

The Christian and Civil Government (10th)

(We will continue our study of reviewing some of the scriptural references as listed in the confessions in today's lesson. This lesson centers around I Timothy 2:1-2 and the Christian praying for in authority over us in civil government.)

As we continue our review of the scriptural references of the confessions, our attention is now passages related to praying for those in authority over us in civil government. One clear passage regarding this is I Timothy 2:1-2. It reads as follows: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." While this passage does encourage Christians to pray for those in civil government that are over us, this is not the context of the overall passage. In fact, the context extends at least to verse six and the general subject matter is that of salvation, and though verse four speaks that God would "have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," it does not imply universal redemption. The "all men" of verse four is instructing us that God would have all kinds (or types) of men (people) to be saved. That the "all men" of verse four does not include each and every human is obvious since there were people already dead and under the judgment of God prior to the death of Christ. There were people like the rich man of Luke 16, who had died and in a state or place of torment, prior to the death of Christ as well as when Paul wrote this to Timothy. Nevertheless, there are men of all kinds who are and will be saved, and this salvation extends to "kings" and "all that are in authority" as well. All too often people, and sad to say many Christians, spend more time griping and complaining about our leaders than praying for them. Can you imagine the difference our country would be if all (or even the majority) of our rulers were Christian? If lawmakers, representatives, and other civil authorities were Christians no doubt countries would be more peaceful and wars would likely cease. Likewise, if more professing Christians and congregations would spend more time praying for their leaders there would possibly be less bickering and backbiting among the population. It may well be noted that the passage did not say to pray for those that you agree with in their political ideologies. It is obvious that the civil leaders in Paul and Timothy's days were not people who shared their views about life in general and especially regarding God. As when Peter exhorted those to whom he wrote in his first epistle and said to submit "to every ordinance of man" and to "honor the king," (I Peter 2:13-17) Nero was in power in the Roman government. Christians are to pray for those in authority in a dictatorial government as well as in a constitutional republic or democracy. Obviously, we are not to pray that the Lord would bless such leaders to be blessed in their wicked practices, but we should pray that the Lord might change their depraved hearts and cause them to bow to the sovereign Lord of creation. Equally, we can pray that if the Lord does not see fit to save them that He might at least restrain them and allow us to be blessed to live a life of peace and safety as we live godly unto the Lord. When Jeremiah prophesied of the judgment of God on Israel by the Babylonian government, the Lord had him to instruct Israel to "seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace," Jeremiah 29:7. After all, those in authority are there by the sovereign rule of God, Did not the Lord tell Nebuchadnezzar that when He was through with him that "the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whosoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men," Daniel 4:17? And later, the Lord instructed Daniel to inform Belshazzar that his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, was driven out to live like an animal until he "knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and *that* he appointeth over it whomsoever he will," Daniel. 5:21. This same God removed the kingdom from Babylon and gave it to the Medes and Persians, Daniel 5:28. Every Bible believer knows that from Genesis to Revelation,

there are an abundance of testimonies where the Lord ruled over kings and nations in every generation. Therefore, since our God has given abundant proof of Him ruling in the lives of kings and nations all through history, we should be encouraged to pray for those in authority in government in our day. We say that He is the same God today as recorded in the Scriptures. Since He has commanded us to pray for those in authority, why are we so apathetic in praying for them? Though they have no right in the house of God to execute their authority there, we recognize that God has established them over us in society and that we should pray for them.

Joseph was a man of great wisdom and a man who served God whether in prison or as the Prime Minister of Egypt. Obviously, Egypt worshiped many gods and did not know the one true God, though God made Joseph to be “a father to Pharaoh,” Genesis 45:8. This means that Joseph was a man that instructed or gave wisdom and advice to Pharaoh with regard to ruling Egypt, Genesis 41:37-45. (It might be noted that though Joseph’s wife was the daughter of a priest, or possibly a prince, in Egypt, he still worshiped and honored God, Genesis 41:50-52.) Though Joseph was in such high position, as a Hebrew, he did not eat with the Egyptians, Genesis 43:32. All of this is to say that Joseph, who was a just and righteous man that served God and was in such a high position in civil government, did not try to force Egypt or those who came to him for grain during the drought to worship God in truth. As previously stated, he lived a virtuous and holy life, but he did not seek to force his beliefs on others and still served in a pagan government and sought the good of the king and very likely prayed for him.

Another obvious example of a godly man serving under worldly governments is that of Daniel. He served in the Babylonian government and under multiple rulers in the government of the Medes and Persians. Daniel lived such a life in honor to the true God and in obedience and faithfulness to the rulers over him that his enemies could not find any fault in him, Daniel 6:4. They could only “find any occasion against” Daniel was “concerning the law of his God,” Daniel 6:5. Obviously, Daniel was to obey God rather than man. By studying the book of Daniel it is seen that Daniel honored the kings, prayed for the kings, served the kings faithfully, and never tried to force his religious beliefs on the kings or their governments. The only time Daniel was in violation of a law of the state or civil government was when the law was created for the purpose of trying to cause him to stop praying or to get him in trouble with the government. Nevertheless, God vindicated Daniel. While God may not deliver everyone as He did Daniel, the principle of rendering to God that which belongs to Him and to the civil government that with belongs there is found in the life of Daniel, as well as in the life of Joseph.

Yes, Jesus did tell us that in the latter days there would be “wars and rumours of wars,” “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places,” and that believers shall be delivered “up to be afflicted” and killed, and “be hated of all nations for” His “name’s sake,” and that because “iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold,” Matthew 24:6-12. However, this is no reason that we should cease praying for those in authority over us in civil government. Do we not believe that in the midst of a chaotic and crumbling society that the Lord can hedge us about so that we might be blessed to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,” II Timothy 2:2? Even if the Lord sees fit that we be persecuted and afflicted by the civil government, we are to still live “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,” Titus 2:12. May the Lord be pleased to grant a revival of prayer and stir up our hearts to pray for those in civil government. Yes, if the government becomes our enemy, our Lord commanded, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,” Matthew 5:44-48.

Before closing, allow me to give a personal experience. I was greatly blessed today (This occurred in February of 2020) as I was driving in my car and listening to a local “Christian radio station.” It was during their “prayer time” and in the prayer being broadcasted, the man prayed for our government and those in authority over us, and though he could not mention all of those in each branch of government, he did mention each branch. He did, however, mention by name President Trump, Vice-president Pence, and Nancy Pelosi, and this prayer was about a week after the impeachment proceedings in the Senate and the State of the Union address by President Trump. It made me stop and think how one-sided my prayer might have been and that my own prayers need to be revised as I, too, strive to pray for those in authority over me.

Our time is up for today. The Lord willing we will look at more passages regarding this subject matter in future studies.