



CITIZEN REIGN

On Being a Citizen in the United States of America

By Tim P Taylor

Among the many blessings that I am thankful for is the privilege of being born in the United States of America. She is not perfect, but she is the best nation on earth. One of the things that makes her special and unique is what I call Citizen Reign. In a monarchy the king reigns—*rex lex*, “the king is the law.” In the US “the law is the king”—*lex rex*. Our constitution provides for equal protection under the law for all people. America is a republic where the governing officials are elected by the citizens. The individual voter is the most powerful person in the land because he or she determines who will govern. The exercising of the right to vote is the most important privilege a citizen possesses. For the Christian it is a sacred obligation.

The fact that this country was established by men and women, who honored God in their personal lives is indisputable. The founding documents of this nation are resplendent with direct references to the divine. Our currency bears the declaration of national homage to the Creator. As much as some would like to remove any mention of God from the public discourse, there is no denying the influence honor for God has played in creating the

system of government of these United States of America.

It is not the purpose of this treatise to praise or deny the checkered past that is the history of America, except to declare that the good that has been done in her name far outweighs the bad. Lord Acton has been proven correct on countless occasions when he said,

*“Power tends to corrupt,
and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
Great men are almost always bad men.”*

Today, we suffer from the truth of this statement as corruption pervades the ranks of our national, state and local elected leadership. It is the nature of the beast that good men are compromised by the immense wealth and power that an elected official can personally amass. I was broken-hearted several years ago to learn that Randall “Duke” Cunningham was convicted of accepting \$2.4 million in bribes when he was a congressman from California. Cunningham is by no means the only former elected official to serve time for corruption, but he is significant because he was one of the first

graduates of the Navy's Fighter Weapons School. The movie *Top Gun* was his story. When he went to Congress, by all appearances, he was a good man. He was forced to resign in disgrace.

Edmund Burke reminds us that citizens are not absolved of responsibility if our elected officials fail us when he stated,

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

In this statement the obligation of the citizen who calls himself a Christian is made evident. The issues at hand are the administration of authority and good men. If we do not elect "good men" (and women), we should not expect those whom we elect to act with good intentions. The temptations are too great for most to resist. Burke informs us that it is the obligation of the citizen to be a good person in order for good people to be elected to serve. The winner of elections actually represents who the voters are. The current lot of elected officials at all levels is actually a sorry commentary on the character of the electorate.

Recent events have been used to attempt to persuade us that character does not matter. "What a person does in private is of no consequence," has been the sermon from those who wish to prop up leaders who lack personal character. Character is an obligation first, of the citizen who exercises the right to vote; next, of those who are elected to serve. If good people vote for good people, good people will govern. If the voters do not require their elected officials to be of good character, then good people will not rule. In our form of government, the chief responsibility is vested with the voter. It is the individual citizen who actually holds the highest office, because he (or she) has the right to vote for whomever he

wishes. Elections are an expression of the will of the people, no matter how they seem to be manipulated. In America, it is the individual of voting age who determines who governs. It is incumbent on the individual citizen to be of good character in order to elect men (and women) of good character to rule with good character.

Power

The Bible tells us that the lust for power is the source of all conflicts, including murder and war.¹ The struggle for authority is nothing new. Power seems to draw persons of low character like a magnet attracts ferrous metal. The Bible also establishes the source of all authority as God. He is the supreme authority by virtue of His role as Creator. Rebellion against His divine rule preexisted creation.² Lucifer led the first revolt against God and he is the father of disobedience that fills the hearts of evil men still today.³ Divine authority is the sovereign power of the universe.

God has chosen to delegate His power to man. On the Sixth Day of creation God gave the newly formed man dominion over the earth.⁴ God delegated authority to man for him to rule the earth. Paul describes these two powers and the obligation of those who call themselves Christians to submit to the governing authorities.⁵ Paul sets no conditions as to the form of government or the character of those who govern. The responsibility under God is to obey those in authority because they have been delegated their power from God.

Delegated authority possesses the power of the "sword," meaning that the power derived from God carries with it the power to enforce the rules and to punish those who break them. This is the subtle difference between power and authority. When a Police Officer holds up his hand to halt traffic, he is exercising his

authority as a servant of the people. The pistol he wears on his hip represents the power to enforce that authority. Fear of punishment is the motive for obeying the laws of the land.

Delegated authority can be found wherever there is established power. It can be formally seated or informally expected. The policeman possesses power to enforce the laws written in the public code. Parents hold informal power over their children, although such rule needs no vote. In a real sense, those who hold roles of delegated authority are servants of God. As servants, whether formally or informally established, they represent divine authority.

The responsibility to obey divine authority is not optional. The obligation to submit to delegated authority is equally imperative. The only exception is when delegated authority requires rebellion to divine authority. This is the point of departure that led our Founding Fathers to break away from England and establish a new nation based on constitutional principles. This was the conclusion that the three Hebrew men declared when commanded to worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol. It is the same principle that Peter stated when commanded by the powers-that-be to cease preaching the Gospel.⁶ Disobedience to delegated authority is permitted in such cases, but there is no promise of rescue from the consequences of that defiance. The 11th Chapter of the Book of Hebrews is a testament to those who chose to obey God rather than man and were martyred for their faithfulness.

The mandate of Scripture commands obedience to delegated authority. The US Constitution likewise requires such submission. It is the Constitution that separates the American Christian from all other citizens of the nations of the world. Because the US is a republic and her citizens have the right to vote to choose the elected

officials who govern, the US citizen serves the role of a servant of God who possesses delegated authority. US officials serve at the whim of the people they govern, regardless of current practices. The presence of corruption in the system does not alter the obligation. Voters most often deserve the people they elect because the elected represent the character of the voters. If good men (and women) are needed to rule, good men (and women) must elect them. God has delegated both the power and the authority. In the US the individual citizen has the right and privilege to elect, or remove, those in authority each election.

What makes the difference is character. Delegated authority is derived from God and there is an obligation of those who wield this power to honor God with it. The welfare of the governed depends on the character of the governing.⁷ Paul calls those in positions of power servants and the duties they perform are acts of honor and respect shown to God and their constituents. There was a time in history when monarchs claimed it was their divine right to rule. We have since seen the error of such ways. Various forms of government have been established throughout history with differing levels of success. Scripture does not dictate a sacred form of government. God leaves that to us, but He does expect a level of character from the governed. Leaders are not role models because they do not set the standard. Leaders reflect the character of those who elect them. The cure for the corruption in Washington is not to change the laws. The solution is to throw off the lethargy of citizen passivity and stand for what is good. We can do that next week with our vote.

The Christian Citizen

The obligation to be a good citizen who elects good leaders is doubly true for the

person who calls himself a follower of Christ. I do not believe that you can be a good Christian in America without being a good citizen. The first and foremost responsibility of the citizen is to vote! 77% of the American population call themselves Christian.⁸ Only a small percentage of this majority exercised their privilege to vote in the presidential election of 2010. If believers would band together, we could be the most powerful voting block in the country. We could rule! Sadly, our statehouses and Congress have become bereft of moral voices. Our national and state capitols have become wastelands devoid of character. We can blame the men and women who occupy the seats of power because they are culpable. But we cannot absolve ourselves of the sin of neglect if we do not exercise our right to vote them in or out of office.

Paul commands the readers of his letter to the Romans to submit themselves to those whom God has delegated His authority to rule. They are his servants. They hold the power to punish that should be feared. It is a sacred obligation for Christians to honor their leaders. By doing so, we honor God. Obedience to the laws of the land is an expression of obedience to God Himself. Submission to those in power over us is a sacred duty, unless of course that authority commands that we rebel against God. Then the authority has forfeited its right to rule. In America it is the privilege and the duty of the individual citizen to make certain good men and women are elected to office. The neglect of this single obligation will be the downfall of the nation. To be a Christian in America, one must be a good citizen. Deserting this duty is disobedience to God. Abandoning the privilege and obligation to vote is the shame of the Church in the United States.

The Spirit of the Age

Zeitgeist is the German word used by philosophers to describe the “spirit of the age.” It literally means, “time-ghost.” It is the term that describes the prevailing personality of the current culture. If there was one word that best defines the zeitgeist of the American society today, it is **victim**. We live in a culture of victims. The dominant message of our age is the denial of personal responsibility. A criminal is no longer guilty of his crimes because he was a victim of an abusive home with an absentee father, living in poverty. Success is demeaned in the name of relativism. Scores are not kept in children’s games for fear that their fragile psyches may be damaged. Being offended has become a cottage industry. No one is to blame for anything they do! The shirking of responsibility has made victims of us all.

I chose the term zeitgeist because it is indeed a spirit that is influencing the age. I call it the *spirit of the Thief*. In John 10, Jesus reveals the nature and character of this oppressive influence. Christ is debating the religious leaders of His day when He evokes the metaphor of sheep to represent people. He describes Himself as the Good Shepherd, who loves the sheep and lays down His life for them. Jesus further explains those who would use the sheep for their own selfish purposes. He calls them thieves. They do not use the front door to enter the abode of the sheep. They climb over the fence or sneak under the gate. The thieves do not have the best interest of the sheep in mind.

The Bible says that the thief has only three objectives. He comes to:

- 1) steal,
- 2) kill, and
- 3) destroy.

The thief takes what is not his. If he cannot steal it, he will kill it. If he cannot kill it, he will destroy it so no one else can enjoy it. The thief is in the business of creating victims.

Who has not been a victim of the thief? This spirit has stolen from all of us. He may not have robbed us of material possessions, but he has stolen blessings God intended for us. What he could not steal, he has tried to murder. Death has doubtless touched each of us in some way and we are victims of his murderous schemes. If the thief could not steal from us or kill what is ours, he has tried to destroy us, and destroy what is ours. Destruction is the chief sign of the thief. This spirit is bent on destroying everyone and everything in its path. Its rampage has been more destructive in our society today than a tornado in Oklahoma. The swath of its devastation stretches from sea to shining sea. Our culture is pervaded with victims because of the spirit of the thief.

Of course, the thief is the enemy of God called Satan. The devil has been so effective in creating a culture of victims that he has all but silenced the Church. Christians are not immune from this epidemic of victimization. Too often, believers are the first in line to blame someone else for their problems. The devil is an easy target and shifting guilt to him, diverts it from us, relieving us of the responsibility to really do something transformative. The spirit of the thief is the child of Satan, but it is not confined to one being. This spirit has cloned itself until it has representatives in every corner of our nation and every walk of life in our society. We will see no lasting change in the personal lives of people in our world, and no substantive improvement in our government and business leaders, until we confront and root out the spirit of the thief from our culture.

This will not be an easy task. America is like the man Jesus spoke of in Matthew 12. An evil spirit was forced to leave him, but because he did not fill the void with the Spirit of God by changing his lifestyle, seven more wicked spirits entered him. He found himself worse off than before. Even so is our wicked generation.⁹ There is no nation on earth that has experienced the blessings of God like America. We were set free, but we allowed the spirit to return, bringing seven more like him. Our current state is worse than we have ever known. What can we do?

We can take a cue from the wisest man who ever lived. At the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem, God gave King Solomon the cure for national apostasy. He said,

*“If my people, which are called by my name,
shall humble themselves,
and pray,
and seek my face,
and turn from their wicked ways;
then will I hear from heaven,
and will forgive their sin,
and will heal their land.”¹⁰*

Only two nations in the history of the world have been specifically established to honor God. Israel of the Old Testament is one and the US is the other. If not in name, by the sheer population of those who claim to be Christian in America, we can be consider “His people.” Regardless of the designation, the promise of deliverance is in Christ. Repentance has always been the swiftest avenue to revival. To see our nation change, it will require humility, prayer and repentance. If we believe, it can happen.

We need also to follow the example of the prophet Ezekiel who was taken by the Lord to overlook a valley full of dried bones.¹¹ God

asked the prophet, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel replied, "Lord, only you know if they can or not." Then the Lord commanded the prophet to preach to the bones. When he did, they began to rattle and move and form into the bodies of men. The bones came together to form the skeleton and God supplied all the body parts and skin, but there was no breath in them. God instructed Ezekiel to speak to the wind to fill these bodies so that they will live. And it was so. There, in the valley that had once been full of nothing but the dried bones of the dead, now stood a vast army of men. The Lord told the prophet to promise this revived army that God would restore the nation. As a sign, Ezekiel was told to gather two sticks, denoting division. God promised to unite the once divided people. When you take two sticks and put them together, they form a cross. It will be by the power of our risen Savior that God will heal our divided land, if we will repent and return to Him.

The transformation of our culture appears to be an insurmountable task. It can only be undertaken by faith. Can we expect our nation to change? Can we see the spirit of the thief vanquished? The antidote for the spirit of the thief is the Good Shepherd. He comes to give life and the life He gives is abundant in both quantity and quality. We must choose life! We must resist the spirit of the thief, refuse to be victims no longer and claim the victory we have in Christ! Can these bones live? We may not have faith to see the whole valley revived, but we can begin by asking God to refresh us with His Spirit. Has the thief stolen from you? Demand that he return what has been taken. In Jesus, we can expect the return of what has been stolen from us because He sacrificed His life. Has the shadow of death hovered over your house? Jesus gives life and in Him we can expect revival through His resurrection. Has

destruction come near you? In Him we can expect restoration. Jesus is in the business of building up what has been torn down.

The real question is do we have the faith to believe that God can revive our nation. Like Esther, what if we have been called for "such a time as this?"¹²

If not us, then who?

If not here, then where?

If not now, then when?

It is not only our duty as Christians to pray for our nation, it is also our obligation as citizens of the United States to take an active role in the reformation of our nation. It begins in the individual heart of every believer who will take a stand for what is good. It only requires the simple act of praying to a God who hears us and waits to move on our request. It can begin with the basic act of casting a vote in next week's election.

Can these bones live? Our nation has never needed God to move among her people more than today. He is the source of all power, but he has delegated His authority for us to exercise. The politicians in Washington and Austin are not our enemies. It is the spirit of the thief we battle. Though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh. The weapons of our warfare are not natural. They are supernatural with divine power to tear down the fortresses the thief has erected.¹³ Jesus has built His Church on the solid rock of His identity as the Son of God and the gates of hell shall not halt Her advance.¹⁴ Praying and voting Christians are our nation's only hope. We are the only people actually equipped to deal with the issues that are devastating our country because we are the only ones with real lasting solutions. We are the children of God! We are not victims, but victors in Jesus Christ!

I implore you to vote this week! I also ask you to begin to pray to the Lord intentionally for our nation, blessing our elected leaders

specifically. Take time to put on the whole armor of God and to stand and see the salvation of God.¹⁵ Pray like this:

Our Father, Who is in heaven, we praise your holy name.

We pray that Your kingdom would come and that Your will be done, on earth as it is done in heaven.

We rebuke the spirit of the thief and we refuse to be victims no longer.

We choose to be victors in Jesus Christ.

We choose life and ask to receive the promised abundance of it.

We demand that the thief return what he has stolen.

We require that he release those on whom the shadow of death hovers over.

We command that he restore all that he has destroyed!

We humble ourselves before you Lord, laying all defiance and pride aside.

We repent of our neglect and complacency.

We love our nation and believe that these dry bones can live again!

Release Your Spirit to revive us!

Begin in our individual hearts. Lord, begin in me!

Thank You for the two sticks that formed the cross on which our Savior purchased life for us.

O Father, save us from ourselves and heal our culture.

Rescues us from ourselves and raise up leaders who will lead us to honor and follow You!

Begin this week with this election!

Let the world see Your hand in the votes that are cast.

Call Your people to act.

Let character win the day!

Revive us again, O Lord, revive us again!

In Jesus name, amen.

- ¹ James 4:1
- ² Revelation 12
- ³ Ephesians 2:2
- ⁴ Genesis 1:26
- ⁵ Romans 13
- ⁶ Daniel 3:16-18; Acts 5:29
- ⁷ Proverbs 29:2
- ⁸ www.gallup.com/poll/159548/identify-christian.aspx
- ⁹ Matthew 12:43-45
- ¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 7:14
- ¹¹ Ezekiel 37
- ¹² Esther 4:14
- ¹³ 2 Corinthians 10:3-6
- ¹⁴ Matthew 16:18
- ¹⁵ Exodus 14:13; 2 Chronicles 20:17

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