

THE CHRISTIAN A CITIZEN OF TWO KINGDOMS

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1 Peter 2:9-14

When a teacher in one of our public schools asked her pupils to give the pledge of allegiance to their country, some of the children who belonged to a certain sect refused to salute the American flag. Were they acting according to the teaching of the Bible?

Edward E. Hale, in his *A Man Without a Country*, tells the story of a man who was not allowed to return to the United States because he cursed his country and refused to be loyal to it. Did this man thereby cease to be subject to any nation? What does it mean to be a *citizen*? In what sense is a Christian a citizen?

Our government seeks through its schools to train the youth of the land to become good citizens. Special classes in citizenship are also held with groups of adults. But the results do not always measure up to expectations. Since this instruction lacks a religious basis, it does not train the heart and the conscience and does not offer the best motive for being a good citizen. But it is altogether different when a person knows what God demands of him and when he turns to the Bible for instruction also in matters pertaining to his conduct as a citizen.

The Christian Is a Citizen of Christ's Kingdom

Every person is a subject of two kingdoms, one of which is spiritual, the other earthly. The unbeliever is in the kingdom of Satan, the believer belongs to the kingdom of Christ. Both the godly and the ungodly are citizens of an earthly kingdom or country, without any difference in the nature of their citizenship.

While admitting that the Christians are subject to the government under which they live, the Scriptures speak of the believers as being not of this world. They are not a part of the world in so far as it is ungodly and the enemy of God; they are not worldly-minded, and they do not regard this earth as their real and permanent home. They are like travelers passing through a foreign country on the way to their true country, "pilgrims," as pictured by John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress*. Heaven is their true fatherland and home (Heb. 13:14).

According to a more exact rendering Phil. 3:20 reads: "Our citizenship [commonwealth] is in heaven." The believers are called "strangers and pilgrims" (foreigners) on earth, (1 Pet. 2:11; Heb. 11:13). They are a "holy nation" and "the people of God," (1 Pet. 2:9, 10). As such they look eagerly for "a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God," (Heb. 11:10, 16). They "desire a better country" than the one in which they live while on earth, "that is, an heavenly" country. Through faith they have become "fellow citizens with the saints" and members "of the household of God," (Eph. 2:19). They are in the kingdom of Christ, which here on earth exists in the hearts of the believers, (Luke 17:20, 21).

Faith in Christ alone makes a person a member of His kingdom, or the Church. Through Baptism we already entered this heavenly kingdom; through the means of grace we are kept in “the communion of saints.” Whoever remains outside of this kingdom will be lost eternally. Therefore our chief concern must be to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,” to remain in faith unto the end (Cp. Matt. 6:33; 24:13). This includes also bringing forth fruits of faith and living a godly life, (Luke 1:75; Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:9b; Eph. 5:8). An important part of our Christian life is our conduct as citizens of our country.

As citizens of Christ’s spiritual kingdom it is our duty “to serve God in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life,” (Luke 1:75). We are to seek chiefly those things which are above, (Matt. 6:33). The kingdom of God is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,” (Rom. 14:17). Even though we live in this world, we are not to be of the world, (John 15:19; 17:16; 1 John 5:4). “Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s,” (Rom. 14:8). “Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,” (1 Cor. 10:31).

However, from the nature of our heavenly citizenship and from our duties toward Christ and His Church it does not follow that this prevents us from being loyal to the country in which we live, as some sects have falsely taught. As Christians we are obliged to be good citizens on earth, and because we serve Christ, we are all the better able to serve our country.

The Christian Is a Loyal Citizen of His Country

Every person who lives on earth is a subject of the government under which he lives. Even if he dwells in a country as an *alien*, without the rights of citizenship, he must submit to the laws of that country, and he is also a subject of some foreign country which claims his allegiance. A person becomes a citizen of a nation either by birth or by naturalization. As a citizen he is subject to the government that rules over him.

The Word of God does not exempt any person from being subject to an earthly government. It speaks rather plainly on this matter and demands of all men that they should take their citizenship seriously. The believers, in particular, are to measure up to the highest standards of loyalty to their country. The Apostle tells the Christians that, because they are citizens of heaven, they should be model citizens of the nation to which they belong, (1 Peter 2: 13-15).

God regards all men as citizens of a country. The Old Testament speaks of men and nations as under civil government. Jesus was enrolled at His birth as a subject of the Roman Empire under Caesar Augustus. St. Paul made good use of his Roman citizenship. The Savior acknowledged the authority of the Roman government. The Apostles repeatedly reminded the Christians that they were to be subject to the civil authorities. The Lutheran Confessions say:

The kingdom of Christ is spiritual, to wit, beginning in the heart the knowledge of God, the fear of God and faith, eternal righteousness, and eternal life. Meanwhile it permits us outwardly to use legitimate political ordinances of every nation in which we live, just as it permits us to use

medicine, or the art of building, or food, drink, air. Neither does the Gospel bring new laws concerning the civil state, but commands that we obey present laws, whether they have been framed by heathen or by others, and that in this obedience we should exercise love. (The Apology, Art. XVI, *Trigl.* 331.)

We are to give evidence of our heavenly citizenship by being good citizens on earth, (Matt. 5:16). Since God has placed us in this world, we have definite obligations to our fellow men and our country, which we are to perform out of obedience to Him. Citizenship entitles us to rights and imposes duties. We should know what these rights and duties are and have a correct understanding of our relationship to the State.

The Bible gives us the true solution to many problems that pertain to civil government and citizenship. It offers us instruction and guidance that will prevent us from falling into error and confusion, which cause some people to have false views regarding matters of government. (Cp. Jude 8; 2 Peter 2:10-13). As long as we are in this world, we are to “render unto Caesar” (the government) “the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s,” (Matt. 22:21).

“Love constrains us to put ourselves on an equality with those among whom we sojourn, since that can be done without peril to our faith.” (Luther.)

A Christian may from lack of proper knowledge not always show the right attitude toward his government and yet be a believer in spite of this weakness. But he cannot consistently claim membership in Christ’s kingdom and at the same time refuse to acknowledge the earthly authority that God has placed over him. Whoever will not submit to God’s Word is not a believer. God’s will in regard to our relationship to civil government is clearly expressed in the Bible.

Discussions by groups on matters of civil government in the light of Scripture are timely and important, particularly because of the babel of conflicting and erroneous opinions which confound the people at the present day.

God’s children must get their bearings and must take their stand on the everlasting truth. Even in the visible Church there is much error and uncertainty regarding the Biblical doctrine of civil government. Some sects maintain that the Christians may have nothing to do whatever with the affairs of State and that they owe allegiance to no earthly power. The Catholics have horribly perverted the teachings of the Scriptures on the subject, and many Reformed churches have never had a clear understanding in the matter.

Various anti-Christian and revolutionary movements, *e.g.*, Communism, are sweeping over the world today and seeking to destroy the established governments. Our age is particularly a time of lawlessness, anarchy, and revolt. Unstable elements are inflamed by greedy demagogues and radical agitators to do away with all forms of organized government. The liberties guaranteed by the Constitution are at stake. With the downfall of the State the Church is also bound to suffer.

Martin Luther set forth the correct doctrine of civil government. His teachings, based upon Scripture, are reflected in the Constitution of the United States by the special providence of God. It is therefore important that we, as the heirs of the Reformation,

hold the Biblical view of civil government and that we make these principles known to our fellow citizens as much as possible. As Christians we should do everything in our power to promote the welfare of our country and to oppose all views and movements that would deprive us of the blessings which we enjoy as citizens of the United States or of the British Commonwealth.

It is no idle boasting to say that the Lutheran Church has followed the right course also in regard to civil government. By adhering strictly to the Scripture principle and submitting to its authority, Luther was able to present correctly also the matters pertaining to man's earthly life. The best forms of government have developed in countries where the influence of the Reformation was most strongly felt. The members of the Lutheran Church have been frequently complimented as being exemplary citizens. In Iceland, which is almost entirely Lutheran, crime has been almost unknown. In a Midwestern community of our country which is composed altogether of Lutherans, the town jail has never had an inmate. Where the Bible rules, the civil government has an easy task.

However, Lutherans have not always been as great a blessing to their country as they should have been. They may, in general, be decent and law-abiding citizens, but they are often not active enough in making their influence felt for the betterment of politics and civil life.

Some church members are woefully ignorant of the functions and affairs of our government. Christians should strive to obtain a good knowledge of civics and politics in order to be able to serve their country better. Special courses are offered by schools and by the government. Good books are also obtainable. There is very little excuse for not being informed about civic matters.

Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
 This is my own my native land?
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned
As home his footsteps he hath turned
 From wandering on a foreign strand?

If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no minstrel raptures swell,
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim.
Despite those titles, power, and pelf
The wretch, concentered all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonored, and unsung.

Sir Walter Scott. From the
Lay of the Last Minstrel