

April - June 2010

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

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**BIDEFORD**

## FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

*“And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* (Acts 1:7-8)

This section of Holy Scripture represents the last form in which the Great Commission is reported. These are the closing words of Christ at His tenth post-resurrection appearance. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles contains the early history of the New Testament Church. It was written by Luke, and is a ‘journal’ of the work and actions of the Apostles. It covers a period of over thirty years, commencing with the Ascension of the Lord, and extending to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome.

The chief characteristic of this fourth account of the Lord’s Commission is the emphasis placed on the Holy Spirit. In fact, this is a subject stressed by Luke throughout the twenty-eight chapters of the book. Nor is it without design, for God, by sovereign inspiration, is demonstrating that the New Testament era is pre-eminently the age of the Holy Spirit. This record then, is of great interest and instruction.

*“And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me”* (Acts 1:4). The Lord being about to leave His disciples commands them to remain in Jerusalem, **waiting** for the promise from the Father. Here is described one of the most difficult aspects of the Christian life – waiting. To work for the promise would have been easier for these men, than simply to wait for it. Whenever a promise is made to an individual, they inevitably experience a restless earnestness to have the promise fulfilled. There is something inherent

in human nature that objects to waiting! Nevertheless, amongst Christ's final instructions is included this of tarrying in Jerusalem, being patient and abiding His time. This command was obviously somewhat irksome to the disciples as is evidenced by their words in the following verses: "*they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6).

It is important to keep all these details within context. Christ is speaking and instructing them of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God; but it is apparent from this response that the disciples were still very earthly in their views; they were still influenced by the Jewish tradition and national expectation. Alas, how powerful a thing religious 'tradition' can become – what a snare of the Devil to hold and bind people! These men failed to appreciate what the 'promise of the Father' was, and the reality concerning the Kingdom of God. Their minds travelled back over the years to the magnificence of David and Solomon. Now the Jews were under the dominion of Rome, and they longed for a deliverer who would unfurl the banner of Judah again, and with lion-like authority restore Israel to national glory, making Jerusalem the 'joy of the whole earth'. However, as the lesson being set at this point was one of patience and waiting, the Lord confines His reply to the matter of time only: "*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power*" (Acts 1:7). He knew full well that the Holy Spirit, so soon to come, would enlighten them as to the true nature of the Kingdom. As recently as His discourse in the Upper Room the Lord had said concerning the Holy Spirit: "*Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth*" (John 16:13).

There has long been a desire among some to lift the veil upon future events. Many men have selected certain portions of Holy Writ and combined them into a 'theory', thereby claiming to interpret prophetic Scripture, often making wild and sensational predictions. This is not

only folly; it is the cause of much confusion and damage to God's people as with every new Middle-Eastern conflict or significant date, fresh calculation and speculation erupts. The Word of God makes clear: "*But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is*" (Mark 13:32-33). These matters are not to be pried into, nor theorised upon.

However, this is not to suggest that the Lord's Second Advent should not be eagerly anticipated. This attitude is exhorted in numerous Scriptures. In particular it should form a regular theme of the saints' prayers: "*Thy kingdom come*" (Matthew 6:10); "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*" (Revelation 22:20); "*How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*" (Revelation 6:10). As level-headed, spiritually-minded believers are occupied with the hope and prospect of the Lord's return, they will be stirred to holiness and faithful service: "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure*" (1 John 3:2-3). The Lord's words will be obeyed "*occupy till I come*" (Luke 19:13), bringing forth fruit with patience, as He instructed (cf Luke 8:15). Never must the Christian lose sight of the fact that even the Heavenly Husbandman, "*waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it*" (James 5:7).

A great lesson was set for the disciples in this one word, '*wait*'. With the waiting there must always be an 'occupying' – to work, and watch, and pray without ceasing. Occasionally the saints are beset by anxieties concerning the future, as were the believers at Thessalonica. To those of this disposition Paul wrote: "*the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ*" (2 Thessalonians 3:5). How many parents, ministers and pastors long to see the results of their

spiritual labours, but instead have to plod on with no evidence of fruit, or success. Even so the Israelites maintained a weary and unproductive course around Jericho many days; but **eventually** the walls fell down! (cf Joshua 6). Similarly Elijah waited on Mount Carmel, and as he waited, he prayed, and seemed to accomplish nothing; the heavens remained as brass. Until at length, afar off on a distant horizon there arose a little cloud, like a man's hand; and ere long there was a sound of an abundance of rain. (cf 1 Kings 18). Man cannot make the seed sprout, but he has to sow it, and having sown, must **wait** for the harvest.

Consider now the 'promise of the Father': "*...wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence*" (Acts 1:4-5). The promise of which Christ was speaking is the coming of the Holy Spirit. The great fact associated with this promise was that the New Testament age would be the period of the Holy Spirit's invincible operation. The work of Christ on earth was now finalised: He, the Second Person of the Godhead must return to Heaven and the Holy Ghost, the Third Person, must come into the world. The Lord had previously said: "*Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you*" (John 16:7). The necessity of Christ leaving the earth before the Holy Spirit could come is rather mysterious. Yet the Scriptures make clear that the whole plan of Redemption is designed to set forth the sublime mystery of the Trinity. Prior to the Incarnation, the person of God the Father was foremost. The Son came into fuller view at Bethlehem; in His life, death, resurrection and mediatorial work. So now was the Holy Spirit to come into prominence, in the next great phase of the Redemptive work. In this, the mysteries of Godhead are seen – how that all spiritual blessings proceed **from** God the Father, **through** God the Son, **by** God the Holy Spirit.

The Ascension of Christ Jesus was essential to the Advent of the Spirit. There needed to be a triumphal entrance into Heaven, where, as the Mediator, His person and work were demonstrably accepted in the courts of Divine Holiness. Pentecost was the signal on earth of Christ's acceptance into Heaven – that the Everlasting Doors had indeed been lifted up, and the King of Glory was henceforth upon His mediatorial throne, vested with all power and dominion. It is in consequence of these things that the Holy Spirit came down to earth. He is the Divine Agent and the great Applier of the Father's purposes in election, to all those who have been redeemed by the Son.

The Holy Spirit operates exclusively through the Word (cf John 16:13-14). This must be so, for He inspired that Word (cf 2 Peter 1:21). He speaks not of Himself, but of Christ – which must be so, for the Scriptures are they which testify of Christ, and there is salvation in none other (cf John 5:39, Acts 4:12). Regeneration and New Birth are the works of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification and progress in spiritual life is accomplished only by Him. Prayer is only prayer if it be 'in the spirit' (cf Romans 8:26-27). Good works and godly living is nothing other than the Fruit of the Spirit (cf Galatians 5:22-23).

The intercessory work of Christ is often referred to, but there is also another work of intercession that must not be overlooked – that performed by the Holy Spirit. There is however a distinction between the two: Christ intercedes as the Mediator with God (cf Romans 8:34) whereas the Holy Spirit is the great Paraclete, or pleader, with men (cf Romans 8:26). Christ intercedes as a Priest – it is part of His sacerdotal work as representative; the Holy Spirit acts as the applier of the priestly work to the Christian's heart and conscience. Christ is now in Heaven; the Holy Spirit is upon earth. These facts should greatly strengthen the believers' faith and assurance, knowing that a double intercession is continually in progress on their behalf. The

Great High Priest above, ever pleading His shed blood and atoning work; the Holy Spirit indwelling the saints on earth, making constant intercession on their behalf with groaning that cannot be uttered. He who is above, preparing a place and inheritance for the saints in light; He who is below preparing them for that place, by His sanctifying work through the Word. All this and more is contained in the ‘promise of the Father’ – the great spiritual blessings for which the disciples were to wait at the dawn of the New Testament age.

What would be the effects of the coming of this promise? “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). The commission which the apostles received – to go into all the world, all nations, the uttermost parts of the earth, to preach, make disciples, baptize, and instruct men in all things whatsoever Christ had commanded – was indeed a daunting task, and one totally beyond them to achieve. But ‘ye shall receive power’ says the Great Head; ‘ye shall be witnesses unto me **after** that the Holy Ghost has come’ – not before. They were to wait. In their own strength they could do nothing, but after Pentecost they could go, being made able to witness.

“*Ye shall be witnesses*” – it does not say ‘ye shall be ministers’, nor elders or deacons – but witnesses. This Great Commission is broader than to the apostles only: these commands and promises extend to the end of the world and thus embrace every Christian. It comes to every true believer; all are included, brethren and sisters alike; all are to be witnesses to Christ, showing by their life and manner of living that ‘they have been with Jesus’ and learned of Him. Some are called to witness in the pulpit, some in the pew, some in the city, some in the wilderness, some at home, some in the workplace, some amongst the family, others in halls of learning. It matters not where the providence of God has placed each believer. Wherever it is, ‘right there’, says

Christ, 'you are to be a witness unto Me'. To bear false witness against a neighbour is a great sin (cf Exodus 20:16); but to fail to bear a true witness to Christ is equally serious. This concludes the details given in Scripture concerning the Great Commission, and Christ's instructions given at His tenth appearance. His final command pertaining to the Kingdom is this: it matters not where His people be found, whether in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost parts of the earth, the factory, the office, the school, the home – there, where He has placed them, they are to be witnesses unto Him. May the Lord make His people faithful in this vital work.

W. H. Molland  
*(transcribed by R. J. Steward)*

### **CHANGE OF PRINTER**

The Church wishes to acknowledge its gratitude to Polypress Limited, Bideford, responsible for production of the Link Magazine for twenty years, and to its proprietor Mr K. Walters who after rendering much diligent service, retired from business in December. Production of the Church's literature has now transferred to:

Mr A. Parker  
North Devon Print,  
Unit 4, Daddon Court,  
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This opportunity has been taken to revise the appearance and typesetting of the magazine. Readers may rest assured that there is no change to the nature and substance of the articles within.



## CHRISTIANS AND THE VOTE

In those countries where any form of democracy exists, there comes a time when the people are given the opportunity to vote. Around the world, at local, regional and national levels, systems exist whereby the populace may choose their leaders, and elect those who will hold authority over them. The attention and importance attached to these occasions increases with the significance of the office at stake, and the power which the office-holder will ultimately wield. The selection of Presidents and Governments, for example, becomes something of a national obsession, in which vast amounts of time, money and energy are expended. Long before Election Day, competing candidates labour for the success of their cause, by means fair and foul, persuading and cajoling their constituents, hoping to win the majority vote and so achieve pre-eminence. Such is the case in Britain at this present time, as a General Election again approaches. Political parties clamour for attention and popular support; the news media amplify and exacerbate their campaigns; the thoughts and conversations of the people are absorbed with the current controversy.

In the midst of this national furore are those who call themselves 'Christians'. They too are the target of much political campaigning; perceived as a demographic group whose votes could significantly affect the outcome of the contest. The vital question thus stands: How should a Christian vote? Or indeed, should a genuine Christian vote at all? Is there a Biblical stance to be taken in the event of secular elections?

This is a subject upon which the opinions of believers are divided and confused. It is an issue that many are content to overlook or ignore, until election time comes, when they follow the masses to the polling booths, claiming 'liberty of conscience' in such matters. This

unthinking attitude is common amongst Christians in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western society, where for many years the outcome of political elections has had little effect upon their personal freedom or religious practice. What modern-day believers need to realise is that in past generations, political affiliation was a much more serious business, even to becoming a matter of life or death. Saints of old have laboured with this vexed question, in times of international conflict, civil war and revolution, and suffered for the stand which they took. And still today, in certain parts of the world, the policies of incoming governments may have major repercussions for those who profess Christ, particularly in lands where false religion holds sway. On these vital subjects, it is not enough to talk of ‘pragmatism’, ‘expediency’ and ‘personal choice’, or to bring arguments that apply only to the limited circumstances of Britain in 2010. A truly Biblical answer to the question of the Christian’s political allegiance will be as timeless as Scripture itself – relevant for saints in every place, at any time.

Should the people of God involve themselves in the political processes of the world? Do Christians have a moral obligation to cast their vote for secular leaders? What saith the Scriptures?

### **The Sovereignty of God**

From the very earliest times, the Devil has deceived man into thinking that he has the power of self-determination. The Adversary’s ploy in Eden was to convince Adam and Eve that it lay within their means to take the fruit of the tree, and become as gods. From that point on, man has continued to labour under the delusion of Free Will; the notion that he may be the master of his own destiny, if only he takes the initiative. The modern democratic process is but a manifestation of this same, fallen attitude. Humanity wants to feel empowered and ‘in control’; able to appoint its own rulers, and direct its own affairs. Bible-believing Christians should know that this is **not** the case. Scripture makes it clear that there is a sovereign God in the heavens,

who rules over all the affairs of men. This especially includes their leaders and rulers, since He is ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’. “*For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God*” (Romans 13:1). The prophet Daniel expresses the same truth: “*Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: And He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings*” (Daniel 2:20-21). Christ Himself, confronting the highest human authority in Judea in the early years AD plainly stated: “*Thou couldst have no power at all... except it were given thee from above*” (John 19:11).

Successful politicians flatter themselves that the strength of their manifesto or force of character won them their office. Supporters of the winning side imagine that their votes are the primary reason for the outcome. Such is not the case; these are merely the secondary causes that God has sovereignly overruled in the accomplishment of **His** designs. These facts have serious implications for the believer. Will they adopt the attitude of the world, or heed the truth of Scripture?

### **The Secret Will of God**

It is tempting for Christians to think that they know what God wants in terms of national government, and that they will vote for those who appear to be the godliest option. This is both presumptuous and wrong. The Scriptures do not favour any one form of administration, or political philosophy over another; nor do they intimate God’s Divine purposes for the various countries of the world. These matters pertain to the secret will of God. None can predict the rise and fall of kingdoms that He has appointed. To those who ask, “*Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this [or that] land?*” the answer is: “*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God*” (Deuteronomy 29:24, 29).

Many historical examples of this principle exist. No sensible Christian given the choice would have voted into power that Pharaoh which knew not Joseph, and so grievously enslaved the Hebrews. Yet to him

God says, “*Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth*” (Romans 9:17). Similarly, no exiled Jew in their right mind would have welcomed the invasion of Babylon by the tyrannical Persian king Cyrus; but in these matters, God “*turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish...That saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure*” (Isaiah 44:25, 28). God’s secret purposes in world affairs have never miscarried; every ruler who has ever wielded power – even the most wicked, despotic and dictatorial – have been fulfilling His greater, undisclosed Divine Plan.

The Christian who casts a vote for a losing party is in an unhappy and discouraging position. They thereby demonstrate their own ignorance of God’s will, and more seriously, are shown to have **opposed** His will by their conduct! Let the believer who dares approach the ballot box beware, “*lest haply ye be found even to fight against God*” (Acts 5:39).

### **The Judgments of God**

In the absence of knowledge concerning God’s secret will, some believers decide to vote for those candidates who show the best character, and seem likely to do moral or social good for their constituency. This is also a flawed policy. For it may be God’s intention to bring judgment upon a particular place or people, and to accomplish this by raising wicked men to positions of authority, for the chastening of whole nations at a time. Such was the situation at the close of Israel’s history, when in consequence of their disobedience they were given incompetent and unstable rulers (cf Isaiah 3:4-5). A heathen monarch rightly observed: “*the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men*” (Daniel 4:17). These are things which Christians cannot predict or know, nor can they hasten or prevent the process by casting their vote. This is a realm in which they must not interfere. For God “*doeth*

*His will... among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Daniel 4:35)*

## **The Righteousness of God**

Another position often taken by Christians in the matter of politics is that of supporting the party which has the greatest number of good principles when compared with its rivals. This is sometimes called the 'lesser evil' approach (a contradiction in terms) – electing those who have the most redeeming policies, while overlooking their errors. Some Christians are inclined to support the party that defends family values, or promises to tighten licensing laws, or has the strongest stance on law and order. These subjective selection criteria can never be reconciled with the objective standard of God's Word, which requires absolute compliance, and condemns all sin.

Take the situation as it exists today. Most Christians would reject at once a political party which espoused false religion, such as Islam or Roman Catholicism; yet they seem oblivious to the rampant secularism that dominates the supposedly 'moderate' parties today. The atheistic and humanist philosophies that underpin modern political movements are just as pernicious and dangerous to the Church as those more obvious historical antagonists. And though one side may superficially seem to be more favourable than another, they all fail on countless vital issues. All have within their ranks and on their benches men and women who are godless, carnal and unbelieving. All fall desperately short of the standard set by the Law of God. Christians who vote for a given person or party are tacitly supporting **everything** for which that candidate stands – not just the beneficial and positive aspects – also their errors, follies and sins. This ought not to be. The Christian's standard is the unmitigated righteousness of a holy God, as expressed in the Scriptures. Anything or anyone which fails to meet those requirements is not worthy of their support, or their vote.

## The Kingdom of God

The political situation is further clouded by those Christians who think it is necessary to infiltrate national Government with as many regenerate persons as possible, in order to prosper the cause of Christ. There are those who imagine that if Parliaments or Senates could be filled with believers, then society could be ‘Christianised’ from the top down, by the passing of legislation in keeping with the Bible. This philosophy has existed among certain denominations for centuries, some even thinking that the Kingdom of God could be established in earthly nations if only the Christian Faith had sufficient political support, and Biblical precepts were enforced by law. Whilst this prospect might seem attractive, it is also a delusion. The heavenly Kingdom is something entirely separate from – and superior to – the governmental systems of this fallen world. It cannot, and will not be engineered upon earth through political lobbying or agitation; not by a democratic process, or a military one; not by the sword, or the ballot box. Christ Himself made this clear: *“Jesus answered, 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). To give this verse further application: if Christ’s Kingdom were of this world, then would His servants vote, that it should be delivered from the control of the ungodly; but His Kingdom is not from hence!

The misguided notion of a heavenly kingdom wrought by earthly power has been held by Jews, Romanists and Millennialists, and is still popular today. Yet the Lord’s own words are unequivocal on this point, *“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). There will never be such a thing as a ‘Christian Country’ on this fallen planet. God’s Kingdom – the Church – is universal, spiritual and invisible. It is not a political or material entity that can be instituted on earth by Christians voting in a particular way.

## The Christian's Citizenship

There are certain prerequisites that make a person eligible to vote. First among these is that they be a constituent, or citizen of the country concerned. Many Christians are of a patriotic disposition, and immediately think of themselves as citizens of the nation in which they live, who may legitimately engage in the democratic process. God's Word states otherwise. It is birthplace that dictates a person's citizenship, and every Christian has been **born again**, which has effected a radical change: "*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God*" (Ephesians 2:19). The saints of God are no longer classified or distinguished by the spot on this fallen earth where they happen to reside; they collectively belong to another place, and have become strangers to their former homelands. This was Abraham's experience who, "*By faith... sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country*"; those who emulate his faith have all likewise "*confessed that they [are] strangers and pilgrims on the earth*", "*But ... they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city*" (Hebrews 11:9, 13, 16).

Abraham showed no patriotic affection for Ur, or Canaan. Moses, who might have had a glorious career in the Egyptian ruling class, had no sentimental attachment for that land, "*choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God... Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*" (Hebrews 11:25-26). The Lord Jesus and His Disciples rejected the causes of Jewish Nationalism and Roman Imperialism alike. The idea of these apostles and patriarchs, or indeed the Saviour, becoming caught up in the world's petty politics is unthinkable. They realised that they were not of this world, even as Christ is not of this world (cf John 17:16). The Christian's position today is exactly the same. The believer who truly appreciates this will also realise that he is ineligible to vote. He is 'of no fixed abode' (cf Hebrews 13:14); and belongs to a different nation (cf 1 Peter 2:9).

## The Christian's Allegiance

There are believers who think they are justified in supporting certain political parties, and do so with considerable enthusiasm, particularly at Election time. But for Christians to align themselves with worldly organisations, and declare their allegiance to human leaders, is dangerous ground. *“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?”* (Romans 6:16). It is a basic principle that fealty to a cause brings the obligation of service. The Christian already owes his service, indeed his life, to a Higher authority. Political affiliation will inevitably bring a conflict of interest, and a division of loyalty. All the legislative systems of this sinful world are, by definition, at enmity with God (cf Psalm 2:1-2, Romans 8:7); and it is impossible to have a foot in two opposing camps. Occasions will arise when it is necessary to *“obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29), or when men will demand precedence over God and His law. *“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”* (Matthew 6:24). Ye cannot serve both God and the world's politicians. Those believers who attempt it become tied into an ungodly partnership, and sadly impeded in their Christian walk. *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”* (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Christ teaches His followers: *“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's”* (Mark 12:17). The world's authorities may legitimately demand certain things of the saints: *“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour”* (Romans 13:7). Taxes, civil obedience and respect should be instantly and diligently yielded to those who require them. But the Christian's love, devotion and service are God's by right, and must be rendered to Him alone.



## **The Christian's Identity**

In some quarters, political sentiments run so high, that people become defined by them. They wear the appropriate party colours and badges, and proudly display bill posters in their cars and houses. It becomes a 'label' and identity. When this mentality enters the local Church, considerable trouble ensues. Divisions that ought never to have arisen run like fault lines through a congregation; and where felicity and fraternity ought to be, comes instead partisanship and unnecessary strife. Scripture denounces such behaviour in the strongest terms; it is shameful and infantile, "*For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*" (1 Corinthians 3:3).

The process of Regeneration is about the abolition of previous definitions, and becoming a 'new creature'. The former things are passed away; the new Christian identity transcends all the earth's categorisations. This should be reflected in the local Church: nationality, ethnicity, social standing, employment status and prior associations are all eradicated and forsaken: "*ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all*" (Colossians 3:9-11). Perhaps it ought to be added that once 'in Christ', there is neither Conservative or Liberal, Socialist or Monarchist, Democrat or Republican. Worldly political persuasions were the deeds of the 'old man'. Now Christ is all, and they are nothing.

## **The Christian's Responsibility**

What response should Christians adopt then, in relation to the political systems of the countries in which they live? All God's people are engaged in that spiritual warfare which began at their conversion, against the principalities and powers of darkness. It is tempting to

think that this conflict can also be pursued at the ballot box, by supporting that which seems good, and opposing what appears to be evil within the democratic process. Such a notion is wrong. This is not the Christian's territory, nor is it part of the real battle: "*the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*" (2 Corinthians 10:4), and, "*we wrestle not against flesh and blood*" (Ephesians 6:12). Involvement in worldly politics is a distraction from the true spiritual campaign; a feint and ploy of the Adversary's, whereby he diverts the believers' strength and attention. God's Word says, "*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*" (2 Timothy 2:4). The saints should be content to "*let the dead bury their dead*" (Luke 9:60), let the unsaved vote for the unsaved, while they concern themselves with the Kingdom of God. When polling day comes, the instruction to believers is clear: "*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment*" (Exodus 23:2). The only proper attitude for Christians to adopt toward politics – Biblically consistent and appropriate in every time and place – is one of godly abstention.

There **is** one Government alone which is of interest to the people of God: namely, their spiritual leadership. It does not vary or change; it does not falter or fail; it has no need of human intervention or support; it cannot be voted in or out of power. Its authority and administration is flawless, because it is entirely vested in one wholly righteous and perfect individual. The government is on His shoulder, "*and His name [is] called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end... to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.*" (Isaiah 9:6-7)

R. J. Steward

## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

“When you elevate a bad man, you give to him a hundred-fold more power of example to corrupt your sons, and your neighbours’ sons by his evil acts. Those acts are a hundred-fold more conspicuous and weighty to attract notice and imitation than if you had left him in his deserved obscurity. When you delegate your money, influence or civic power to a bad man, you make his wicked official acts and influences your own; he is your chosen agent, and acts for you, and be assured a jealous God will not forget to visit the people for the guilt thus contracted... These misleaders of the people, while you so weakly connive at their indiscretions, may indirectly be preparing the weapon which is to pierce [your] bosom...”

R. L. Dabney (1820-1898)

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“The office of a magistrate is ordained of God, even as we have always confessed, since according to our small talent we have served the Word of the Lord. And moreover, in the meantime, we have obeyed them when not contrary to the Word of God. We intend to do so all our lives. For we are not so [ignorant] as not to know what the Lord's Word commands in this respect. Taxes and tolls we pay as Christ has taught and Himself practised. We pray for the imperial majesty, kings, lords, princes, and all in authority. We honour and obey them (cf 1 Timothy 2:2; Romans. 13:1)... [False brethren] say ‘yea and amen’ to everything the magistracy commands or does, whether it is agreeable to the Scriptures or not. Thus they by their pleasant doctrine lead these souls into destruction and loss. They seek not their salvation but their own enjoyment and gain. Therefore before God, it is the truth; love compels us respectfully and humbly to show all high officials what the Word of the Lord commands...”

Menno Simons (trans. L. Verduin)

*Reply to False Accusations 1552*

## EDITORIAL

True Christianity, when practised in accordance with the Word of God, is not subversive or injurious to the State. When there is a proper relationship between the Church and the secular authorities – namely one of mutual exclusion and respect – the two may co-exist harmoniously.

Having established in a foregoing article the principle of godly abstention from political affairs, it is necessary also to guard against the opposite extreme: that of antipathy toward national government; civil disobedience or rebellion. Sadly, there have been periods in the Church's history when this unjustifiable behaviour has occurred. The Bible has a surprising amount to say on the subject of complicity with earthly administrations. Sometimes a reminder is necessary: "*Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work*" (Titus 3:1). This is an important part of the Christians' witness, that they might be clear of any false accusations: "*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors... For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*" (1 Peter 2:13-15).

If the believer truly appreciates God's sovereign appointment of world leaders, they will be inclined to obey: "*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*" (cf Romans 13:1). A still broader and more searching command is quoted by Paul: "*Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people*" (Acts 23:5). This is a particularly pertinent word to those who regularly berate and criticise authority figures. "*Curse not the king, no not in thy thought*" (Ecclesiastes 10:20), but rather, "*Honour the king*" (1 Peter 2:17).

As is so often the case, such words are easier to quote or say, than to do. This is especially so when the rulers concerned are godless or wicked men who abuse their power, and use their office to do wrong; but in this connection, Scripture does not discriminate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ leaders: all are to be respected on account of the authority they hold. Let it not be forgotten that when Paul and Peter penned the words just listed, the kings and governors of whom they spoke were the Caesars and Roman Procurators of evil memory, many of whom violently persecuted the Early Church. The moral condition of these heads of state did not change the Biblical instruction.

What then is a proper Christian response to human governments in which sin and iniquity are rife, and much wickedness is perpetrated? A historical example of precisely this situation is given in the record of Samuel. He lived at a time when the monarchy was first instituted in Israel; and it began under very dubious and acrimonious circumstances. The people in their unbelief clamoured for a king, desiring to be rid of God, spared the inconvenience of faith, and made more alike the heathen nations around them. God responded and judged the people’s transgression by giving them what they asked for, and the sort of king they deserved: “*thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath*” (Hosea 13:10-11). From the outset, Saul, the popular choice, was destined to be a flawed and godless ruler, whose behaviour would be greatly to the detriment of the nation of Israel.

Samuel was made fully aware of this fact, first by prophetic revelation, and then by bitter personal experience. Had he rejected, opposed and refused to acknowledge Saul, his actions might have been considered legitimate and understandable. The facts of the case are rather different. Samuel acknowledged the sovereign will of God in this difficult matter, and did not resist or prevent the appointment of the king. He also maintained three vital and necessary exercises:

1.) He continued to preach the truth: *“howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them”* (1 Samuel 8:9). Despite the weight of popular opinion, and the institutionalised sin of the administration, Samuel boldly persisted in the declaration of God’s Word. 2.) He stressed the need for obedience, without respect of persons: *“If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice... both ye and also the king”* (1 Samuel 12:14). Both the people and their monarch stood in need of righteousness, with which he charged them all, without fear or favour on account of office. 3.) He prayed often and always for the people and their ruler, saying, *“Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you”* (1 Samuel 12:23). This same practice is instructed in the New Testament also, *“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. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour”* (1 Timothy 2:1-3). Amongst all the obligations which a Christian has toward earthly leaders, this is the highest – to pray for them – whatever their nature or quality.

Samuel is hailed in the Scriptures as a paragon of righteousness and faith (cf Jeremiah 15:1, Hebrews 11:32). May believers in the present day learn to emulate his godly example.

## **ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> June 2010 D.V.**

Saturday 3.30 p.m. & 6.00 p.m. Tea served 5.00 p.m.

Lord’s Day 10.45 a.m. & 6.30 p.m.

*Preacher :* Pooyan Mehrshahi  
( Cheltenham )

*a cordial invitation is extended to all*