political office are deceived. We are not to pledge allegiance to any flag, nor are we to be sworn into any office. Indeed, in this age we are not to swear any oath or swear to uphold any constitution or civil government (Mt. 5:33-37; James 5:12). This is true for Christians in Russia or Switzerland or the United States. We as Christians should not get involved in the governments or kingdoms of this world. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36).

Some Christians say that we can infiltrate these political systems to have a Christian influence so that we can raise our children in a better environment. This may sound plausible, and indeed according to the Scriptures we are the salt of the earth. But we must do God's work His way; everything else is, at best, a fine grade of wood, hay, and stubble.

Some say that Satan has changed his strategy, and no longer persecutes Christians in places like America. But do not be deceived, beloved Christian. It is not Satan who has changed, it is the Church. The Church is so much like the world that there is no contrast---therefore there is no persecution. If Christians refuse to compromise with the world and its carnal offerings, and call sin what it is---sin---then they will suffer persecution, they will be hated by worldlings including loved ones and others.

And the day is coming when, in America, Christians who are of the likes of John the Baptizer and the apostle Paul will suffer martyrdom. But all the better. Persecution has always served to purify the Church, to separate the goats from the sheep, to glorify God.

According to Paul, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

If the Second Advent is near, then America, if not exclusively then as part of a system, is depicted in the Book of Revelation as the abominable commercial and spiritual Babylon from which God's people are commanded to come out. Not that we should physically leave, but we should be spiritually separated. We are in the world, but we are not of the world, and the only reason we are in the world is to call people out of it. That is, those who have been saved, prepared, and sent should evangelize the unsaved and make disciples until Jesus comes back.

Scripture says that "we know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19). It also says that "when a country is rebellious, it has many rulers" (Prov. 28:2). This truly is the case in the United States today.

Rule by the ruled---that is democracy.