

Charles St-Onge
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**Intercession for All in Authority:
The Rule of the Church and of the State**

1 Timothy 2:1-8

(1 Ti 2:1-8) ¹ I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. ⁷ And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. ⁸ I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

THE STATE EXERCISES THE LAW IN SOCIETY,
THE CHURCH HERALDS THE GOSPEL

I. What does Paul suggest the Church's attitude be toward the State?

It's a great question to ask. What does Paul actually say about the Christian's attitude toward the Church and toward the State? Some would suggest that Paul wants the Christian to be an...

a) Activist:

In other words, should the Christian be about making the state more "Christian?" Should he or she attack those laws and institutions we know to be wrong?

Many Christians take this approach. In fact, one website called "worldnetdaily.com" supports vigorously the view that to be a Christian means to be a citizen crusader. They tend to be what we might call the "right wing." The "right" sees the Christian activist as responsible for getting the state to enforce "Christian morality." They tend to view "Christian morality" as consisting almost entirely of sexual morals and corporate freedom from regulation and overtaxation.

But there are also Christian activists on "the left." On the left, there are those who want the State to govern according to the Sermon on the Mount. In other words, "Do not judge, lest you be judged," there should be no taking of oaths, we should "turn the other cheek."

b) Passive?

Well, if Paul doesn't want the Christian to be an activist, what does he want? Does he want the Christian to take a passive attitude toward the state? Is it impossible for a Christian to be involved at all in the affairs of government? Is that what Paul suggests in his epistles?

What he urges is prayer for the State, that we as Christians give thanks for our governments, and ask God to look out for them. He suggests this with a simple end in mind. He says pray for the government, first of all, “That we may live peaceful and quiet lives” and secondly, “That all men may come to the knowledge of the truth.” In other words, the State is instituted by God, and we should therefore pray for the State. We should honor it as a gift from God, to the end that the Church might do IT’S work.

II. What does Paul suggest as the attitude of the Church?

Well if that’s what Paul has to say about the Christian attitude toward the state, what does he say about the right attitude for the Church? What is the Church’s responsibility and work? Are we called on to...

a) Judge?

Is it the Church’s job to point out what is right and wrong, to train up people with good “moral values” and make people be good citizens? There’s not really anything in this passage that suggests the Church’s job is to reform or judge the state. Paul never urges his churches to write letters to their senator to get Roman law changed, and never urges them to march on their governor’s office to protest unjust arrests and ask for welfare reform.

b) Proclaim!

What you will find in Paul’s epistles is a call to “herald” or “proclaim” the Gospel. That’s why Paul has such a clear statement of Gospel in 1 Timothy 2 – possibly one of the clearest statements of Gospel in the Bible, right up there with John 3:16:

“There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men.” (1 Tim. 1:5-6)

That is the Church’s business main, chief business. Not the business of reforming society, but the business of building a parallel and new society in the midst of the old one. We don’t do it by war or imprisonment or other punishments. We do it instead by calling to repentance and preaching the Gospel of Christ. We tell people the Good News, that there is ONE God, and one MEDIATOR between him and us, ONE man who reconciled us to God. That one man is not Mohammed, or Buddha, or Confucius, but JESUS of NAZARETH, and him alone.

III. How do we keep the two straight?

How do we keep straight the right attitude toward the State, and right Christian attitude toward the Church? For the average 1st century Christian, this was not a problem. If you were a Christian, you prayed for the government. At the same time, you quietly hoped you didn’t have to disobey for religious reasons. The soldiers and administrators did their job, which was to keeping the streets safe, fighting wars, etc. You did your job, which was to living an honorable life and pray for the government, not giving any one any reason to arrest you and discredit the faith. You did all that, no matter that the

governors were all Roman pagans – or worse, that they all supported abortion, tolerated homosexuality, and had basically no concept of social welfare.

Nowadays, of course, the situation is much more complicated: *you will all have to vote!* In other words, the Church and the State combine and collide *in you!* In addition, Christianity at one time played a FORMATIVE role in society. Or at least, “New Testament morals” did. Even Thomas Jefferson, who slept around with his wife, kept slaves and ran election ads that would make Kerry and Bush flinch thought the New Testament had some “pretty good ideas.”

Now, however, the government is doing many things that are clearly “immoral.” Consider just as a few examples the growing support, once again, for gay marriage, abortion, the lack of law and order in many of our cities, etc. etc.

Not only that, but many of the things good governments do that are “moral” aren’t being done here. The US is the only developed country without some form of national health care. The arguments used against creating some form of national government, as one writer has pointed out, are basically the same arguments that the landlords of 19th century Paris, France used against city-wide garbage collection. I imagine your garbage is collected by the (shudder) government. But I think pretty much everyone here believes that’s a good thing. Our government has also abdicated its God-given responsibility to maintain law and order to its citizens:

“If we had more guns in the hands of law-abiding citizens we would have less crime in D.C.,” Bob Levy, a senior fellow the Cato Institute.

To add confusion to matters, I hear a lot of talk among some Christians that the United States is involved in a “holy war” in the Middle East. That somehow the United States is the “chosen land” of God, and that we need to protect God’s other chosen land, a now earthly piece of real estate called “Israel.” etc. etc.

So how do we handle our attitude toward government now? All of this will make a lot more sense if we keep the authority of the State, on the one hand, and the Responsibility of the Church, on the other, distinct. Not “separate” – but “distinct.” I learned about the whole difference between “separate” and “distinct” back home, where Quebec wanted to be recognized as a “distinct” society within Canada, rather than become a “separate” state apart from Canada. The difference is important!

Martin Luther was once asked a serious question by a ruler and soldier: Can you be a soldier, fight in wars, and still be a Christian? Luther had some wise words to share in response to this question, a response I think we all need to hear today:

Christians do not fight and have no worldly rulers among them. Their government is a spiritual government, and, according to the Spirit, they are subjects of no one but Christ. Nevertheless, as far as body and property are concerned, they are subject to worldly rulers and owe them obedience. If worldly rulers call upon them to fight, then they ought to and must fight and be obedient, not as Christians, but as members of the state and

obedient subjects. Christians therefore do not fight as individuals or for their own benefit, but as obedient servants of the authorities under whom they live.

In other words, we are Christians first, who happen (second) to live in a country called the United States. As Christians, we forgive one another, pray for one another, and support one another. As citizens, we may be called on to fight or even wage war – but as *citizens*, and *never* as Christians.

What is the role of the Church then? And what is the role of the State? Luther went on to illustrate the New Testament teaching on this point:

God has established two kinds of government among men. The one is spiritual; it has no sword, but it has the Word, by means of which men are to become good and righteous, so that with this righteousness they may attain eternal life. He administers this righteousness through the word, which he has committed to the preachers.

The other kind is worldly government, which works through the sword so that those who do not want to be good and righteous to eternal life may be forced to become good and righteous in the eyes of the world. He administers this righteousness through the sword. And although God will not reward this kind of righteousness with eternal life, nonetheless, he still wishes peace to be maintained among men and rewards them with temporal blessings. He gives rulers much more property, honor, and power than he gives to others so that they may serve him by administering this temporal righteousness. (p. 99)

In other words, as Christians, as the Body of Christ, as the Church, we take up arms against no one. We do exactly as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: we turn the other cheek, we cheerfully accept persecution, and we bear our crosses willingly, whatever they may be. We do, in fact, exactly what Paul says in 1 Timothy:

- 1) We pray for the government and those in authority over us.
- 2) We live quiet and peaceable lives where we find ourselves
- 3) We tell people about Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man.

As citizens, however, we don't "forgive sins." God doesn't ask countries to "turn the other cheek" He doesn't ask judges to "forgive and forget." He doesn't tell duly appointed police officers to "be at peace with everyone." Paul says in Romans 13:

(Ro 13:1-3) ¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.

And Peter says in 1 Peter:

(1 Pe 2:13-17) ¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good

you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. ¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Now perhaps, after the election on November 2, we will find that our leader is one whom we see as a **tyrant**. Either because we think they aren't wielding the sword when they should, or perhaps because they're wielding the sword when they shouldn't. In that case, what should we do?

I remind you again of the words of Paul in 1 Timothy:

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”

(From Luther) Let me tell you a story: There was once “a widow who stood and prayed for her tyrant most devoutly, asking God to give him long life, etc. The tyrant heard it and was astonished because he knew very well that he had done her much harm, and that this was not the usual prayer for tyrants. People do not ordinarily pray such prayers for tyrants, so he asked her why she prayed thus for him. She answered, “I had ten cows when your grandfather lived and ruled. He took two of them and I prayed that he might die and that your father might become lord. This is what happened, and your father took three cows. I prayed again that you might become lord, and that your father might die. Now you have taken four cows, and so I am praying for you, for now I am afraid that your successor will take the last cow and everything that I have.”

I finish with one more quote from Luther's, “Can a Soldier, Too, Be Saved?”

Do you understand these fables? There is as great a difference between changing a government and improving it as the distance from heaven to earth. It is easy to change a government, but it is difficult to get one that is better, and the danger is that you will not. Why? Because it is not in our will or power, but only in the will and the hand of God... The mad mob, however, is not so much interested in how things can be improved, but only that things be changed. Then if things are worse, they will want something still different. Thus they get bumblebees instead of flies, and in the end they get hornets instead of bumblebees. They are like the frogs of old who could not put up with a log for lord; instead they got a stork that pecked their heads and devoured them.

God has thrown us into the world, under the power of the devil. As a result, we have no paradise here. Rather, at any time we can expect all kinds of misfortune to body, spouse, child, property, and honor. And if there is one hour in which there are less than ten disasters or an hour in which we can even survive, we ought to say, “How good God is to me! He has not sent every disaster to me in this one hour.” How is that possible? Indeed, as long as I live under the devil's power, I should not have one happy hour. That is what we teach our people.

Of course, you may do something else. You may build yourself a paradise where the devil cannot get in so that you need not expect the rage of any tyrant. Actually things go too well for us. We are too happy and content. We do not know how good God is to us and we believe neither that God takes care of us nor that the devil is so evil. We want to be nothing but wicked scoundrels and yet receive nothing but good from God.

It would seem sometimes that our country is choosing the way of all flesh, not the way of God. Perhaps we would like something different, a government that supports our Christian values, either right wing or left wing. At that moment, stop and pray. First, to give thanks that everything IS going so well for us. Then, ask God not to destroy everything because of the faithlessness around us. And last of all, take a deep breath, and make...

Requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Amen.