



ONE LORD

As Christians, we live in every imaginable state of civil government today that has existed since the beginning of time. One of the unique characteristics of the Christian faith is that one can live in peace under most governments under which one might find himself or herself. For this reason, we do not think that it was coincidental that the Son of God, in fulfilling all prophecy concerning His incarnation into this world, came into the world as a citizen of one of the most autocratic governments that has ever existed (See Gl 4:4). And yet, while He and His followers continued to preach the gospel to the government officials and citizens of the Roman Empire, they did not march on the streets for deliverance from autocratic dictators. Such efforts are found nowhere in the New Testament.

The early Christians already had the freedom they needed in their obedience to the gospel. Therefore, we would follow their example that is recorded throughout the New Testament documents. As Christians, we will not become involved in government overthrows. On the contrary, we will learn to be productive citizens in any government in which we may find ourselves. We will likewise do as the Holy Spirit mandated through Paul, *“I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, **for kings and all who are in authority**”* (1 Tm 2:1). This means, therefore, that we will seek to understand our government,

especially if our government leaders are autocratic, as were some of the Roman Caesars during the early centuries of Christianity.

When either governments or government leaders become autocratic—dictatorial—they of necessity seek to claim to be the “savior” of the people, and often demand total loyalty from the people. By making people live in fear, he seeks to convince the people that he, the dictator, must be the one in whom total control of the country must be invested. It is our blessing from the Holy Spirit’s record of the behavior of the early Christians as they lived under such a government in the first century, that we can also live in peace regardless of any autocratic leaders. The Spirit-inspired New Testament record of early Christian behavior is a blessing from which we can learn many things in reference to being good citizens while living under any government (Compare Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

A. A new Lord is prophesied:

The Jews and early Christians lived in the midst of an imperial cult religion that was philosophically in conflict with the world view of both the faith of Jews and Christians. They lived during the existence of the Roman Empire, which Empire often exalted its Caesars to being gods on earth. Roman imperial religion was consequently a religious cult of ancient Rome. It became the “false prophet” about which John wrote in his visions of Revelation (See Rv 13).

But it is interesting that in Old Testament prophecy, God revealed through Daniel, and other prophets, that something would change in the days of the latter years of His covenant with national Israel, but in the early days of Christians. Note the following prophecy of Daniel 7:

*I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven. And He came [into heaven] to the Ancient of Days [God, the Father]. And they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him **dominion and glory and sovereignty** [kingdom reign], **so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him** (Dn 7:13,14).*

What was given to the Son of Man after His ascension to the Father would be sovereign reign. Subsequently, people throughout the world would seek to come under the control of this ascended King. However, this picture was in total contrast to the behavior of the typical Roman citizen at the time of fulfillment. When the prophecy was eventually fulfilled in the first century, what some of the Caesars demanded of the people of the Empire was total submission. Some Caesars even claimed to be the only lord to whom the people should submit.

Before the fulfillment of Daniel 7, the Jews correctly believed that the prophecy referred to the Messiah. It was a prophecy that the Messiah would reign above any earthly government lord. The Jews believed in a “Higher Power” who was in control of all things, even the government leaders of the Roman Empire. But this belief presented a problem, especially for Christians who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of Daniel 7. He was the Messiah (See Jn 20:30,31).

The Jews, many of whom would eventually become Christians, believed in a Higher Power who reigned over all governments of this world.

B. Peter preached a problem.

So the apostle Peter stood up during the days of the Roman Empire and preached a message that would later develop into a conflict with many Roman government leaders who wanted

to be referred to as the only “lord” of the people. To many of these “lords” of the imperial cult of Rome, Peter was preaching insurrection. It was insurrection in the fact that Peter preached that there was only one Lord, and this Lord was King Jesus who was reigning from heaven. On that most notable day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed this fact:

*Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both **Lord** and **Christ** [Messiah] (At 2:36).*

There were two very distinct audiences for what Peter proclaimed concerning “*this same Jesus*” who had fulfilled the prophecies concerning the One, who at the time of his proclamation, was sitting on the throne of David in heaven. Peter made one reference that specifically applied to the Gentile world, and the other to the Jewish faith. In reference **to the Jews**, Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning the coming Messiah (Greek, “Christ”) (Lk 24:44). The Jews were to look to no other person in history, or in the future, who would be the God-ordained Messiah. Jesus was this person. Peter thus announced that Daniel 7 had been fulfilled. Both Jews and Gentiles had to understand this.

The second audience, **the Gentiles**, to whom Peter addressed his message was that Jesus had ascended to the right hand of God the Father. Therefore, “*this same Jesus*” was the universal Lord of all things “*so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him*” (Dn 7:14). Now this presented an ideological problem for the Gentiles in general, especially Gentile governments. In fact, it eventually led to the death of many Christians who were thrown to the lions in the Roman Colosseums.

Both among the Jews and Christians there was a Higher

Power than earthly governments to which all humanity was to recognize and submit.

C. The rise of a conflict between lords.

Reference to this conflict to whom the citizens should pay total homage first developed with Caesar Claudius who was Caesar of Rome from A.D. 41 to 54. This conflict arose when there were few or no Christians living in the city of Rome, but a great number of Jews. Because the Jews would not accept Claudius as the final lord over their lives, he ran all the Jews out of Rome. Because they were also Jews, Aquila and Priscilla were victims of Claudius' autocratic demand for total submission. They subsequently fled to the city of Corinth (See At 18:3).

Nero later became another autocratic Caesar of the Roman Empire. After Claudius, his autocratic behavior extended from A.D. 54 to 68. He had the same problem with people of faith in a Higher Power as Claudius. He, too, did not like any citizens claiming that there was a "lord" who was greater than his lordship over the people of the Empire. Therefore, he went beyond Claudius and claimed to be the only lord of the people. Because Christians could not accept this from a political dictator on earth, Nero turned his wrath against Christians in Rome who served only one Lord.

Because Christians would not confess that Nero was the only lord of their lives, they were subsequently condemned as insurrectionists of the Empire, and thus subject to the civil penalty of death by crucifixion, or entertainment for the people by being thrown to lions in the Roman Colosseum. And if a Christian were a Jew, then he was double guilty of not giving total loyalty to government, or government officials, and in particular, Nero himself.

It is believed that Nero started a fire in the city of Rome in July A.D. 64, and then blamed it on Christians – the fire eventually consumed about a third of the city of Rome. Nero subsequently launched a personal vendetta against Christians. He unleashed horrifying forms of execution on Christians. He ordered public crucifixions. Sometimes Christians were rolled up in pitch and then set on fire to light the imperial gardens. And then some Christians were wrapped in animal skins and thrown to starved dogs to be ravaged and torn apart. Nero will always go on record as the most evil autocrat of history. Eventually, as almost all autocrats who are basically cowards, he committed suicide.

The persecution of Christians continued off and on for about 150 years after Nero first set an example of imprisonment and death for those who would not confess Caesar as the only lord.

D. The one Lord clashes with atheistic autocratic lords.

The truth that autocratic government officials really do not desire that the people pay homage to “powers” higher than themselves has been illustrated throughout history. It is with us even today in our world. After Caesars Nero and Domitian in the latter part of the first century, Roman persecution of Christians continued into the second century. In the second century there were some faithful Christians of the Roman Empire who would not accept the claim that there was an all-powerful “lord” on earth in the person of Caesar. On the contrary, these faithfuls of the church truly believed what the Holy Spirit declared, that there was only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ep 4:5).

As in Rome, the same self-proclaimed gods exist today in different countries around the world. These autocratic rulers

often cannot accept the fact that there is a Higher Power above them, a King Jesus who has all authority over all things (Mt 28:18). King Jesus is the one who is *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come”* (Ep 1:21). Jesus *“has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him”* (1 Pt 3:22).

Atheistic autocratic leaders detest this particular truth of the Christian faith. They do so because they know that they cannot enact upon Christians any ordinances or laws that would conflict with the faith of Christians. Christians will always exalt God over man. This is simply a problem for those government officials who choose to rule contrary to the will of God.

Autocratic leaders in government throughout history simply could never accept the truth of what Jesus stated to the Roman regional ruler, Pilate, at the time Jesus was to be given over to the Jewish religious leaders who wanted Him crucified: *“You would have no power over Me unless it had been given to you from above”* (Jn 19:11). This was also a hard truth for King Nebuchadnezzar to digest when the prophet Jeremiah said to him in reference to what his enemies would do to him for his arrogant leadership as the king of Babylon:

They [your enemies] will drive you from men and your dwelling will be with the beasts of the field. They will make you eat grass as oxen, and seven times will pass over you until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whoever He wills (Dn 4:32).

Government officials who seek total loyalty from the people have a difficult time with those people who believe in a Higher Power that is above all governments on earth.

E. Wicked atheistic autocrats seek total loyalty.

We were recently taken back to those years of oppression and arrogant government leaders by the following statement that came forth from the mouth of an African politician who was running for election:

“Unlike Jesus, I don’t need a silly cross to save my people. I believe I’m the messiah of our time. I’m gonna save this nation like Jesus saved Christians. Except, I’ll be able to save you without some silly cross.”

So said one political leader who would subjugate the people to his dictatorial authority if he were elected as their leader. He could accept no Higher Power above himself, nor the fact that the people would submit to such a Power over him. There was certainly no King Jesus in his life.

Such arrogant statements as the above remind us of the circumstances surrounding Herod when he allowed his followers to say of him, *“The voice of a god and not a man”* (At 12:22). And then the Holy Spirit reported on the result of Herod’s arrogant behavior: *“And immediately an angel of the Lord smote him because he did not give God the glory. And he was eaten by worms and died”* (At 12:23). Arrogant autocratic leaders need to remember that there is an angel standing by who is ready to strike them down as Herod.

The striking down of Herod reveals what God thinks of those political leaders in government who would reign autocratically over the people, and thus seek to squash any faith out of the people. Atheistic leaders simply have a difficult time reigning over people who believe in a Higher Power.

In response to the preceding statement by the arrogant African

politician, Dr. Jan Venter wrote a retort in one of the national periodicals of that nation, “Leaders who claim godlike qualities often face disastrous ends” (*Farmer’s Weekly*, April 13, 2018). Such a disastrous end came upon Herod. We have witnessed throughout history the same end to similar self-proclaimed demagogues. Such leaders have come and gone in history, but unfortunately, as Stalin of Russia, they left millions of people dead as their legacy of psychopathic megalomania.

We might think that Rome’s frustration with the believers who considered that God is to be honored above all governments and kings on earth, was something that happened centuries ago. But the same thing still occurs today, and has occurred throughout the centuries. One of the most prominent examples occurred in Europe the latter part of the 1930s and into the years of World War II.

When the autocratic Hitler ravaged across Europe, a problem rose among the conquered peoples that was referred to as the “Jewish problem.” The Jews of the territories that Hitler had conquered honored God far above any tyrant as Hitler. Therefore, the only way to solve the “Jewish problem” was to eradicate Jews from society. And thus, “death camps” were built across the conquered territories of Europe. It was in these camps where over six million Jews, who honored God above the “supreme leader,” were exterminated from society.

Hitler’s attempt to eradicate from society any competition with his autocrat dictatorship over the people may have been extreme, but it was real. Others, today, are calling for the same eradication of the Jews even as we write. What we are discussing is the reason why there has been so much wrath unleashed by autocratic leaders throughout history against any people who would exalt God above any government authority on earth. Atheistic autocrats simply cannot allow people

to exist in society who will not exalt them as the “supreme leader” of the people. It is for this reason that Kim Jong-un, the “supreme leader” of North Korea, must be considered a god. No competition with his authority over the people must be allowed to exist in the country.

If a government official does not give glory to God in all things, then that leader will eventually face his or her doom in the final judgment, if not before.

F. Government is to be for and by the people.

God established governing authorities for the sake of the people of a nation. Therefore, the Holy Spirit wrote, “*Let every soul [of a nation] be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God. The authorities that exist are ordained by God*” (Rm 13:1). And since God, who is the one who ordains government to exist to prevent anarchy among the people, then He is greater than any government. The government that was in power at the time this statement was made was the Roman Empire. We must not forget, therefore, that God ordains government to exist among people, not specific government officials. Government is necessary to prevent anarchy, not to become the god of the people.

A government should never become in function the opportunity for atheistic autocrats to rise to the top. It is for this reason that democratic governments are established. In a democratic government the people have the power to stop the atheistic autocrat leader on his way to reach the top. If such leaders in a democratic government do reach the top, then such is a spiritual indictment against the voters who voted him into power.

A democratic system of government may not be the most efficient type of government economically, but it is the most free, as long as the people are kept in power by the power of

a moral vote. However, a nation can be kept on a preserving moral standard only if the voters continue with the standard of God's will.

When some authorities called the apostles Peter and John into their council chambers and demanded that they not speak in the name of Jesus—a Higher Power—the apostles bravely responded, *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard”* (At 4:19,20).

Though we today have not personally *“seen and heard”* as Peter and John, we should have enough faith in the Holy Spirit inspired record of their actual experiences with Jesus that this record is the foundation upon which we would make the same brave declaration (Jn 20:30,31). However, if we as a nation take our eyes off Jesus, we are in serious trouble.

If ever the religious leaders of a country move into the political wings of government, and make statements as that which was voiced by the preceding religious leaders or Herod, then it is time to take a stand for the truth of the one Lord Jesus Christ who is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

If one would be a Christian, then as a Christian, he or she does not have the option of denying the lordship of Jesus who presently reigns over all kings and lords of this world.

G. The business of Satan is to eradicate faith.

Satan does not idly lurk quietly in a dim street alley awaiting for some unsuspecting innocent to wander where lions roar. He more often covertly rises in the ranks of government legislators who enact antichrist laws that reflect their unbelief. Or often, he arises, as in Jesus' day, among leading religionists of

the land who seek, as in the Dark Ages, to crush any faith that would oppose the religious establishment. Before indifferent Christians finally realize that the “governing authorities,” or religious establishment, are commanding us “*not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus,*” it is sometimes too late. Before the indifferent realize it, they have lost their freedom for faith.

When Islam swept across North Africa in the seventh century, this antichrist faith swept Christianity off that part of the continent. When the atheistic communist regime of Mao se Tung rose to power in China after World War II, he did a great deal of religious house cleaning and sought to sweep Christianity out of China. Christians of that time in China had to go into hiding. Thankfully, Mao failed, for millions of Bibles a year are now openly printed by Chinese presses and distributed to people of faith throughout China.

The president of North Korea today has been very successful in making himself a god on earth, and thus demands the total loyalty of the people of North Korea. Back in the days of the Iron Curtain and the Cold War between the West and Communistic Russia, communistic government made it necessary for Christians living outside Russia to smuggle Bibles into the Russian block of nations. It is Satan’s business to do these things, and thus, we should not be surprised. The real problem is inert, inactive and indifferent Christians. The challenge arises when people of faith allow their faith to be swept away by the forces of satanic leaders, both in government and in religion.

Satan often works himself into a society by way of the back door. Those Christians who are indifferent—which indifference they pass off as being forbearing, tolerant and patient—will always find themselves at the mercy of the devices

of Satan. We must not simply view Satan as one who tempts us to commit sins individually. He certainly does such on an individual basis. But his work is also far beyond individuals. It is his total world work to eliminate Christianity from the face of the earth.

It is always Satan's business to create decade-long atheistic movements that will suppress, if not annihilate, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ from every society.

H. Christians must take up the Sword of the Spirit.

Christianity is a "militant" faith, but not with guns and suicide bombers. It is through a persistent stand for the truth of the gospel that enables Christians to be the preservative of any society. But in order to be a militant Christian, one must first understand what the final goal of Satan is in reference to any faith of this world. He is the enemy of our faith, the enemy of all righteousness (At 13:10).

When Jesus said, "*Be wise as **serpents** and harmless as **doves**,*" He did not mean "indifferent as serpents" and "idle as doves" (Mt 10:16). Those metaphors would make no sense if we attached such meanings to them. We must not forget that Jesus used the metaphor "wise as serpents," not "wise as Solomon." Serpents have a bite, and that bite has venom. A serpent will certainly be patient. He will not strike unless threatened. But if threatened, he will lash out with a venomous bite.

It is quite interesting that Jesus would use the behavior of a serpent in reference to those who would follow Him, though Christians do not bite so as to devour. Unfortunately, many of Jesus' disciples today forget what Jesus said to His immediate followers: "*Do no think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*" (Mt

10:34). But in the context of this statement, we must always remember what Jesus admonished in reference to those who would persecute us: “*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for My sake*” (Mt 5:11). “*I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” (Mt 5:44).

We never hear the subject of “Christian serpents” preached. We feel that most indifferent Christians have no desire to bite back with the truth of the gospel when threatened. But when the truth of the gospel is threatened, Christians must be reminded that it is time to wield the sword of the Spirit in standing up for the truth of the gospel. It is time to follow the mandate of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 6:17: “*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.*” We may live under one of those governments that is controlled by an atheistic autocratic leader. Nevertheless, in such cases we must remind ourselves of who Jesus said we are, that is, “Serpent Christians.”

When political “messiahs” arrogantly blaspheme the cross by which we are saved, it is time to bite back with the venom of the truth of the gospel.

Group Review Discussion Questions

[After reading the text of this bookito, answer the following questions in a discussion group with others.]

1. What was the meaning of the Son of Man being pictured in the Daniel 7 vision as one who ascended to God the Father in heaven?
2. When Daniel 7 was eventually fulfilled, what sovereignty did the Messiah exercise over the governments of this world?
3. Why did the declaration that Jesus was the only Lord become a message of insurrection by some Roman Caesars?
4. In view of the political ambitions of Caesar Claudius, why were the two Jews, Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth when Paul arrived?
5. Why does faith in the fact that there is only one Lord above all the lords of this world conflict with the central aspirations of atheistic autocratic leaders?

6. What did the religious leaders in Jerusalem command that Peter and John never do again?
7. What was the real reason for the genocide of the Jews across Europe before and during World War II?
8. What did Herod allow to be said of him that eventually led to his demise?
9. What is the real reason why Satan seeks to eradicate Christians from every society in the world?
10. What does it mean that Christians should be “wise as serpents”?

ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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