

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.
By William Symington.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 24.

CHAPTER 8.
THE MEDIATORIAL DOMINION
OVER THE NATIONS.
(Continued.)

[In the preceding paragraphs of this chapter, Mr. Symington began a third primary division, asserting that “there are duties which the nations owe to the Mediator”; and then demonstrating “First, it is the duty of nations and their rulers to have respect to the glory of Christ in all their institutions and transactions”; and then beginning “Secondly” to show that “it is the duty of nations, as the subjects of Christ, to take his law as their rule.” In opposition to the popular and pretentious claim that “the light of nature” is the rule to regulate civil matters, he demonstrated from both the Old Testament and New Testament, that God’s word is designed to be instructive about these matters, and not only about religion.]

And if this is the case with regard to revelation as a whole, it will not be denied to be so with regard to the moral law in particular. Nations, as such, are under the obligation of the moral law; they are bound to regulate their affairs by the principles and precepts of the decalogue. Every precept of that law they are bound to obey. It is, we are aware, maintained that only the precepts of the second table are obligatory on civil communities. As an individual standing in a particular relation and circumstances is not under obligation to obey those parts of revelation which have respect to persons placed in other relations and circumstances, so it is contended that nations are only under the obligation of such parts of the moral law as can be shewn to apply to them. We frankly admit the fairness of this reasoning. But then we are prepared to maintain that every part of the moral law is applicable to nations. If nations in their national capacity, and magistrates in their official character, are admitted to be moral subjects, it will not be easy to shew that they are exempt from the obligation of any part of the moral law. ► If it could be shewn that there are some requirements in that law which nations are incompetent to fulfil, it would follow, of course, that from these they are exempted. If, however, it can be shewn that nations are capable of obeying every precept—those of the first as well as those of the second table—it will be difficult to persuade an unprejudiced mind that they are free from the obligation of any one of them. With regard to the second table, there is, of course, no dispute; yet the last precept of this department reaches farther than many of those who contend against all national religion can consistently go; it respects the state of the heart. But it may easily be shewn, that nations are as capable of obeying the precepts of the first as

those of the second table. How is it, we ask, that nations can obey even the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments, but just by passing laws obliging men to perform their respective relative duties; by protecting the life and property of individuals; by discouraging licentiousness; and by promoting truth between man and man, by the sanctity of an oath? And may they not, in like manner, manifest their obedience to the first, second, third, and fourth precepts, by embodying into their constitution an acknowledgment of the being and character of the one living and true God; by providing for the ordinances of divine worship being maintained and observed in the land; by enacting laws calculated to restrain all blasphemous abuse of God's sacred name; and by making provision for the sanctification of the Sabbath? ► And if nations are thus capable of obeying the whole moral law, who will contend that they are not under obligation so to do? We allow that the Scriptures of truth are necessary to guide them in yielding this obedience: but is not this true of the one table as much as of the other? The kingdoms of the world require, indeed, much direction from the Word of God, in performing the solemn and delicate duties obligatory upon them by the first table of the moral law: but do they require no such direction with regard to those of the second? They do. The law of marriage belongs to the fifth precept; but how, without having recourse to other portions of the Scriptures, can any Christian nation legislate against polygamy? The law of murder is founded on the sixth; and how, without betaking to some other part of revealed truth, can it be shewn that the murderer should be punished with death? It thus appears that nations, as such, are bound to recognise the obligation of the Word of God as a whole; to make it their rule in all their transactions, and their standard of appeal in all circumstances; and, in this way, to shew their dutiful subjection to that divine Mediator, who is at once the author of revelation, and the Governor among the nations.

Thirdly. It is a duty which nations owe to Messiah the Prince, to have respect to moral and religious qualifications in those whom they appoint over them. We wait not to agitate the question of the people's right to elect their own office-bearers. Whatever diversity of opinion may prevail regarding the first magistrate, there is now no dispute, at least in these lands, with regard to the right of election in the legislative and executive departments of government. The general practice of the nations unites with Scripture and common sense in support of a representative system of government. Rulers as the representatives of the people are understood to be elected by and responsible to the people, according to the constitution and laws of the land. ► Even under the Old Testament dispensation, when kings were designated to office by immediate revelation, the consent of the people was deemed indispensable to their lawful authority; and they were liable to removal from office, by the people, for abuse of their trust. With regard to subordinate office-bearers, also, such directions were given as clearly imply that the right of election belonged to the community. 'Take ye wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you. When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; thou shalt in any wise set him over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose; one from among

thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee; thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.’ [Deut. 1.13; 17.14,15.]

But is it to be supposed that the people, who are invested with the right of election, are left without all control in the exercise of this right; that they are at liberty, acting from mere prejudice, self-interest, or caprice, to choose whom they will; and that the objects of their choice are forthwith, in consequence of being so chosen, invested with lawful and indisputable authority? So far from this being the case, the people are bound to use their elective power discreetly and wisely; they are under obligation to fix upon men possessed of qualifications fitting them for office; nor are they themselves constituted the sole judges of what these qualifications may be. ► God has given them in his Word a supreme rule of direction, in which the character of civil rulers is described, and only such as seem to them to be possessed of this character are they at liberty to appoint. If the people were under no restriction of this nature, it is fearful to think of the consequences that would ensue. As the power of the magistrate is not an absolute power which he is at liberty to employ as he chooses, so neither is the right of the elector an absolute right which he is at liberty to exercise as he chooses. Both the one and the other are placed under the limiting control of the Divine Law; and it is only when they are used according to this law that they are used aright.

It is not every individual who is qualified to hold office in a nation. Good natural talents, a cultivated mind, and a due share of acquaintance with the principles of government and with the constitution and laws of the country, seem indispensable. Scripture, not less than common sense, discountenances the practice of setting persons of feeble intellect to bear rule. ‘Wo unto thee, O land, when thy king is a *child*! Thou shalt provide out of all the people *able* men. Take ye wise men and *understanding*, and I will make them rulers over you.’¹—Not less essential are *moral* qualifications. High and incorruptible integrity, well regulated mercy, strict veracity, and exemplary temperance, are all specified with approbation in the Word of God. ‘Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people men of *truth*, hating *covetousness*. He that ruleth over men must be *just*. *Mercy* and truth preserve the king, and his throne is upholden by *mercy*. If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.’²—► Nay, more than this, *religious* qualifications are required in the Scriptures. A profession of religion would seem to be implied in the canon: ‘One *from among thy brethren* shalt thou set over thee; thou mayest not set a *stranger* over thee, who is not thy brother.’ [Deut. 17.15.] But true religion in the soul is also specified. ‘Thou shalt provide out of all the people such as *fear God*. He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the *fear of God*.’ [Exod. 18.21; 2 Sam. 23.3.] It is needless to say, that the fear of God is spoken of in Scripture as the very essence and sum of true piety. ‘The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.’ [Job 28.28; Eccl. 12.13; Jer. 32.40.]

1 Eccl. 10.16; Exod. 18.21; Deut. 1.13.

2 Exod. 18.21; 2 Sam. 23.3; Prov. 20.28, 31.4,5.

Thus it appears that three distinct classes of qualifications are necessary in civil rulers:—natural, moral, and religious. They are required to be men of good abilities, of unimpeachable character, and of sound piety. Weak and ignorant men; drunkards, libertines, sabbath-breakers, profane swearers; papists, socinians, infidels, are, accordingly, disqualified for exercising government in a country which is blessed with the volume of revelation. Such the people are not at liberty to appoint to places of power and trust. As regards the two former classes of qualifications, namely, such as are natural and moral, this statement will not perhaps be disputed by many who will demur to it as regards the third, that is, religious qualifications. The Word of God, however, is as explicit on this point as on the others: and if it is asked, ‘Of what use is religion to a civil ruler?’ it might be deemed enough, in reply, to refer the objector to the Bible, where such qualifications are expressly required. But no one who candidly reflects that civil magistrates are denominated ‘ministers of God;’ that they are required to administer oaths; that they exert a mighty influence by their example; and that decided personal piety adds greatly to the lustre and power even of natural and moral qualities; can be at a loss to perceive the importance of religion to one who is invested with civil power.

It will be allowed then that the nations owe it, as a duty to Messiah their Prince, to appoint over them rulers possessed of such qualifications as his Word prescribes. What these qualifications are we have already seen. And it requires but a slight glance at the state of things, even among those nations which are in possession of the inspired volume, to perceive how utterly and how extensively this duty is disregarded. It is a too common maxim with many in our day, that magistrates as such have nothing to do with religion,—nothing to do with it, it would seem, not only as an object of legislation, but even as a qualification for office. How often does it happen that men of *any* religion, or of *no* religion at all, are unblushingly preferred to those who have justly acquired a reputation for godliness? How dishonouring to Christ thus to set up, as his ministers, his open and avowed enemies—men who deny his divinity, who blaspheme his name, who deride his worship, and who openly profane his sacred day! Such conduct is attempted to be justified on a principle which is alike pernicious and fallacious, namely, that we have nothing to do with the private character of public men. Away with the treacherous maxim.

‘For when was public virtue to be found
Where private was not? Can he love the whole
Who loves no part? he be a nation’s friend
Who is in truth the friend of no man there?
Can he be strenuous in his country’s cause,
Who slights the charities for whose dear sake
That country, if at all, must be beloved?’³

Apart from the divinely authorised maxim, that ‘the wicked walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted,’—a maxim which all history illustrates,—if rulers are required, as we

3 *The Task*, [by William Cowper, c. 1785.] v. 502-508.

have shewn, to respect the glory of Christ, and to take his law as their rule, it is impossible that their moral and religious qualifications can be a matter of indifference, for without such qualifications, they cannot perform any one of these duties. However the force of circumstances, and the overruling providence of God may compel men of no private worth to devise and execute measures of public utility, there can be no security for either the existence or efficient execution of such measures, when the public offices are filled with worthless men. And, even if there were, this would not prove it to be the duty of Christians to confer the highest honours of state on persons of this description, and that, too, in preference to men of distinguished private worth. How differently did the patriotic Nehemiah feel and act in this matter: 'I gave,' says he, 'Hananiah, ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem; *for he was a faithful man and feared God above many.*' [Neh. 7.2.] ► The senseless outcry of *measures not men*, may serve the purpose of the slavish adherents of a profligate ministry, but it is a maxim that is essentially base, unmanly, irrational, and unchristian. It overlooks the necessary connexion subsisting betwixt cause and effect; it pours contempt on those parts of revelation in which the qualifications of rulers are prescribed; and it manifests an utter disregard of the honour and glory of the Saviour. The maxim *measures not men*, is not more deserving of respect than its converse, *men not measures*. Indeed, if we were under an absolute necessity of choosing either the one or the other, we should not hesitate to prefer the latter, there being, in our opinion, a much greater likelihood of good men correcting the evils of bad measures, than of good measures restraining the evils of bad men. But there is no need for adopting either. With the Bible in our hands, we are entitled to insist on both. *Measures AND men*, or rather *men AND measures*, is the maxim on which Christian nations should proceed. And every people, duly alive to their obligations, by making it an unalterable and fundamental law that they shall set over them only 'able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, a terror to evil-doers and a praise to them that do well,' will take care so to frame their constitution and regulate their practice, that the openly vicious and ungodly shall not have it in their power to thrust themselves into the sanctuaries of law and justice.

Nor is it only to the qualifications of the rulers whom they choose, that, out of respect to the will and glory of Christ, men are bound to attend, but also to their own qualifications as electors. This point is too apt to be forgotten. It is, however, one of great importance. Where the elective franchise is liberally enjoyed, everything may be said to depend upon the manner in which it is exercised. Electors, who are themselves irreligious and immoral, are not likely to set a high value on the existence of proper qualifications in those whom they choose to represent them. To such, the absence of these qualities is apt rather to prove a recommendation. But the choice of a representative, it should be borne in mind, is a civil right, the exercise of which involves, to a great extent, the welfare of the nation. It is not the individual himself alone that suffers from an improper use of this privilege, but the community at large. ► It is, consequently, of immense moment, that he exercise it, not from passion, fancy, or prejudice, but under the guidance of sound Christian principle. He is bound to subject his judgment and inclinations in this matter to the control of God's Word. Hence the vast importance of having the public mind deeply imbued with pure moral sentiments, and correct religious principles.

Never should the professing Christian suffer himself to forget that he is bound to act in character at all times. Never can the circumstance occur which will warrant him to say, Now I may drop the Christian and act the civilian or the man. It is not in matters of an ecclesiastical nature merely that he is to act as a Christian. He must conduct himself as a Christian at all times; when acting as a member of the state, not less than as a member of the church; in the workshop, as well as in the sanctuary; at the hustings,⁴ as well as at the table of the Lord.

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Discussion Questions:

1. When it is demonstrated from Scripture that the nations, as such, are under obligation to receive and enforce the moral law, as it is revealed in Holy Scriptures, how do some seek to qualify this truth?
A.
2. In what case, or on what condition, could we admit that the first table of the Law should not be enforced by the State?
A.
3. How is a nation's capacity or competency for fulfilling the precepts of the first table of the Law like its capacity for fulling the precepts of the second table of the Law?
A.
4. What is the third duty which nations, as such, owe to Messiah the Prince?
A.
5. What observations can be briefly made in support of the people's right to elect their own officers?
A.
6. When we assert that the people have a right of election, what caution should still be remembered about the rights of the people?
A.
7. What are the three distinct classes of qualifications which are necessary in civil rulers?
A.
8. What does the Bible tell us is the consequence of exalting immoral and irreligious men to power?
A.
9. In the Bible, whose example demonstrates a proper regard for religion when choosing officers?
A.

4 Hustings: A reference to political campaigns and meetings for political speeches.