

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.
By William Symington.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 25.

CHAPTER 8.
THE MEDIATORIAL DOMINION
OVER THE NATIONS.
(The Duties of Nations—Continued.)

Fourthly. The nations ought to have respect to Christ, in their subjection to those who rule over them by his authority. Scripturally-qualified and lawfully constituted magistrates are entitled to conscientious submission. Whatever are the specific duties to which such are entitled, whether respect, or tribute, or prayer, the duties are to be performed, not from slavish dread or selfish motives, but from respect to the authority and honour of the Redeemer. The law of Christ, on this point, is very fully and explicitly laid down in an oft-quoted but ill-understood part of New Testament Scripture. ‘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. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 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 of 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. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, *not only for wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.* For, *for this cause,* pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render, therefore, to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.’ [Rom. 13.1-7.] ► We say nothing at present of the character of the powers to which subjection is here enjoined. The nature of the subjection is that to which we would first call attention. It is conscientious subjection that is spoken of; free, willing, hearty; not forced or constrained. It is such as supposes the lawfulness of the authorities to which it is paid, and such as recognises the will of him by whom they act. It is to proceed from respect to the authority enjoining obedience, and not from a mere dread of the consequences of disobedience. In this way are the inhabitants of the nations bound to yield to their rulers;—‘*fear,*’ not a slavish involuntary dread, but an affectionate, respectful, and confident veneration;—‘*well-doing,*’ in the diligent performance of the duties of their station, and constant fulfilment of the laws;—‘*tribute,*’ the pecuniary support which is requisite for internal improvements, national defences, and the maintenance of such functionaries as devote their whole time to the public good, and which is

to be paid cheerfully, not merely as a return for privileges enjoyed, but as a mark of submission to, and approbation of, God's ordinance;—► '*custom*,' that particular form of taxation which falls not directly on persons or landed property, but on goods imported or exported;—and '*honour*,' in the use of respectful language and demeanour, avoiding, on the one hand, all scurrilous vilification, and, on the other, all idolatrous adulation, of men in power. These duties are to be performed from a principle of conscience; and the refusal to perform them is denounced and threatened with danger. 'Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.' The resistance of lawful authority is thus stigmatised as rebellion against God, and, according to the views formerly laid down, must be regarded as peculiarly offensive to the Messiah.

It is obvious, however, that it cannot be to every power, without exception, that subjection, under these lawful sanctions, is inculcated. Such a supposition is anything but honouring to Christ. Some, indeed, have maintained this, and, the better to support their views, have regarded the apostle, in the above passage, as having immediate respect to the then existing government. This opinion they found on the words, 'The powers that *be*,' 'There is no power.' But they overlook the circumstance that similar phraseology is employed, in laying down general principles applicable to every age. For example:—'There is no man that hath left house, &c., but he shall receive an hundredfold.' Here the phrase is the same as when it is said, in the passage in question, 'There is no power but of God:' and if the latter is restricted to the then existing authorities, ought not the former to be explained as applying exclusively to the men of the then existing generation? ► Again, we read:—'There *be* just men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked;' where the mode of expression is the same as in the phrase, 'The powers that *be*:' yet who ever thought of regarding the sentiment expressed in this passage as peculiar to the time when Solomon wrote? Besides the laws of impartial criticism require us to explain the character of the powers spoken of by the context, where they are described as 'not a terror to good works, but to evil—ministers of God for good—bearing not the sword in vain—revengers to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.' It is only necessary to compare, or rather contrast, these expressions with the character of the then existing powers, to be convinced that the whole passage is descriptive of the duties of Christians, towards, not any magistrates who may happen to be possessed of power, but such as are what they ought to be. ► Nero, who at that time wore the purple, was in every respect the opposite of what is here described. He was one of the most wicked monsters that ever occupied a throne;—a terror, not to evil works, but to good;—bearing the sword in opposition to everything that deserved protection and support;—and executing wrath only on such as did good and shunned evil. *Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.* Let Nero be tried by this test.¹ The primitive Christians, who lived during his reign, it will be

1. The author has made a reference to Birk's *Christian State* in support of his argument. The following are some of the sentences:—

'It is objected that the words of St. Paul apply immediately to the Emperor Nero, of whom it is unutterably absurd to suppose that the Apostle meant to invest him with any authority in religion. Hence the application, which is untrue in this case, must be untrue in every other, and no reference to

allowed, did that which was good. They professed and maintained the religion of the cross; they worshipped and served the Saviour of the world; they waited on the ordinances of religion with exemplary diligence; they faithfully discharged the relative duties of life, and conducted themselves in an orderly and inoffensive manner as members of civil society. And what was the 'praise' they received in return? Why, they were charged with every crime: were treated with every indignity; were tortured by every infernal device; were crucified, and their bodies either thrown to the dogs, or converted into torches with which to illuminate the capital! ► So far from the apostle's language referring to the existing governors, then, it is more natural to regard it as framed on purpose to reprove them, by presenting a striking contrast. Indeed, it would be difficult to conceive a more cutting sarcasm on Nero and his associates in power, than is here furnished. None but the most blinded devotee to the exploded doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance, would ever think of interpreting this passage of the then existing government. Nor is it easy to conceive a greater insult that could be offered to the Holy One of Israel, by whom kings reign, than to represent such a monster as Nero as 'the minister of God for good,' or his government as 'the ordinance of God' which could not be resisted on pain of damnation.

Without confounding all moral distinctions, it is impossible to suppose that the lawfulness of a power depends solely on the fact of its existence. The distinction betwixt a preceptive and a providential power, is not more consonant with reason and common sense than with Scripture. And if it is a breach of the obligation due to the Messiah, to set up, as his representatives and vicegerents, persons devoid of every requisite qualification for office, equally at variance with the duty we owe to him must it be to honour and acknowledge such persons when set up. Those to whom conscientious submission is due in the name of Christ, should certainly possess some measure of the qualifications which Christ himself has prescribed. ► It is absurd to suppose that nations, who are the moral subjects of the Redeemer, are bound, in obedience to his authority, to recognise and approve of, as his ministers, those who overlook and despise his authority, who employ their influence in opposition to his interests, and conduct their government on principles that are immoral. It is, doubtless, the duty of Christians living under a government of this description, to submit to it; but they are to submit to it as a chastisement sent them by God, and to conform, for the sake of peace, to the general order of society; while they take care, at the same time, to bear a full and honest testimony against its evils, and to avoid whatever is calculated to involve them in a participation of its guilt.

Under immoral systems of government it is, happily, possible for Christians to do many things, in compliance with the principles of social order, and for the good of the religious authority can possibly be designed.

'This objection would be forcible and conclusive if the Apostle were merely asserting a fact; but if he is defining the real duty of the ruler, which is evidently the case, it becomes quite powerless. Viewed in the former light, the words would scarcely be true, even when limited to secular affairs; for Nero was often a terror to good works, and sometimes more than to evil. St. Paul is clearly stating the true design of God's ordinance.' Pp. 288, 289. Edition of 1847.

commonwealth, as well as of individuals, without giving the sanction of their approbation to such systems as the ordinance of God. These things may be done, from regard to their own intrinsic obligation, as things moral in themselves and required by God. There is an obvious distinction betwixt doing *what* is enjoined, and doing the same thing *because* it is enjoined. Lawful authority is for the most part, though not always, to be obeyed; unlawful authority, never. Lawful authority may be employed to enjoin what is not lawful; and in this case it is not to be obeyed. Unlawful authority may be employed to enjoin what is lawful; and, in this case also, it is not to be obeyed. ► What, it may be said, not to be obeyed even when requiring what is right! Certainly not. The thing enjoined is to be done; not, however, *because* enjoined, but from respect to its own intrinsic obligation springing from the law and will of God. A wicked neighbour, usurping an authority which does not belong to him, intrudes into my dwelling and *commands* me to worship God, to love my wife, and to bring up my children in the fear of the Lord. These are lawful commands; and it is at my peril that I neglect them; but in doing them I am not, surely, obeying the intruder. This distinction, betwixt obedience to lawful commands out of respect to the authority enjoining them, and obedience to them out of respect to their own intrinsic obligation, is a most important one, in a practical point of view. It enables Christians, living under iniquitous and anti-christian powers, to do much that is calculated to promote the good of the community, and their own civil interests, without giving the sanction of their approbation to those who renounce the authority and disregard the law of Christ, and thus violating their oath of allegiance to the Prince of the kings of the earth. [Fifth Duty Follows]

=====

Excerpt from John Chrysostom on Romans 13.1-2.

“For there is no power,” he says, “but of God.” What say you? it may be said; is every ruler then elected by God? This I do not say, he answers. Nor am I now speaking about individual rulers, but about the thing in itself. For that there should be rulers, and some rule and others be ruled, and that all things should not just be carried on in one confusion, the people swaying like waves in this direction and that; this, I say, is the work of God’s wisdom. Hence he does not say, “for there is no ruler but of God;” but it is the *thing* he speaks of, and says, “there is no power but of God. And the powers that be, are ordained of God.” Thus when a certain wise man saith, “It is by the Lord that a man is matched with a woman” (Prov. xix. 14, LXX.), he means this, God made marriage, and not that it is He that joineth together every man that cometh to be with a woman. For we see many that come to be with one another for evil, even by the law of marriage, and this we should not ascribe to God. But as He said Himself, “He which made them at the beginning, made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.” (Matt. xix. 4, 5; Gen. ii. 24.) And this is what that wise man meant to explain. For since equality of honor does many times lead to fightings, He hath made many governments and forms of subjection; as that, for instance, of man and wife, that of son and father, that of old men and young,

Excerpt from Algernon Sydney's Refutation of Robert Filmer

On the Divine Right of Kings

[Algernon Sydney was Ambassador for the Commonwealth of England to Gustavus King of Sweden.]
The Apostle farther explaining himself, and showing who may be accounted a Magistrate, and what the duty of such an one is, informs us when we should fear, and on what account. *Rulers*, says he, *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 of the same; for he is the Minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.* He only therefore is the minister of God, who is not a terror to good works, but to the evil; who executes wrath upon those that do evil, and is a praise to those that do well. And he who doth well, ought not to be afraid of the power, for he shall receive praise. Now if our Author [Robert Filmer] were alive, though he was a man of a hard forehead, I would ask him, whether in his Conscience he believed, that *Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero*, and the rabble of succeeding monsters, were a praise to those who did well, and a terror to those who did ill; and not the contrary, a praise to the worst, and a terror to the best men of the world? ► or for what reason *Tacitus* could say, that virtue brought men who lived under them to certain destruction, and recite so many Examples of the brave and good, who were murdered by them for being so, unless they had endeavoured to extinguish all that was good, and to tear up virtue, by the roots? Why did he call *Domitian* an Enemy to virtue if he was a terror only to those that did evil? If the world has hitherto been misled in these things, and given the name of Virtue to Vice, and of Vice to Virtue, then *Germanicus, Valerius Asiaticus, Corbulo, Helvidius, Priscus, Thraseas, Soranus*, and others that resembled them, who fell under the rage of those Beasts, nay *Paul* himself and his Disciples were evil doers; and *Macro, Narcissus, Pallas, Vinnius, Laco, and Tigellinus* were virtuous and good men. If this be so, we are beholden to *Filmer* for admonishing mankind of the error in which they had so long continued. If not, those who persecuted and murdered them for their Virtues, were not a terror to such as did evil, and a praise to those who did well. The worst men had no need to fear them; but the best had, because they were the best. All princes therefore that have power are not to be esteemed equally the Ministers of God. They that are so, must receive their dignity from a title that is not common to all, even from a just employment of their power to the encouragement of Virtue, and to the discouragement of Vice.

=====

Excerpt from William Steven's "Answers to Twelve Queries" (1794)

Concerning the Character of the Roman Caesars.

Now here is a description of a government and governors which the Associate Presbytery say is specifically different in nature and kind from civil government, an absurdity destitute of the very essence of magistracy, complete tyranny and usurpation of the MEDIATOR's kingly office, according to Mr. Thomson. Let this be applied to all the ancient monarchies, Egypt, Babylon, &c. and see the consequence. Apply it even, to many of the kings of *Judah* and *Israel*, whom yet you contend were all to a man uniformly acknowledged, and submitted to, as the Ministers of GOD, and try what follows. But let us especially apply it unto the Roman Cæsars, which is

the matter presently before us. ► The rejected government of King Charles II and the Duke of York, as above described [by the Associate Presbyterians] consisted of three things 1st, Absolute power. 2^d, They held it not by the will of the people. 3^d, The exercise of a habitual and horrid tyranny, so that their government was a force upon the nation. Now it is evident that all the Cæsars, from first to last, assumed absolute power: the second of them had the name *Augustus* conferred upon him, from that very circumstance, which, says Prideaux, signifies something that above human is sacred and venerable. And though he was the wisest and worthiest man of all the emperors, yet it is well known, that by subtilty, deceit, flattery mercenary influence, and other base, and even violent means, he obtained a packed senate of his creatures, as King Charles II did of his Parliament; by whose consent he materially revoked and rescinded the whole former legal constitution of the empire, and had absolute power vested in his person alone; by which he might rule the whole empire according to his arbitrary will and pleasure; and this, by one part of the people, who courted his favour, and by another, who dreaded his power, was generally submitted unto, as was likewise the case with Charles II. And though, by the natural wisdom, prudence, and moderation, whereby *Augustus* conducted himself, he retained the esteem and consent, of the senate and people during his life, yet the case altered soon after: ► the senate saw their error when it was too late, and in vain made many efforts to shake off the yoke, which they had unwisely drawn upon themselves. The government of Rome, even before, but especially after, the commencement of the imperial power, was a force upon the whole empire; few or none of the conquered nations were retained tributary, but by mere force of arms. Some of the succeeding emperors, not only absurdly, against the very essential nature of magistracy, pretended to hold their power immediately of GOD, and not of the people; but even claimed divine honours themselves. And besides all their other wickedness, in the days of the Apostle, the emperor *Nero*, standing upon the same absurd and illegal constitution, and assuming the same absurd, absolute power, proceeded unto the exercise of a habitual and horrid tyranny, still more dreadful and unparalleled in various instances and respects, than even that of Charles II. was, as all acquainted with his history will acknowledge. His persecution upon the Christians was at least equally shocking; and by imputing his own diabolical wickedness, of setting fire unto, and burning the city of Rome, unto them, he not only rendered them odious there, and caused them to undergo the most inhuman torments; but also over the whole empire; and passed the most cruel edicts against them, whereby the whole empire was drawn into a conspiracy against the kingdom of CHRIST, and against their own rights, and privileges as men.

=====

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the forth duty which nations, as such, owe to Messiah the Prince?
A.
2. When Paul enjoins conscientious subjection & honor to rulers, does he include Nero and every ruler?
A.
3. What orderliness & governableness should characterize Christians while living under immoral govt.?
A.