

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

This sermon script is furnished with
the good wishes of the Reorganized Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

World Headquarters: The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri

Program Number 287

Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
All Rights Reserved

The Sermon: THE ORDINANCES OF MEN

Scripture: I Peter 2:13-17.

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.

When the American founding fathers faced the decision of whether or not to break the political ties which bound the colonies to the mother country, there were many factors to be weighed -- political, religious, social, and practical. If they declared their independence, they would be condemned by some as rebels, traitors, and seditionists. If they did not, they would be giving up most of the freedoms for which they had come to America and for which their fathers had fought since the days of King John and the Magna Carta. If they declared their independence, they faced the almost certain prospect of war, and loss of life, property, everything.

In those days the doctrine of divine right of kings was still widely proclaimed and believed; and tyrants as well as benevolent kings knew how to quote scripture to prove that rebellion against the king was rebellion against God. Paul had written: "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." and Peter had written: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake..... Fear God; honor the king."

Where does the Christian owe his first allegiance? Always to God, the Creator, the Ruler of the universe, the King over all. When Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," he was not trying to divide life into

two separate and autonomous areas, one for God, and one for government. All is God's. Governments, their rulers, and their citizens, are all amenable to God; they must all eventually come unto his judgment.

Government is a part of God's plan. If God desires the safety, order, justice, peace, and well being of man (and we must believe that he does) then we must believe that governments which are designed to protect and preserve the unalienable, God-given rights and freedoms of men are pleasing in the sight of God, so long as they obey his laws, and insofar as they do promote human welfare. The Christian has a moral obligation not only to the heavenly kingdom, but to the earthly kingdom; for he has been taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven." It should be a part of his religion to relate the eternal to the temporal, the sacred to the secular, the ideal to the practical. He can do this only by assuming his share of the burdens and responsibilities of government, by cooperating with and obeying the laws of the state, and by supporting those officers whose duty it is to administer and enforce those laws. This he is bound by duty as well as by expediency to do, so long as the state in turn respects and protects his rights as a citizen and as a child of God. To oppose the state or its officers or its laws for selfish, unwholesome, or ungodly ends is unbecoming to a Christian, for it is rebellion against God's moral law, as well as against civil law.

What should the Christian do when

there is a clash between conscience and government -- that is, when government commands him to take a course of action which he believes to be contrary to the will of God? This was the problem faced by the men who signed the Declaration of Independence. Defying those who quoted scripture to prove that men owed unquestioning obedience to kings who ruled by divine right, and who must be obeyed as the vice-regents of God, these men boldly proclaimed that men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that to insure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; and that when government becomes destructive to these ends, it becomes the right of the people to alter or abolish it.

This also is good Christian doctrine. It is unthinkable that the God who created men free and gave them the right of free moral will or agency, who gave his Son to restore life as the alternative to death in order that man might retain his agency and his right to choose between life and death -- it is unthinkable that this kind of God should order or sanction any kind of government which makes some men slaves to others, which denies men their agency, and sets itself up as the absolute dictator and arbiter or moral and religious duties. It is even unthinkable that this kind of God would destroy men's agency by providing for an alliance between church and state in which the state becomes the tool or the instrument of a dictatorial church which attempts to force its concept of moral and religious duty upon all citizens, regardless of their own belief and conscience.

If the Bible contains passages enjoining obedience to earthly government and rulers, the Bible -- and secular history as well -- is also replete with examples of men and women who have defied and disobeyed worldly magistrates rather than disobey conscience or the commands of God. David found it necessary to ignore the king's authority and flee the kingdom rather than remain subject to Saul's jealous and murderous rages. Daniel went to the lion's den rather than obey the king's command against praying to any god but himself. The three Hebrew children, knowing that they faced the ordeal of the fiery furnace, deliberately disobeyed the king's command to bow down

and worship an idol. Elijah defied the idolatry of King Ahab, and was hunted down as a rebel and a traitor by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Peter, when ordered by the Sanhedrin to speak no more in Jerusalem in the name of Jesus, replied; "It is better to obey God rather than men."

Thousands of Christians in the early Christian era died rather than obey the command of the Roman emperor to renounce their religion and their allegiance to Christ. Other thousands since have suffered and died at the hands of worldly rulers, rather than yield to laws they believed contrary to the laws of God.

Men owe allegiance to the state so long as its officers obey the laws of God and respect and protect the God-given and unalienable rights of its citizens; but if and when the state or its officers ignore, flout, or defy the laws of God, then the citizens owe their first allegiance to God. No man can escape the demands of his own conscience by referring his decisions to the state and its officers, yet in a dictatorship that is always what men are required to do. What is the moral obligation of a soldier who is commanded to mistreat prisoners of war? What is the moral obligation of one ordered by the state to carry out a systematic and ruthless program of racial annihilation or genocide against a minority group? What is the moral responsibility of one whose conscience is sincerely opposed to bearing arms in war? What is the moral responsibility of one who is confronted with the choice of obeying conscience, or obeying a ruthless and unscrupulous political boss who uses his legal authority to manipulate and pilfer the public treasury?

The obligation of all earthly rulers is to obey God, and to serve the people. So long as they do this, the citizen is obligated to obey rulers and laws and cooperate with other citizens to see that God's will is done in the state, on earth, as it is done in heaven. When the state or its officers no longer obey the laws of God, the citizen should be meek, patient, kindly, and long suffering; but it is always the right and the duty of the citizen whose rights are invaded by his government to alter or to abolish that government, and to replace it with one which will respect and defend his right to give primary allegiance to God.