

THE NATION AND THE CHRIST

BY ARLEN MARSH - RESTITUTION HERALD - JULY 4, 1933

Oddly enough, the impression is held by many that following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ precludes patriotism, that the Messiah's teachings call for the abolition of the very natural pride in his country possessed by every loyal citizen. That this impression is partially true cannot be denied, but that it is altogether correct is a decidedly erroneous contention.

Certainly, the Savior's sermons would not lead men to any such expression as that of Daniel Webster: "Let our object be our country, our whole country, and nothing but our country"; but it is also certain that those sermons in no instance decry loyalty to the government that permits freedom of religion and that offers a safe haven to all who may become its citizens.

It is to be assumed that the Apostle Paul was more nearly without sin following his conversion than are the majority of us today; yet, to give a pre-publication quotation from *The Truth Seekers' Sunday School Quarterly* (lesson one, fourth quarter, 1933), "Paul apparently found satisfaction in knowing himself to be a Roman citizen by birth. His sense of loyalty to the government that granted him its protection and freedom is expressed in Romans 13 :1-7, where he asserts that the civil officers of the Roman Government were ministers of God at whose hands no righteous man had anything to fear. Loyalty to the government of which he was a citizen was one of the elements of character that contributed to his success as a missionary in the Roman Empire."

Paul not only practiced patriotism, however; he actually preached it under the inspiration of God. In 1 Timothy 2:1-3 he wrote, "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." His demand in Colossians 3:2 to "set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" cannot be construed to signify that the Christian should have no love for his fellow men; no more can it be said to indicate that patriotism, love of country, is a fault.

There is no doubt whatever that the Christ made no assertions which could be taken to mean that loyal affection for a government founded for the purpose set forth in the constitutional preamble of this nation should not exist. On the contrary, the Messiah's every teaching was to the same end that "we, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Jesus said nothing that would prohibit loyalty to such a government as this.

Criticism of all forms of government is rampant. Taxes, socialism, capitalism, monarchism, and republicanism all undergo a constant censorship. This in itself is good, since it constitutes an effective check on the rulers of the world; but unfortunately prejudice against various laws has created an abiding desire to disobey not merely the laws against which that prejudice primarily is directed, but all laws. No patriotic attempt to make a better government here exists; indeed, in it lies merely a rebellion against God. As Paul expressed it in Romans 13:1, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers (secular rulers). For there is no power that is not of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

The Apostle in this statement was not relying upon his own knowledge, but upon divine inspiration. There remains no doubt as to his meaning, either in this or in the following assertion: "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Penalties for disobedience to men's laws, as long as they stay within the bounds laid down by God, are exacted not only by men themselves, but by Jehovah as well. True Christianity, like true patriotism, consists in obedience to law because it is law, whether the law refer to murder or to rules of the road.

Paul continues his remarks in direct contradiction to those who declare plainly that all government is rotten to the core. Nor were the conditions at the time of his writing one whit better in the Roman Empire than they ever have been anywhere. Sensuality was allowed full play. Honest men were incarcerated for years at the whim of a ruler; Christians endured horrible persecution. Yet, despite all this, Paul found it in him to say, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise for the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

Taxation in Rome was far more confiscatory than taxation in this nation, wherein is continuous complaint regarding the terrible burden borne by the taxpayer. Yet both the Christ and Paul taught plainly to "pay ye tribute also" (that is, pay tribute as well as obey law). Efforts to reduce taxation are not denied to any man, but no opportunity is left to refuse payment on biblical grounds.

Combining all of these facts, then, in brief summary, there is this: the patriot is foremost a Christian, but secondarily every Christian should be a patriot; and, above all things, obedience to every law of man not contrary to the laws of God is required by Jehovah, regardless of that law's intrinsic worth or importance. The Apostle finally states the cause for such a patriotic, Christian obedience in a single sentence: "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake," not only for fear of punishment, but also out of desire to obey. Undeniably the Christian is a patriot.