

# *Honour the king?*

## *Should a Christian respect physical governments?*

Each year in Canada, the Monday that precedes May 25th is given the name *Victoria Day*.

Now, I know what you're thinking... "So what?" For the majority of Canadians, Victoria Day holds about as much significance as most other national holidays – such as Labour Day and B.C. Day. It is just another day off work – convenient if you get paid for it – inconvenient if you do not!

But, like our fair city, this holiday was named after Queen Victoria who reigned over Britain and its empire (which included Canada) during some of their greatest years. The city of Victoria was so named in 1838, the same year as the young Victoria came to the throne, because it had been discovered as a potentially good port site.

There are many cities, provinces, states and nations throughout the world that were named after Queen Victoria (1819-1901). She was the longest reigning British monarch (63 years), and a whole era, the Victorian era, was named after her. But why was she so popular? Why did the whole world love her with such a zeal that almost approached idolatry similar to the Beatlemania of the 1960's? Funk and Wagnall's Encyclopedia cites three reasons:

1. The growth, prosperity, and success of the British Empire during her reign,
2. Her full involvement in the rule of Britain and the Empire,
3. Her personal example of honesty, patriotism, and devotion to family life.

But times certainly have changed! Here we are, a hundred years after Victoria's death. The British Empire is almost gone. The Commonwealth is not very *common* any more. It is full of rifts and disagreements. Many of its members do not even want it to be called the "British" Commonwealth. Queen Elizabeth II, Victoria's great-great-granddaughter, is a fine and hard-working monarch, yet her ruling responsibilities have been reduced to the signing of laws formulated by the elected governments of Britain and the Commonwealth countries. In complete contrast to the Victorian era, British royalty itself is coming under increasing criticism from a growing number of anti-monarchists. They feel that the monarchy has become a luxury that the taxpayers can no longer afford. Queen Victoria would not have been amused!

This erosion of respect is not confined solely to the British monarchy, but also to every level of human government in every nation. What about us? Are we critical of our various levels of government? Are those of us who live in commonwealth countries critical of our queen and the royal family?

This, at last, brings me to the purpose of this article, which is to urge you to examine your feelings toward the various levels of government which are over you, and to learn, from God's Word in the Bible, what our attitudes should be. Please note that none of what I write here is meant as a criticism towards our senior ministry to whom God gives the responsibility to cry aloud, to spare not and tell the people – including the national leaders – their sins (Isaiah 58:1).

### *Usual feelings toward government*

It is so easy for us to criticize and to speak negatively of our governments because (and I write this with all due respect) they are so imperfect. What human government has ever been perfect? Not Queen Victoria's. Not King David's. Not any!

The times that we speak out against our rulers are usually the times when they do something or legislate something that we might passionately disagree with. Examples might include increased taxes, abortion on demand, benefits for same-sex couples, and continuing refusal to bring back the death penalty for murderers.

We may find ourselves expressing our critical views in different situations: in an angry march on the Parliament Buildings, around the coffee station at work, or just murmuring to our wives from behind our morning newspaper! It is so easy. It is too easy. And, in one way or another, we have all done it!

Does God have anything to say on this matter? Has He given us any instruction or examples in the Bible? Yes, He has. Let us look at a few examples:

## *David's example*

One day, young David was called in from his humble sheep-herding job in the fields and was anointed as prince, and thus future king, of Israel:

**And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. (I Samuel 16:11-13)**

Quite a surprise for one so young! And one that he and his family would have to keep to themselves for quite a while. David knew long before Saul did that he was to replace Saul on the throne of Israel. Despite Saul's many imperfections, David loved him like a father and had deep respect for his position as "the Lord's anointed."

During the time the mentally unstable Saul was seeking David's life, David had at least two opportunities to kill him (I Samuel 24:1-15; 26:1-20), and to take over the throne he knew God intended for himself. But in both cases, despite prompting from his right-hand man, David knew that it was not his responsibility to dethrone the Lord's anointed, but that God would do it in His own good time. David maintained his love and respect even during this time when the demented Saul was out to kill him.

We may have our differences with them, but our government leaders are not out to kill us! Despite their failures and imperfections, most of our leaders feel that they are doing their best to rule us wisely.

When God did eventually remove Saul from office, did David rejoice because the throne of Israel was now his?

**Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: and they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword. And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite. And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed? *[This man, expecting a reward from David, had claimed to have murdered Saul]* And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. And David said unto him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD'S anointed. (II Samuel 1:11-16)**

The remainder of this chapter continues as David's respectful lament over the death of Saul, his beloved king.

## *Jesus Christ's example*

David was only a human being – like you and me. Was his course of action, therefore, necessarily right in these cases? Let us now turn to Jesus Christ's example. He was more than just a human being. He was God-made-human, and we know that His course of action was definitely right. If any man knew the faults and imperfections of human governments, Jesus Christ did. He had been watching their activities from their very beginning. The major government over the land of Palestine during Jesus' physical lifetime was, of course, that of Rome. The Romans allowed the Jews a surprising amount of autonomy for a conquered nation, yet their form of government was still a far cry from the way that it should be done. Again, Jesus knew this fact better than anyone. But, like David, He knew that He would have to wait a considerable length of time (in human terms) for His Kingship. This is shown in Matthew's and Luke's versions of the parable of the pounds (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-21) and by Jesus' assurance to Pilate that He was a king, but that His Kingdom was not of this age (John 18:36-37).

During His human life Jesus had the utmost respect for the physical governments that were allowed to be placed over Him:

- He paid His taxes,
- He taught that Caesar's taxes should be paid by those obedient to God,
- He talked with, dined with, and even called certain government employees (among them tax collectors, apparently the most despised and disrespected government employees of that day).

Disrespect for government was one of the temptations Satan tried on Jesus at the very beginning of His ministry. Perhaps Satan thought, "Here's one they all fall for! Everyone hates their government!"

**Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (Matthew 4:8-10)**

Satan offered Jesus early kingship over all the nations of the world, and without the human suffering that Jesus knew was to come. As with David, the ploy was, "It is rightfully yours anyway. Why not take it now?" As future leaders in the World Tomorrow, do we sometimes fall for this in our criticisms of our human governments?

Jesus turned Satan down flat! It is an interesting sidelight to notice, however, that Jesus did not tell Satan that those kingdoms were not his to give.

## ***Other New Testament instruction***

There are many other examples and instructions in the New Testament regarding proper respect by true Christians for our various human governments. Paul was always respectful toward the Roman government, even when he was unjustly imprisoned by them, and even when he faced death at their hands:

**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. (Romans 13:1-7)**

Likewise Peter. He too would later be put to death by the Romans, yet he clearly instructs Christians on this matter:

**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. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. (I Peter 2:13-17)**

Through Peter, God told His people of the first century church to honour their king. Yes! To honour the Roman emperor!

And so, by extension, He is telling the same thing to His people today. To honour our Queen. To honour our Prime Minister or President. To honour our Provincial Premier or State Governor. To honour the Mayor of our municipality.

Although it may become increasingly difficult to do so, God commands us to have proper respect for the governments and laws that He has placed over us.

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