

FEAR GOD, NOT GOVERNMENT

By

Curtis Dickinson

Whether or not we face impending national disaster as did the nation of Judah in the of Jeremiah we will have to wait and see. But in any case the warning given by Jeremiah still applies: “Cursed is the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart is departed from the Lord” (Jer. 17:5).

The fact that his warning applies under the new covenant as well as the old is demonstrated by the attitude of the apostles when facing, not only national destruction (which came in 70 AD), but also personal persecution. Arrested for preaching the resurrection of Jesus, they were threatened and warned to preach no more in his name. In a modern setting Peter and John might be expected to get out a newsletter, launch a letter-writing campaign to the Senators in Rome, and create an organization of conservative people of all faiths to defend their freedom and protect them from the Sadducees. But none of this was deemed necessary or even desirable, Peter and John didn’t turn to human powers, nor indicate the least faith in Rome’s guarantee of their rights. They simply said, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Their prayer was not for relief from opposition but that God would give them the power to “speak the word with all boldness” (Acts 4:29). They refused to cower in fear of the combined power of Caesar and the religious machine. Peter was convinced that it is a blessing to “suffer as a Christian,” since we are “sojourners and pilgrims” in the world (I Pet. 4:16, 2:11). John labored under the conviction that “perfect love casts out fear” (I John 4:18).

There is a kind of paralyzing fear running through our country, pervading all of society — business, government, religion — influencing decisions and demoralizing relationships, stagnating business and negating the Christian witness. Ironically, it is the very people who should demonstrate the greatest strength and courage — Christians — who seem to be panic-stricken at every turn of events. So-called prophetic evangelists compete to see who can instill the greatest fear in the hearts of their people. Not the healthy fear of God, but the debilitating fear of man, of the future, of the communists, of the international conspirators, of the collapse of the economy, of the tyranny of government and scores of other things.

Granted that all these threats to freedom and happiness are very real and growing daily, and that preachers and elders are responsible to enlighten their flocks that they may be forewarned of danger. But such enlightenment should be given to strengthen one’s hold on God and build his confidence, not tear it down and send him searching in fear for human help and strength in the arm of flesh.

Much of the fear is generated in the tension that exists between commitment to Christ and duty to country. The fear-mongers equate the Christian faith with patriotism, and patriotism means support of the nation in every situation, whether right or wrong. This denies Christian freedom and makes one virtually a slave to men. To confess Jesus as Lord is to give allegiance to Him. The Christian is a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. He is under the command of the eternal and almighty King, Jesus Christ. If the

state demands of him that which violates his allegiance to the Lord then he is a captive of the state, and is not free. The church generally opts for the slavery to state rather than to Christ.

Patriotism and freedom are not the same thing, although most people who are struggling to preserve original freedoms guaranteed by the constitution would consider themselves patriots. But freedom means, above all else, freedom to follow one's conscience with regard to religion. When the state violates that conscience it is violating freedom. To fight for freedom means one must sometimes oppose the state.

When Peter and John defied the priests, Sadducees and Pharisees, they were aware of the fact that the state was involved. Praying about the matter they quoted Psalms 2. "The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his anointed." They linked "Pontius Pilate with the gentiles and the peoples of Israel" in crucifying Jesus. The church faced the united forces of state and official religion, but refused to be intimidated by them and for 300 years managed to remain free of any compromise with the state.

The church was called out of the world and instructed to "be not conformed to the world" (Rom. 12:2). The standards of the world in every age fall far short of the image of God as demonstrated by Christ. For this reason He warned His disciples that they would be rejected, scorned, hated and persecuted by the world.

In spite of the warnings the church has allowed the world's influence to outweigh the Lord's. Its members have feared rejection by the world and have sought its approval, loving the things of the world rather than the things of God. It has become so closely identified with the world that any judgment upon the world is feared by the church as a threat to its comfort, pride and security. Christians have come to be more careful to obey the state than God.

For Example, Christian Colleges, established for the training of preachers, enthusiastically accept state standards in order to be eligible for all the tax breaks, grants and dubious accreditation the state offers. Why should the church, God's holy nation, be concerned that its affairs be dubbed acceptable by a humanist state? If the church, and its related agencies such as Christian schools, is to teach that God is able to provide the essential needs of the saints, why should it go, hat in hand, to any government agency and plan its program with fear and trembling to comply with the atheistic standards of the state?

To make sure that the church is implicated in supporting the power of state, the state offers tax exemptions if the church keeps the rules. And the majority of people will not give the "cup of cold water" in the name of Jesus unless the thirsty beggar can guarantee that it is tax deductible.

The example of Jesus is that of a man who had no fear, not even that of the state. The temple had received special permission from Rome to collect its own tax and it was well known that some of that tax eventually wound up in the hands of Caesar or some of his subordinates. When Jesus entered the temple to cleanse it of the corrupt money changers, He was well aware of the complicity between the government of Rome and the religious authorities. He also knew the consequence of defying state and religious authority. The question they put to him was "by what authority do you do these things?" It was the same question with which they challenged the apostles, Peter and John, after they healed a man at the temple gate.

In both cases the question implied a threat, and Jesus and the apostles knew the risk. In both cases the risk had been calculated and accepted. Jesus had instructed the disciples to “Be not afraid of them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matt. 10:28, Luke 12:4–5).

Jesus not only warned of the collapse of the nation of Israel, He emphasized that its collapse was the fulfillment of prophecy and a result of divine judgment (Luke 21:22, Matt. 21:42–43). He even told them that it would come upon that generation, and gave specific signs preceding it. But it was not to be faced with fear by the Christians, but rather in the confidence that God’s hand was ruling in the affairs of men with perfect justice and that the same hand guarantees salvation and eternal life for the saints. The greater the distress of the nation, the greater the reliance upon the Lord.

The first requirement of discipleship is denial of self, and the second is taking up the cross to follow Jesus. This means denying the protection of the world and risking all to the Lord. Taking up the cross could mean only one thing, that as Jesus suffered death in order to be obedient to God and purchase our salvation, we must be ready and willing to die also, and, in fact, must die to the world — to its protection, its power, its glory, its pleasure — and live completely in dependence upon God and for God’s purpose.

Jesus knew some things Caesar and his supporters — the religious authorities — did not know. He knew that this power to kill Him was their only because a Higher Power granted it. He knew that His death was victory, that by defying the powers that threatened Him He was fulfilling the purpose of Almighty Power and that the reward of obedience to God was ultimate glory beyond anything known by the arrogant powers of human dignitaries.

If we believe God, we believe that He is the One who saves and destroys governments. Unless our nation begins to turn to God in deep repentance and a devout effort to curb sin and uphold righteousness, there is no hope for it.

We must fear God more than government, more than inflation and more than communism or world conspirators. We must trust God and not guns, the arm of faith, not the arm of flesh.

To live in fear of the world’s impending disasters is to be a slave to the world and to fear. God’s servant fears no one but God.

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute
Curtis’ articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article
for permission to be valid. Vol. XX, Number 11.
.....