

## EVANGELIZATION WHERE THERE IS GOVERNMENT HOSTILITY

*J. Christy Wilson*

*Dr. Wilson, Tehran, Iran, has been the Pastor of the Kabul Community Church in Afghanistan for a number of years.*

Dr. John Van Ess, a missionary who has since gone to be with the Lord, believed that the Holy Spirit was leading him to go to a place on the coast of Arabia to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the people there. He was, however, refused a visa. But because the Lord's guidance was so clear, he went anyway. When he landed, he was asked to show his authorization. He opened his Arabic New Testament to Mark 16:15 and read, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." He asked whether this were a part of the world; to which they answered, "Yes." Pointing to this verse in Arabic, he said that it was not only his permission but also his commission from God to come there and share the good news about Jesus Christ. He then asked if they had any tea. They replied, "Certainly. Sit down, sit down." They gladly welcomed him with a cup of tea, accepted the authorization of the Word of God and listened attentively to the message he had to tell.

Suffering for the sake of the Gospel is nothing new. Our Lord and his apostles lived, preached and ministered under opposition. Christ said, "You will be hated by all nations for My name's sake." Wesley Pippert in his book, *Memo For 1976*, says, "We can make a persuasive case that nowadays no government...is truly Christian. In a real sense, therefore, the Christian in politics always is in a position of dealing with ungodly governments." The situation today is similar to New Testament times when Paul wrote from prison and John from Patmos, as they shared the unsearchable riches of Christ under terrible restrictions. Thus the Bible has much to teach us about evangelization under opposition.

When our Lord was asked a loaded political question, he replied with the wisdom of God as He answered, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." Hereby he established a Christian's dual duty. But the question arises as to how to differentiate and carry out one's responsibility toward God and toward a government. This is where the divine direction of the Scriptures is needed. Let us therefore consider first the Christian's duty to God; secondly, the Christian's duty to a government; thirdly, the Christian's spiritual warfare; fourthly, the Christian's discernment and discretion; and fifthly, the Christian's suffering of persecution.

### I. THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY TO GOD

The Bible clearly teaches that God should have first priority in the life of every individual, family and nation. When our Lord was asked to point out the greatest commandment, without hesitation he stated, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." The Scriptures not only reveal God as the

"King of the nations," but also governments that honor him are to be prospered while those who dishonor him are to be cursed, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people." On the one hand, the Bible warns, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, even all nations that forget God"; but on the other, there is the promise, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

Dr. J.G.S.S. Thompson entitles his exposition of Jeremiah 46-52 as, "The Lord God Omnipotent Reigneth." He summarizes these prophetic messages to the nations with these observations: "1) God is on the throne of the universe and is in absolute control of it. 2) This is a moral world, and the important things in it are not power and riches, but character and morality. 3) This sinful world is under the judgment of God." If God is Sovereign, as the Bible states, his revealed will for the nations must have precedence. Therefore we dare not take lightly his great commission to proclaim the Gospel to every creature, to make disciples from among all nations, to teach them everything that Christ has told us and to baptize converts into God's triune name. But the way this is to be accomplished is directed by the Holy Spirit, as he calls, equips and uses individuals who yield to his leading. At one time, he forbade Paul to preach the Word in the province of Asia, because he knew that he would bring the Apostle back there later on when the whole area would be evangelized. Meanwhile, the Spirit led Luke, Silas and Paul, through the vision of the man of Macedonia, to start the evangelization of Europe. The guidance, places and methods may change, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, but the message remains the same, "the faith which was once for all delivered."

Today the necessity for world evangelization is being challenged by those who proclaim a universalism, supposedly based on the love of God. This is diametrically opposed to the Lord's clear command. Christ, having obtained all power and authority in heaven and in earth by his death and resurrection, orders us to take the good news of his conquest to the whole world. Our Lord clearly linked his victory with our responsibility when He said, "It is written that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations."

One often hears the objection of those who oppose missions put in these words, "A loving God could not possibly condemn the ones who have never heard." This is similar to the servant our Lord spoke about who was given one talent. He criticized God as One who reaped where he had not sown. This is what God has determined, that we plant and water, but that he brings the increase. The final efficiency report on that servant was that he was "wicked, lazy" and "unprofitable," and he was cast into outer darkness. What an awesome warning this is to those who do not take Christ's command seriously.

Our Lord affirms, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man comes unto the Father but by Me." Peter echoes this when he, being filled with the Holy Spirit, states, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The Apostle Paul expands on this revelation when he says, "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How then

shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" Earlier in Romans he explains that since all have sinned, they are condemned for their own transgressions, and not because they have not heard the Gospel. However, our responsibility before God is to take the crucial news of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the world to every person, so that each may have the opportunity to hear, believe, call, and be saved eternally.

Those who hold that people after death will have a second chance also vitiate Christ's command, and go contrary to the clear teaching of the Scriptures which warn, "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." Our Lord expands on this truth in his description of what happened to the beggar Lazarus and the rich man after their deaths. This revelation underlines the necessity for carrying out Christ's commission to take the Gospel to every creature in this life.

Recognizing our Lord as our Sovereign God, we know he controls and orders world situations in order to accomplish his purposes. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose." Joseph wonderfully realized God's overruling power and providence when he said to his brothers, "As for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive." Dr. Peter Wagner writes, "God often uses skilled instruments to accomplish his purposes. He used Cyrus and Pharaoh in dealing with his people in Old Testament days. He may also use rulers today, or revolution, or natural disaster, or migrations, or urbanization, to prepare masses of people for the message of Christ."

The Scriptures bring out how history will find its consummation in Christ, in spite of what Satan and all of his forces, including the opposition of man, may attempt. "For God has allowed us to know the secret of His plan, and it is this: He purposes in His sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in Him." Thus by knowing and serving Christ we are in a real sense on the winning side. Isaiah also saw this future victory of Christ in history, "And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Our Lord has taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This reveals that God wants his wishes carried out here and now in his creation, and his clear commission to us is world evangelization.

## II. THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY TO GOVERNMENT

The Bible acknowledges in a realistic way the faults of government leaders, but at the same time it has much to teach about a Christian's responsibility politically. Some say that since it was politics that crucified Christ, it has been proven that earthly authorities are anathema.

This falls into the error of mistakenly calling something evil "per se," rather than following the scriptural injunction that the use is what makes it good or bad.

The Bible contends that God has established governments for good purposes. Our Lord subscribed to the validity of political institutions when He said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." He also acknowledged the authority of the religious leaders of his day, in spite of recognizing their hypocritical inconsistency in not practicing what they preached: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."

In Romans 13, the Apostle Paul reveals the Christian's responsibilities toward governmental authority. "Let every person be in subjection to governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed receive condemnation upon themselves." Just as the Bible presents a chain of command in a family between children and parents, so here God reveals the line of authority between us and our governments. In order that children might honor their father and their mother, as directed in the ten commandments, the Scriptures even dictated the death penalty for those who cursed their parents. In like manner, the Bible warns us against cursing a ruler, and includes this with the prohibition against cursing God.

When the Apostle Paul was struck unjustly as he stood trial before Ananias, the High Priest, he said to him, "God is going to strike you, you white-washed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the law, and in violation of the law order me to be struck?" When bystanders reminded Paul that in saying this he was reviling God's High Priest, he immediately apologized mentioning that he was not aware that Ananias was High Priest that year. He then went on to quote the Old Testament injunction that one was not to speak evil of a ruler of his people. In spite of the fact that Ananias was wrong in ordering Paul to be struck, the Apostle acknowledged that he had spoken out of turn by abusing this ruler for what had happened.

In Romans 13:3, the Apostle goes on to say, "Rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil." In other words, God purposes rulers to encourage good behavior and to discourage evil. Paul continues, "Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same, for he is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword for nothing; for he is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience's sake." This passage brings out that a Christian can have a good conscience through fulfilling his governmental responsibilities. "Also pay taxes; for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due to them: taxes to whom taxes are due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." Our Lord, even though He was Master of the universe, humbled himself to pay the temple tax.

Even though the Bible acknowledges that all men are sinners, and therefore perfection cannot be expected of rulers, nevertheless we are to obey them in the realm over which they have jurisdiction, provided they do not infringe God's higher authority: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution: whether to a king as to one in authority; or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right," writes the Apostle Peter. When earthly governments seek to block the carrying out of Christ's commission, the Christian has a prior responsibility toward his Lord. When the apostles were forbidden to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, Peter and John answered, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard." Daniel also as a government servant lived and worked so blamelessly that his enemies were unable to find cause for condemnation. When they had a special law passed against praying in order to trap him, Daniel purposely broke this human ordinance in order to carry out his responsibility toward God, even though it meant being thrown to the lions.

John Knox, in an interview with Mary, Queen of Scots, said, "Madam, as right religion took neither original strength nor authority from worldly princes, but from the eternal God alone, subjects are not bound to frame their religion according to the appetites of their princes...The sword of justice, Madam, is God's, and is given to princes and rulers for an end (purpose)." We are to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but when the government trespasses upon the Lord's jurisdiction, we are to render unto God the things that are God's.

### III. THE CHRISTIAN'S SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The Bible clearly brings out that in reality we are not fighting "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." In other words, our real adversary is the devil and all his forces. These oppose the spread of the Gospel. Along with taking the whole armor of God and attacking the evil one offensively, we are admonished in this battle to pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. Spiritual opposition delayed the answer of Daniel's prayers by three weeks. Our Lord himself met Satan and overcame him during his forty days of fasting before he started his glorious ministry. With the Bible revealing the power that prayer has in moving the hand of Almighty God, this is the Christian's secret weapon in overcoming forces of darkness.

This points up the importance of praying for political leaders. Paul encourages us to "Pray...for kings and all others who are in authority over us, or are in places of high responsibility, so that we can live in peace and quietness, spending our time in godly living and thinking much about the Lord. This is good and pleases God our Savior, for He longs for all to be saved and to understand this truth." With efficient reporting of world news through the media today, this gives Christians a great opportunity to intercede for leaders who have far-reaching decisions and obligations.

The Scriptures emphasize the necessity of prayer in regard to the evangelization of the world. It was when the church in Antioch fasted and prayed that the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to start on their missionary outreach for evangelizing the then known world. Wherever they went, Satan raised up opposition. However, through their prayer and witness, they were able "to turn the world upside down" for Christ.

### IV. THE CHRISTIAN'S DISCERNMENT AND DISCRETION

"No land is closed to God," said Mildred Cable who evangelized in Central Asia, "and if we look around we shall see that even if the front door be shut, a back door may be open...What we want is a new dimension of the spirit of wisdom to see where there is an opening and how to seize it." Our Lord advised us to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves, and where there is no vision on the part of Christians, peoples of the world perish without Christ. Forward-looking believers are beaming the Gospel around the world through radio and TV. However, these ministries need to be expanded.

Scriptures and Christian literature are also being disseminated widely. This, of course, brings up the question whether it is right to distribute such items in countries where governments are hostile. Some Christians differ in their views, but it would seem that God's commission is sufficient sanction. Yet Christ's admonition to be as wise as serpents, makes sensible discretion essential.

Today there is a "diaspora" or scattering of self-supporting Christians all over the world as businessmen, tourists, teachers, students, United Nations workers, and diplomats. Just as the Apostle Paul was a tentmaker, but had evangelism as his primary purpose, so today Christians of many nations have the opportunity of living and witnessing for Christ all over the world.

Along with our Lord's injunction to be wise as serpents, He commands us to be harmless as doves. In other words, He does not want us to offend unnecessarily. The Bible clearly teaches that it is never right to lie, but it also demonstrates that one does not have to tell all. God Himself illustrates this principle of not divulging everything; "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children." Our Lord also told His disciples, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

This ethical principle is further illustrated in the life of Samuel. When Saul sinned and God ordered Samuel to go to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the new king, he complained, "How can I go? If Saul hear it he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take an heifer with thee and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord." Here God ordered Samuel to tell part of the truth by his words and acts, but not to reveal all that the Lord had told him to do in the face of a hostile ruler. In the same way, God has commanded us to take the Gospel to every creature, and this often in the face of spiritual and governmental opposition. We therefore are justified in keeping our motives confidential.

This, however, does not sanction the fomenting of armed revolution which Peter Beyerhaus calls "the Mission of Barabbas." This was the tragic mistake of the Crusades. When Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, our Lord healed it, and said, "Put up again thy sword...for all they that

take the sword shall perish with the sword." As Christians we are to do all we can to pray for and to influence authorities regarding religious freedom, racial equality and social justice, but in the way of peace.

#### V. THE CHRISTIAN'S SUFFERING OF PERSECUTION

Our Lord not only warned us but assured us of persecution if we live and witness for Him. "If they have persecuted me," he said, "they will also persecute you." He even prophesied that men would kill us, thinking that they were doing God service. However, he told us to be faithful unto death, and that he would give us a crown of life.

In promising one hundredfold blessing for those who give up their homes, loved ones, and lands for his sake and the Gospel's, our Lord also said that these benefits would be accompanied by persecutions.

When persecution comes, one temptation is to think that we are in the wrong and out of God's will. This is not necessarily so. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were condemned for refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image, and yet the Lord was not only with them in the fiery furnace but delivered them from it. We are assured that God is "a present help in trouble." In other words, the Lord expects us to endure difficulty but promises to help us in our extremity.

The blood of the martyrs is still the seed of his church. It has been stated with strong support that more Christians have given their lives for Christ in this twentieth century than ever before. This is probably a prime reason for the fact that the Gospel has been taken to more people in this century than ever before. When the Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted, they were scattered and went everywhere preaching the Word. When John Wesley was not allowed to preach in the churches, he proclaimed the Gospel in the open air; and all of Britain was shaken with a great awakening. Persecution, through God's providential overruling, can be a great means of evangelization.

Recently when a young man who had become a Christian in another country was returning home where the punishment for conversion to Christ was death, he was asked whether he was not afraid to go back. He replied, "I have already died with Christ." Absolute dedication to our Lord and his Gospel, with wisdom from the Holy Spirit, is the secret to evangelization under opposition.

## EVANGELISM WHERE THERE IS GOVERNMENT HOSTILITY REPORT

*Chairman: Dr. David Howard*

*Secretary: A. C. Emery*

Three general discussion periods were held to consider Dr. J. Christy Wilson's paper on *Evangelization Oppositions*. The dialogue fell broadly into four categories:

1. Questions concerning the biblical authority and direction for Christian conduct under these conditions.
2. Individual statements of experiences and attitudes.
3. Description of conditions under which Christians work in different countries.
4. Recommended action to be taken by Christians who are free to worship to support their Christian brothers and sisters. Suggestion that this Congress might take to help the situation.

### I. Questions concerning biblical authority and Christian conduct.

A. When a convert is made, should he be encouraged to come out openly, through baptism and witnessing, to express his new Christian faith openly? This action in a number of nations exposes the believer to persecution and even death. Those who have had to face this situation felt that biblical example indicated several possible positions for the Christian.

1. To flee. This was the action taken by some believers in both the Old and New Testaments.
2. To hide. This action is being taken by some believers today as it was in Bible accounts.
3. To remain quiet as a secret believer. This also has Scriptural antecedents.
4. To openly confess and accept the risk of torture, imprisonment, or death.

Comment was made that these options were left to the individual in the assurance that wisdom would be given by the Holy Spirit to the converts on the appropriate action they should take.

B. When should a Christian accept the teaching of Rom. 13:1-7 and submit to secular authority and when should he resist and disobey? This question was covered in Dr. Wilson's paper, but discussion expanded upon it. Acts 5:29 "...we ought to obey God rather than man," was quoted as being the proper attitude for Christians to take when secular authority and legislation violates conscience and specific biblical direction. Romans 13 was stated to be quoted by enforcement officials in the USSR when believers are questioned concerning their acts of faith and worship.

C. What should the Christian position be concerning lying when questioned by government authorities? The answer given was, "To tell a lie is always a sin. To say everything is also a sin." Reference was made to the study paper where Wilson mentioned God's com-