

The believer's response to an enemy who has harmed him or a loved one is to be one of love, not revenge. We are to love our enemies and do good to them, to overcome evil with good. We are promised "I will repay saith the Lord." He does not wish any to perish, to die in their sins, 2 Peter 3:9. We don't either. But if we avenge ourselves we may drive a lost sinner away from Christ. While we are not to avenge ourselves, God in His mercy has provided government on the earth to maintain law and order in the present evil age. Government by human beings over other human beings. This is a blessing from God and moved by God.

*Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.*

Government preserves the world from utter chaos and self destruction, while God appeals to its human inhabitants to turn to Christ for salvation.

There was no government on earth in the days before the Flood of Noah. Sin grew rampant; the earth was full of violence and corruption, Genesis 6:5,11,12. God destroyed the world that then was, 2 Peter 2:5, 3:6. Then He instituted government, giving man the authority and responsibility to avenge murder by capital punishment, Genesis 9:5, 6. The Law given by Moses enlarged the role of government among the Children of Israel. God would have His chosen people Israel live in an atmosphere of order, peace and security, honoring Him amongst the nations around them. Their repeated abuse of the authority given them is the story of the Old Testament. Ultimately this pattern led to their condemnation of the innocent righteous Man, Jesus, to death by crucifixion.

God has never removed the responsibility from mankind to govern themselves, despite the many failures and abuses of the authority given them by God. John the Baptist did not challenge the right of Herod to govern. Neither Jesus nor His disciples challenged the authority of the High Priest, Herod or Pilate to take a man's life. They did criticize the unjust act of taking the life of One in whom they could find no fault. But there is no talk in the Bible of immorality of the death penalty. Paul here says "He (government) bears not the sword in vain." A functioning government serves as a reminder to people of their ultimate accountability for their deeds, not only before judges in this world but before the Judge of all the earth.

*Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*

Some rebel against government and reject the idea of accountability to God or to anybody else.

*2 Peter 2:10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government.*

*Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*

They cause themselves and others a lot of trouble. The first government a person encounters is parental. If parents do not teach their children obedience and subjection, who will? Will they be ready to obey God's command to repent, Acts 17:30? Or will they go into the lake of fire gnashing their teeth?

Resisting the government is resisting God. What an amazing concept, totally foreign to thinking in today's world! Believers should have no part in seeking the overthrow of the current authorities. David didn't, though anointed king and persecuted relentlessly by Saul.

*1 Samuel 24:6 And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.*

See also v.10; 26:9 - 23; & 2Samuel 1:14, 16, 21.

Daniel didn't. He served both his captors and their conquerors. Read Daniel 5. Also Daniel 4 reveals God's providential oversight of the kings of the earth. King Nebuchadnezzar, the first world ruler of the Times of the Gentiles, was moved to write a strong letter to all the kings of the earth. He related his forced humbling under the mighty hand of God, warning them that God is indeed sovereign over all. His letter should be required reading for every government official on earth. But they go on in ignorant bliss repeating history, the same mistakes over and over again, rising and falling, being enthroned and being deposed, landing in hades with their rivals and predecessors

*Jude 1:13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.*

Even in so-called Christian nations God is given lip service by authorities but largely ignored in practice. Though His infinite wisdom and power are at their disposal for the asking, sadly most never humble themselves to ask. Since He put them in authority He will help those who call upon Him for help. Some do. President Lincoln was one, although it is not clear if he was truly a saved man.

Revolution against any government is in reality a revolt against God for He put that government in power. When the colonists, in what is now the United States, rebelled against the King of England conscientious believers left the country. Some later emigrated to Minnesota settling near Trott Brook in what is now the City of Ramsey. God blessed them by bringing the gospel and the truth of the assembly to them by some of His faithful servants around 100 years ago. God has added others and here we are.

The believer is to voluntarily be in subjection to authorities for conscience sake not just for fear of punishment. That is, be in subjection because it is what

God wants. Respectfulness and subjection to those in government is actually to God, who has put them there. Not easy, if we see incompetence, injustice and corruption there, but let's do so anyway.

And pay our taxes as paying God's ministers. Do we complain about taxes? Doesn't everyone? Do we complain about giving to the Lord as part of our worship on every Lord's day? Same thing? One is required, the other is voluntary, but the same God is the recipient. His servants in the gospel are supported by us and His servants in governing our nation, states, cities, schools, etc. are supported by our taxes. We aren't exhorted to pay more than required but to pay what is due in a timely manner, after taking legal deductions and advantage of government income assists. Government is God's minister for good not only for vengeance, verse 4.

We are to respect those in authority because of the office they have been given by God, even if they personally are unworthy, haughty, crude, ruthless, selfish, prejudiced, immoral, filthy, cruel, unjust, etc. When Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans, the world emperor was Nero, a notoriously arrogant, cruel, despicably immoral man. This ruler later personally rejected Paul's message of grace and had him beheaded. The Bible is full of examples of every conceivable form of misrule and the terrible consequences reaped by the rulers and the people under their rule.

*Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

People yearn for a righteous rule, for "law and order," although not so much enforcement that their own sinful impulses and schemes are observed and restrained by the government. Perfect government on earth will come into reality when the Lord Jesus returns with us to reign for a thousand years with Satan locked up. Crime in those days will be punished justly and immediately. Sin will be suppressed, but not abolished. As soon as Satan is released, he will incite those feigning obedience to open rebellion. Thus is the heart of sinful man. They will be destroyed by fire from heaven, Revelation 20:7-10. Capital punishment indeed!

In this country there are many other issues related to government and governing. Democratic and other elected forms of governments present unique challenges and temptations to believers. If citizen participation in government is invited how much should a believer be engaged or involved? Is there an unequal yoke involved? Will the outcome be untoward conformance to the world?

Will it drag the believer from his walk of separation with the Lord and compromise his testimony? Should a believer be employed by the government? Believers are named in the epistles who were government workers. One in Corinth was a city manager or treasurer.

*Romans 16:23 Erastus the chamberlain of the city.*

Should a believer vote? For whom? Using what criteria? What if the one I vote for loses, or is elected and later found to be inept or corrupt? What if all citizens are required by law to vote? Should a believer run for legislative office? Executive office? Should a believer support someone one running for office? If a believer? If an unbeliever? Actively campaign for them? Should a believer campaign against someone in office? Should a believer become a sitting judge? (While believers can defend themselves before the authorities they should not initiate action against another believer before the world's judges, 1 Corinthians 6.) Should a believer in office seek to ban and punish sinful practices such as open sexual immorality, abortion, harvesting human embryos to grow various body parts, etc.? If a governmental official becomes a believer should he or she continue in office? All tough questions for one having a conscience toward God and desiring to honor Him and the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Be not conformed to this world . . ." 12:2.

*2 Timothy 2:4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

Paul's haunting appeal to the Corinthians rings out:

*1 Corinthians 4:8 Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.*

There is a time set for us to reign. It is to be with Christ. Don't jump the gun. He never sought to enter or reform the government in power while He was here. (He did rebuke the religious establishment of the day.) He paid taxes, was subject first to his parents, then later to other authorities, not railing against false accusers or unjust decisions. Neither did his disciples. We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth, Matthew 5.

*John 17:16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*

By Ron Canner, January 30, 2008