

THE CHRISTIAN AND GOVERNMENT
Robert Stapleton

Much has been said over the years in relation to exactly how the Christian is to relate to the government. Some have attempted to suggest that the Christian is obligated by God to totally abstain from any participation in governmental matters, even to the point of not voting or requesting assistance from Police Officials. Notice carefully the following quote, "If a Christian participates in a system of civil lawmaking, and if a law is made which is obviously contradictory to the law of God, he finds himself in an impossible position. He is ethically obligated to obey a law which he is spiritually bound to repudiate. What can he do? Should he uphold and defend laws which sanction the use of beverage alcohol, promiscuous divorce, abortion, and many other things which are contrary to the will of God? May he hold an office and help to execute and enforce those laws which violate his conscience and contradict the will of Jesus? Can anyone honestly answer in the affirmative? If not, then he most assuredly may not take part in the process by which such laws are made and such offices established."¹ Undoubtedly the careful reader can see numerous false assumptions in this quote. Further, they can see that "all that is necessary for the preservation of evil is for all good men to do nothing."

Brother Rogers even digs the hole deeper in relation to his pacifistic thinking with the following statement, "It would seem, then, that the servants of God may accept the assistance of those whom God has ordained to be His ministers unto them for good, but they may not call upon them nor rely upon them for the carrying out of the purpose of God."² By now most would be saying that brother Rogers undoubtedly has given way to strange fits of foolishness. Can you imagine the Christian husband standing by watching his wife as she is brutally raped while refusing to lift a hand to help, or flag down the passing Policeman, all in the name of love of God? On this point I cannot help but to agree with Foy E. Wallace as he states, "Take as an example the criminal rapist, what will love do-leave the criminal unopposed, and leave a helpless victim without the protection of resistance? On the basis of love itself, a choice would be inevitable. It was on this point that R.L. Whiteside said, that if he should see a criminal dragging an innocent woman or girl into a secluded spot to assault her, he would have no more compunction of conscience against shooting down that criminal than to shoot a mad dog attacking a child. We subscribe to that statement unreservedly."³

For many years the "battle" has raged in the church over capital punishment and whether the Christian should support such. It would seem to me that to suggest that capital punishment is "cruel and inhumane punishment" is to suggest that God is "cruel and inhumane" since He is the One who instigated His eternal law relative to capital punishment (Genesis 9:6). Further, He is the One who, through Paul, said, "...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." (Romans 13:4). There can be little doubt that the sword is viewed as a means of death in the Scriptures (Matthew 10:34; 25:51,52; Luke 22:36; Acts 16:27).

Clearly, we see that the Christian has a God-given responsibility when it comes to the civil government. One cannot study Romans 12:7-13:7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 without seeing that this is true. Paul's whole point, in the above mentioned Romans text, is to show that God has prepared a way whereby those who commit criminal acts against society are to be dealt with. In view of that we see that "every soul" is "subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but that of God: the powers that be are ordained of God (Romans 13:1).

Further, beyond the fact that we are "subject unto the higher powers" we see an obligation to financially support these powers thru taxation. Note carefully what is said in Romans 13:6 on this, "For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." Paul's point is that since God ordained these "higher powers" He also has ordained that they be supported financially thru the paying of "tribute".

Therefore, in conclusion, it appears that as Christians we have a responsibility to the government to obey its laws so long as they do not contradict the still higher law of God (Acts 4:18-20). Likewise, we have the responsibility of supporting those financially who are God's "ministers" "to execute wrath".

ENDNOTES

1. Rogers, Lee M., God and Government, Rogers, 1971, pp. 23,24.
2. Rogers, op cit., p. 27, emphasis mine.
3. Wallace, Foy E., The Sermon On The Mount and The Civil State, Foy E. Wallace Publications, 1967, p. 225.