

9. Discipling the Powerful (1Q 2014—Discipleship)

Biblical material: Rom. 13:1–7, Mark 2:23–28, Matt. 8:5–13, 26:57–68, 27:11–14, Acts 4:1–12; 6:7.

Quotes

- I do not politicize Christianity nor my discipleship as Jesus did not politicize either His divinity nor his humanity. *R. Alan Woods*
- Jesus said his disciples would be known for their love, not for their placards of protest and angry letters to the editor. *Brian Zahnd*
- Individually the disciple and friend of Jesus who has learned to work shoulder to shoulder with his or her Lord stands in this world as a point of contact between heaven and earth, a kind of Jacob’s ladder by which the angels of God may ascend from and descend into human life. Thus the disciple stands as an envoy or a receiver by which the kingdom of God is conveyed into every quarter of human affairs. *Dallas Willard*
- A wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities. *Thomas Jefferson*
- Government is not reason; it is not eloquent; it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master. *George Washington*
- Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one. *Thomas Paine*

Questions

How should Christians relate to government and church leaders? What can we learn from the example of Jesus? The early Christians had major problems from a pagan and often hostile government—how did they respond? How are leaders meant to operate, and what is our duty in relationship to what they do or do not do?

Bible summary

“Everyone should obey government authorities, because no one has the power to rule unless God gives permission,” writes Paul in Rom. 13:1. In the subsequent verses he makes it clear that not only should they be obeyed, but paying taxes to support the government is a matter of conscience, not just the rules. Jesus response to the religious leaders of his time when accused of allowing his disciples to “break the law” is recorded in Mark 2:23–28. The believing centurion is the wonderful example recorded in Matt. 8:5–13. Jesus’ response to both religious and civil leaders is shown in his trial (Matt. 26:57–68, 27:11–14), and similarly by Peter and John in Acts 4:1–12; 6:7.

Comment

“Over the long centuries, people have struggled to understand the role and function of government and how citizens should relate to it. What gives rulers the right to rule? What is the best form of government? Should people always obey their

government? If not, why not? These are just a few of a host of questions that we still wrestle with to this day.” (Sunday’s lesson).

If you had been living under Roman rule, how would you have related to that? Even Americans, living under benign British rule, felt it necessary to revolt! Did they not read their Bibles where it says “Honor the king”?!

Jesus in his interactions with leaders showed that he cared little for himself but was very concerned for them. Even during his trial he was trying to help the chief priests, the elders, Herod and Pilate see the truth—the truth that stood before them! Yes, he had previously identified Herod as a fox and called the Pharisees “whitewashed sepulchers full of dead men’s bones.” But he wanted to provoke a response from these men in positions of power and authority, keen for them to see their situation and their desperate need of the salvation only he could provide.

It’s fascinating to note the way Jesus dealt with the powerful. He was all too well aware of their abuses, but he still sought to win them. He could have come with overwhelming power and destroyed them. But he did not, preferring to use the divine way of invitation and demonstration to try and convince them.

This helps us to see the way we are to relate to both religious and civil leaders. While we are not called on to agree with them or to endorse their methods, we are to respect them in the same way Jesus did while not surrendering truth and right.

One of the hardest things is to experience unchristian behavior from our very own church leaders. Yet it happens, and from the testimony of many, is sadly not uncommon. The human response is to react negatively and retaliate. But Christ calls us to act as he did, not retaliating against all the harsh words and brutal actions he experienced. We are not to be accepting and compliant and become a “doormat,” and it is right to clearly show the wrongs that are being done. But in the end we leave judgment to the Lord.

Ellen White Comments

Some precious souls that could not justify the unchristian course pursued toward Brother J and others, have been crowded until they have separated from the church. Others have been cut off for no cause except bitter enmity because they did not act in harmony with the wishes and ideas of the leaders. Such a spirit has taken possession of those leaders who have ever been determined to rule, that they have been controlled by Satan rather than by the spirit of Christ. Some who have been deprived of the fellowship of the church were far more worthy of a place in it than are those who with their longer experience have been so overbearing and so anxious to drive out their brethren. The unreasonable, unchristian course of men and women who had more zeal than knowledge or piety, has displeased and dishonored God. He calls upon them to repent. {15MR 138-9}

From the beginning of his work as president of the General Conference, Elder Olsen’s policy has been a mistake... He has not been altogether in harmony with the men I have referred to, but so much so that Satan has stolen a march upon him. Unconsciously he has been ensnared, and his principles of integrity and purity have been corrupted. God has been dishonored, and His Spirit has been grieved. {17MR 182}

Religious leaders who are thus praised and revered lose sight of their dependence upon God, and are led to trust in themselves. As a result, they seek to control the minds and consciences of the people... {GC88 170}

Prepared June 19, 2013 © Jonathan Gallagher 2013