

The Ministry

FOR GREATER POWER AND MORE EFFICIENCY



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No. 6

OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MAN—No. 1

AN EDITORIAL



WHEN Christ answered the question, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?" He settled a question which had perplexed the Jews for generations. The Jews held themselves to be the only people of whom God approved, harking back to the days of Abraham for evidence of being His chosen inheritance. With them it was not a matter of obedience but of birthright that made them God's peculiar people. They held in contempt all peoples other than themselves. They despised the Romans, who had control of their nation, and who collected taxes from the Jews with which to wage their wars and administer their government.

All through the childhood and youth of Christ there had been Roman supremacy over Palestine, the land promised to Israel. The Romans were a ruling, foreign power hated by the Jews. The Jews had started one rebellion after another, only to find themselves more and more in the iron grip of this supreme and relentless force. Christ could hardly have replied to the question asked by the Pharisees and Herodians, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?" in more surprising and stronger language than the words:

"Why tempt ye Me, ye hypocrites? Show Me the tribute money. And they brought unto Him a penny. And He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto Him, Cæsar's. Then saith He unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Matt. 22:17-21.

It has ever been God's plan that His people should be separated from the world, for He declares: "The kingdom of God is within you." The divine command is: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15. The prayer of Christ definitely defined the distinction between the Christian and the world:

"I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. . . . As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. . . . Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word." John 17:15-20.

When Christ was being persecuted by those who were determined that He should die, he said:

"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." John 18:36.

Here Christ claims a kingdom, but He at once declares that it is not of this world. If it belonged to this world, then would His servants fight. Thus Christ separates His people from the world, and plainly adds, "But now is My kingdom not from hence." Because of the nature of His kingdom, it being a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men, His servants cannot kill. On this very occasion Peter in his zeal undertook to defend Christ with his sword. It seemed right to Peter that he should defend his Lord and Master.

"Behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" Matt. 26:51-53.

If the use of the sword by true Christians can be justified on any grounds, it would seem that Peter was justified in defending the Son of God who was soon to be crucified by a mob. Christ is the Christian's perfect pattern. As He lived, we are to live. It would be unthink-

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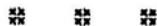
able that Christ and His chosen twelve should have joined the Roman army and followed the Roman eagle. Nor can we think that the people of God can live the Christian life when engaged in taking human life. The Duke of Wellington is quoted as saying: "Men of nice scruples about religion, have no business in the army or navy."

Christ established His church in the hearts of men. His kingdom is spiritual, not carnal. "When He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:20, 21. Thus Christ has a real kingdom over which He is King. Men whom He has called and chosen, and in whose hearts He has established His spiritual kingdom, are to be citizens of temporal kingdoms, which may tax them and control their actions toward the state and toward one another; but He demands that in the Christian's heart and affections and service God shall be given the first place.

Thus there comes between the state and the devout Christian a natural separation. The state represents this physical world. It says to all its citizens: "I demand your utmost loyalty, your highest degree of service. There shall be none who come between the state and its citizens. Your first duty is to the state." But said Christ: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Mark 12:30, 31. "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

God demands man's supreme love. Nor does He yield one iota of His demands. Should He do this, He would lose His subject. The service God demands is from the heart, the affections, the finest, noblest part of man. Nor is He willing to divide this loyalty, and give part to the state. This is made very clear by His own words: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Matt. 6:24.

I. H. E.



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No. 7

OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MAN—No. 2

AN EDITORIAL



HE church of Christ is an anomaly in the world. Physically it is a part of the world, and has to do with material, natural things; but its heart and all its affections are not of the world, but are given to God, a spiritual Being who absorbs all that is valuable and precious in man. The Christian cannot divide his affections. To him the spiritual kingdom established in his heart is so much more highly esteemed than any earthly kingdom that he refuses to set his affections on this world. Yet he cheerfully pays tribute, and obeys all governmental laws that do not contravene his loyalty and love to God.

When, therefore, a state or a government demands that its citizens recognize the state as supreme in matters of conscience, and that it be obeyed, regardless of the right or wrong of its demands, it usurps the place of God and becomes an oppressive power. When the state attempts to control the consciences of men in spiritual things and in obedience to God, it exceeds its prerogatives, and enters into the realm where each citizen must decide whether he will obey God or man.

One good thing about the war question is that this controversy has been settled by the word of God, and settled right. Christ lived on earth in troublous times; the state was supreme under Roman domination. The Romans permitted the Jews a good deal of liberty, because that was the easiest way to keep the peace. Those who asked about paying tribute did not really desire light on the question. They asked the question to involve Christ. If He said, "Yes; pay tribute to Cæsar," the Jews would condemn Christ. Should He say, "No; pay no tribute to Rome," then Cæsar would take offense. Christ's answer met their cunning, and sent them away confounded.

And it has been an answer for devout Christians for all time. The Christian has a dual duty—one toward God and another toward worldly powers. God's requirements never in-

fringe on the legitimate claims of Cæsar. Neither has Cæsar the right to infringe on the demands of God. The two realms must ever be separate and distinct. It was so understood by Christ when He said, "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

In apostolic times the high priests had imprisoned the apostles who were in Jerusalem, and the Romans left the Jews somewhat free to carry on their own religious rites and worship. While under Roman jurisdiction the religious rulers of the Jews had forbidden the apostles to speak about Christ in the temple. Because the disciples had disobeyed and taught in the temple, they had arrested some of the apostles and put them in prison. An angel came and opened the prison doors, and brought the apostles forth, saying, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Now, that preaching was forbidden, and was the offense for which the apostles were imprisoned. A council was called and officers went to the temple and brought the apostles before the council, saying, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, *We ought to obey God rather than men.*" Acts 5:20, 28, 29.

To the early church this did not mean disrespect to earthly governments, but it meant that when earthly governments required of the Christian what God forbids, each Christian must choose whom he will obey. Peter declared, "We ought to obey God rather than men." The New Testament exhorts the church to be obedient to earthly governments. Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth

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the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 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 unto him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." Rom. 13:1-7.

To Titus, a Christian pastor, Paul wrote: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." Titus 3:1.

In all civil requirements by the state the Christian cheerfully obeys when those requirements do not contravene his duty to his God. The Christian, like his Master, is ever ready to do acts of mercy in ministering to the sick and afflicted; cheerfully he cares for the wounded and dying, he feeds the hungry and clothes the naked. In war and peace he does all this as a service to his Lord and Master. But to take human life is contrary to the law of his God. Nor is it because he is a coward or filled with fear that he cannot kill his fellows; but because he owes an allegiance to God that is more to him than this mortal life, for to him it means eternal life or eternal death.

The church has always had to suffer, and yield its physical bodies to the state, when the state encroached upon personal religious liberty; but the state has no divine right to enter the realm of conscience and usurp the place that God claims as His own. The genuine Christian can suffer, he can go to prison, he can die; but he cannot allow any earthly power to usurp the loyalty and devotion that he owes to God and has pledged to Him. The state has a right to financial support and to loyal service from all Christians in all things civil that God approves. The Christian is ever willing to do helpful service for the sick and wounded. But when the state would control in the realm of conscience, and demand from Christians service forbidden by God, it exceeds its authority.

The question, "Can a Christian become a soldier and fight, killing his fellow beings because the state demands it?" is a moot question with many. The true Christian can never fight his fellows for personal ends. All wrongs that he is caused to suffer, he endures. He does not kill or murder his fellows. His loyalty to God will not allow him to revenge himself in any way, regardless of injustice or severe personal injury. Christians are charged: "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Rom. 12:19. In the early church it was thought that

followers of Christ should be separate from the world, and they did not voluntarily join the army. They endured all kinds of persecution, and even suffered death for their faith, but they would not take life.

When Constantine outwardly accepted Christianity, he did so as a converted pagan general. Later he persuaded Christians to fight in his army. From then on professed Christians were less and less conscientious; and the more worldly the church grew, the more willing to join the government in war did she become. Later the church under the Papacy promoted wars, and not only fought against pagan and heathen peoples, but also carried on wars in the name of the church to exterminate heresy and to make herself supreme. No one can look to pagan Rome, nor to the Papacy, as a pattern of true piety or as an example for Christians to follow, notwithstanding many noble examples of deep personal piety and godliness.

The Christian is a citizen of an unseen country, whose King reigns in the heart. His citizenship is in heaven, and he looks for a "city . . . whose builder and maker is God." He recognizes earthly governments as ordained of God to punish evildoers; but he is unable to obey laws where obedience compels him to break the moral law of his Creator.

Undoubtedly the conflict between the state on the one hand and the true people of God on the other, must ever have conflicting views of the duty and the rights of the Christian. The state generally believes in war, and often in conquest; the Christian believes in obedience to the state for the good of humanity, and is cheerfully obedient to all that the state requires when he is permitted to worship God as he understands the Holy Scriptures to teach. But he does not believe that he can be a Christian and take human life. To him this is a matter of conscience. In this realm the state has no divine right to interfere. "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

I. H. E.