

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

04-73

Dear Reader

In a short time there will be a presidential election in the USA with the whole power base in the White House and in Congress up for grabs, humanly speaking. Whichever party controls the White House and Congress will likely also make changes in the Supreme Court which will likely affect the lives of every person in the USA and perhaps in the rest of the world for many years to come, probably till the Lord's coming, known as the Rapture. So in this issue we want to look at:

THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY IN RELATION TO GOVERNMENT

There are serious morality issues mixed in with the politics of this upcoming election which are of special concern to Christians, such as homosexuality and abortion. The Supreme Court still allows abortion, although all medical evidence is that it is murder. The simple fact is, once conceived, the mother adds nothing to the growing child other than food, oxygen, warmth and protection. The child only needs *time* to be able to survive outside the womb, and that "time" is becoming less every year as premature care improves. Also, the Supreme Court has recently opened the door for homosexual "marriages" and homosexuality has become almost mainstream, just an interesting alternate lifestyle, something titillating for TV sitcoms, movies and other media. There have been thousands of "gay unions" since the Supreme Court ruling, although in most cases they don't (as yet) have the legal force of a "marriage." Speaking out against homosexuality is considered intolerance. A bill was reportedly passed in Canada that could classify the Bible as *hate literature* because it clearly states the sinfulness of homosexuality and also that *Christ* is the only way to God.

These and other matters, such as public prayer and alleged infringement on civil rights, have brought out questions as to our individual responsibility in the politics of the country, including voting and other means of allowing our feelings and biblical principles to be made known. Indeed, almost universally, the Christian community is told by "church leaders" to get involved and work for the election of those who will uphold Christian principles. Is this right or wrong advice? What does Scripture say? Although the final conclusions must be left up to each individual, this issue of the *Assembly*

Messenger will look at the *principles* of Scripture so we will have *God's* mind, not human opinion – even opinion with the best of intentions.

We have used USA politics and elections as the example for this issue of the *Assembly Messenger*, but the *principles* apply to every country, every state or province, every city and town. Details vary, but divine principles always remain the same.

God Puts His Choice of People into Governmental Authority

In the final outcome of all the politics of the year 2000 USA presidential election, *God* put George W. Bush into the presidency of the United States. "There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are *appointed by God*" (Rom.13:1). "The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to *whomever He will*, and sets over it the lowest of men" (Dan.4:17). "... till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and *gives it to whomever He chooses* know that *heaven rules*" (Dan.4:25-26). The president or governor or mayor may not be the one we would choose as Christians, but the person in office (whether a Christian like Mr. Bush, or not) is fitting *God's overall* plan for this godless world. Remember, this world is plunging towards the terrible judgments of the Great Tribulation and *God* is using people and events to lead towards that terrible time, all in *God's* perfect timing.

The opposite of the above is that *God* didn't allow Al Gore to be president. Mr. Gore might have seemed the logical choice. He had been Vice President during eight years of great prosperity, had little or none of the personal scandal associated with former President Clinton, and claimed to be a Christian. But he lost! People complain the election was stolen. Whatever the truth of that, *God* "changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings" (Dan.2:21). As we head for the Tribulation, it may well be time for the morality of the country to get much worse than it already is: only *God* knows. This world is fast heading for the time of such evil that unless the Lord put a stop to it by His coming to reign, no one would be left alive (Mt.24:21-22).

If I had voted through the years, many of the candidates I would have favored, lost. I would have been voting against God's will. There simply is no way I can discern God's mind regarding any specific candidate. Nor are we ever told to get involved in the world's politics. But I *know* God's mind regarding His Man! It is never a waste of time to proclaim Him! And I'm going to serve in His administration in an honored position, reigning with Him over the earth for 1000 years! And so will you, dear believer! I want to spend my time and energy for *Him*! Don't you? These are serious considerations!

Citizens of Heaven; Pilgrims on Earth

Our home is in heaven. God will "keep us from the *hour* of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who *dwell* [a moral word] on the earth" (Rev.3:10). We will not go through the Tribulation. We are not destined for wrath, but for rapture, as we have seen in recent *Assembly Messengers*. The tribulation is to test, to judge the unsaved who reject God and His things. They prefer the world's things to God. "Jesus who delivers us from *the wrath to come*" (1 Thes.1:10). "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes.5:9). Therefore, we should consider ourselves as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb.11:13; 1 Pet.2:11) and not as here to improve the world, but to lead people to Christ who makes them heavenly citizens. A *stranger* is not acquainted with the persons or events associated with those surrounding him. A *pilgrim* is one traveling in a foreign land, on his way home. Our "citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior" (Phil.3:20-21). Neither a stranger nor a pilgrim should attempt to get mixed up in the politics of the country he or she is temporarily in, for obvious reasons. We are citizens (Gk: *politeuma*) of another country where our "politics" – our heavenly status – is to be enjoyed.

"We are *ambassadors* for Christ" (2 Cor.5:20). As does a governmental ambassador in a foreign country, we are to *represent Christ* in the earthly country where God has temporarily placed us. While not "meddling" in the country's internal affairs (or he would be asked to leave and would bring disgrace on his home country), an ambassador seeks to *promote the interests* of the country he or she represents. So, Scripture encourages us to speak out and preach Christ as the answer to man's spiritual needs, and to teach Christian principles wherever we can, but as an ambassador, we can't get involved in the politics of that country where we perform an ambassador's duty!

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov.21:1). "The Lord made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God" (Ezra 6:22). Although God has not promised the Christian an easy life and may even place him or her in situations where the government is violently anti-Christian, God can still control that government in relation to the individual Christian. Think of the above verse from Ezra, and also Nehemiah chapter 1 through 2:8. Nehemiah had prayed and prayed, and the Lord made the king ask Nehemiah, "What do you request?" (2:4). And Nehemiah prayed again, and then asked and asked for more! The world would say he was pressing his luck, but there is no "luck" with God! Nehemiah's testimony is, "And the king granted [all my requests] to me according to the good hand of my God upon me" (2:8).

"We *know* that all things work *together* for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom.8:28). Even if the Christian is jailed or martyred, there is still a testimony to be maintained, and it's only for this life. If we lose our life, God allowing it, then "at His right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps.16:11). Remember, God "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph.1:11). He has an "eternal purpose" (Eph.3:11) which goes far beyond any political election. We are part of that purpose.

Obedience to Government

We are to obey all rulers and their laws (whether or not we agree with them), because *God commands it*. "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities Whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake" (Rom.13:1-5). "Be subject to rulers and authorities" (Tit.3:1). "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet.2:13). God has spoken: we are to obey Him! And that obedience involves obeying government.

If every IRS (Internal Revenue Service) auditor and every highway patrolman were removed, the Christian should still pay all the taxes required by law and should obey the speed limits and stop signs, etc. Regardless of how unfair or ridiculous we might think some law is, we should obey it simply because God requires it. Back in the days of the USA 55 mph (88 km/h) national speed

limit, when most were driving 65-75 mph (or faster) with their CB radios and radar detectors going, I came up behind a Volkswagen Beetle doing 50 (his speedometer probably said 55). He had a bumper sticker which said, "I drive 55 because the Bible tells me to." (Yes, I was doing 55, but with a calibrated speedometer). I thought, "How many of my Christian acquaintances with perhaps much more knowledge of Scripture would put that sign on their vehicle *and then do it*!" Can we expect God's care over us when we defy Him by our disobedience to the laws of our country?

Obeying God First

But human rulers are subordinate to God. So we are to be consistent first to the Lord in our Christian walk, and in some instances that might require disobedience to human rulers. Peter and John said to some authorities of their day, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). The rulers had told them not to preach Christ. That was in direct violation of God's orders. The apostles didn't organize a protest rally or seek the rulers' removal, but simply went on preaching Christ.

Two examples of having to disobey man's laws are seen in the book of Daniel. In chapter 3:8-28, some Chaldeans hated Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego who loved the Lord. Because they refused to fall down and worship a golden idol and thus serve Chaldean gods – in violation of king Nebuchadnezzar's direct command – they were thrown into a fiery furnace after being given a chance to recant. They were prepared to be martyred, but knew God *could* deliver them. The furnace was so hot that the flames killed the men who threw in Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. But the King was astonished, for he saw four men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire, unhurt, and the form of the fourth was like the Son of God. The fire had no power on even their hair or clothes (Dan.3:8-28). Along with the events of Daniel 4, God used this to bring about this mighty king's salvation.

The second example is seen in Daniel 6. Daniel, now a much older man, also served under king Darius. Again, a law was passed out of envy, aimed at stopping Daniel praying to God. Actually, that law was aimed at getting Daniel into trouble! Daniel, however, remained *consistent*. "When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks

before his God, *as was his custom since early days*" (Dan.6:10). Although tossed to hungry lions, God closed their mouths and Daniel was unhurt, again to the glory of God.

Notice in every case, whether with the apostles or Daniel or his three friends, there was no protest, no screaming, no sign-waving, no civil disobedience except for the specific matter that would have caused them to disobey God. Daniel didn't throw open his window so he'd be seen, with an "I'll show you" attitude. No, his window was *already* open towards Jerusalem (1 Ki.8:38) and he simply did what he had always done according to God's direction, whether or not there was a law forbidding him from doing it. The early believers (and many others since) testified when questioned, but simply went about doing for the Lord what they had done before. They were not *activists* as we think of the term today, although they actively and effectively served the Lord.

Think of the days of the apostles. They lived under Roman tyrants. There was slavery all around them. The Jews made up the religious rules as they went along. Women were second class citizens. But never did the apostles speak out or actively protest against these unjust things of man's government. But they did preach shining for Christ among those unjust things!

You may remember the emotionally-charged case of the execution in September, 2003 of Paul Hill, a professed fundamentalist Christian who gunned down an abortion doctor and his bodyguard in 1994. Just before his execution Hill reportedly said, "I expect a great reward in heaven." He reportedly believed the doctor was a mass murderer and he [Hill] was protecting the unborn. Yes, the doctor was a mass murderer in God's eyes because of all the babies he killed, and if the government was acting as God expected, *it* would have dealt with him instead of giving him the legal OK to commit those murders. Those responsible in government will have to answer one day to God.

But Hill was equally wrong in his actions. He was living in the wrong dispensation. There is no thought in this dispensation-of-grace for a believer to take the law into his own hands when he doesn't agree with what the government is doing – even when the government is wrong. In the greatest crime of the universe – the murder (from man's side) of the Lord – He told Peter to "put your sword in its place" (Mt.26:51-53; Jn.18:10-11) after Peter had tried to kill one of those who came to arrest the Lord. The Lord even asked the Father to forgive those who were acting against Him (Lk.23:34).

Some mass murderers, such as Son of Sam, reportedly have been saved while in prison. So there will be no reward in heaven for what Hill did. We need to adjust both our thinking and our emotions to Scripture and never act against the government just because it seems like the right thing to do.

The one way in which Scripture tells us to *actively intervene* in the affairs of government, to bring about change – not to *persons*, but as to how they govern – is to *pray* for them. “I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, *for kings and all who are in authority*, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Tim.2:1-2). In the USA, God put Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney into office, and each of us are to earnestly pray for them, just as we should pray for whoever the Lord puts into office in November 2004. The same for people in Congress or Parliament. The same for governors and mayors. It is not wrong to seek *by prayer* a “quiet and peaceable life” that we may serve the Lord effectively, even amid the deteriorating morals and escalating crime and terrorism all around us.

The Lord’s Coming is God’s Answer

The Lord is coming and only what’s been done for Christ will last. The political ragings of the moral majority or the fundamental right will prove to be time wasted on a wrong focus. Things won’t improve until Christ reigns! Things after the Lord’s coming, the Rapture, really will get bad! Think of what it will be like in the United States with probably a third or more of the population gone, with the restraint of both the Church and the Holy Spirit gone (2 Thes.2:6-7). A few years later, the man of sin will be revealed, “the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the [future] temple of God [at Jerusalem], showing himself that he is God.” We’ll give more details below.

Something today is restraining the coming of this man of sin, “that he may be revealed in his own time.” God’s timing is already set and nothing will change it (Acts 17:31)! That restraint probably is the *Church* which provides a moral salt for this world. But “the mystery of lawlessness is *already* at work; only *He who now restrains* will do so until He is taken out of the way.” The “He” is the Holy Spirit in the Assembly who will be taken from this earth as an indwelling-possession of believers, when the Church is raptured. So, God promises a double restraining power until we are gone, even though we should expect to see things going down hill morally and religiously – the mystery of lawlessness

already working. When the Church and the Holy Spirit are gone from this earth, “*then* the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming [to the mount of Olives to judge and to reign]” (2 Thes.2:1-8). The many factions in the USA and elsewhere will be without divine restraint once the Rapture takes place. I’m glad I’ll be gone!

The great work of the apostles was to preach Christ and thus bring individuals *out* of the immorality and idolatry of their day, to “take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14), not change the world which will only be changed by Christ’s reign.

As part of the true Church – all born-again believers of this dispensation – we are responsible to be a restrainer, an ambassador, a pilgrim, but not to try to change what Scripture says is God’s prerogative. The *principles* of how far to go in the world’s politics are given herein; what you and I do in each circumstance in relation to these principles must be left between ourselves and God. Just make sure you are acting on the basis of God’s Word, not pressure from even Christian people or groups, or out of personal emotion. Let us keep praying!

RPD

Note: You may remember that issues 01-47 through 01-54 sought to present the truth of the Church and our responsibilities to it, to young people and to those not brought up in so-called “assembly truth” in a simplified format. We are happy to report that those eight issues are now reedited and make into an attractive, inexpensive pocket-size 144 page paperback book from *Believers Bookshelf* (570-672-2134 USA; 905-563-4929 Canada). The book is entitled, *Christian Fellowship: What? When? Where? Why? With Whom?* We would encourage individuals and assemblies to give this book to their young people, and to those who inquire as to *what* is biblical Christian fellowship; *when* are we expressing such fellowship; *why* is it so important; *where* can it be found; and *with whom* do we maintain such fellowship?

It is our prayer the Lord will use the book to reach a far wider audience than the eight issues were capable of reaching, all to His honor and glory and the blessing of His people as they seek to love and obey Him.