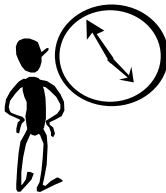


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Governmental Authority

By Steve A. Hamilton

Some members of the Lord's Church struggle to understand a Christian's relationship with the government. The government "*is God's minister for good.*" Christians are "*subject to the governing authorities.*" Government's authority was appointed by God. Christians are directed not to resist their authority. To resist government is to resist God (Rom. 13:1-5). Yet, Peter and the Apostles said, "*We ought to obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). The Apostles said that to the local governing authority with God's blessing.

The line that was drawn by the Apostles was clear. When government exceeds their authority by trying to regulate God's Word they are not to be obeyed. Relating it to an unlawful order might help to understand that there are limits that should never be exceeded even when God appoints the governing authority in question. The government told the Apostles not to teach about Jesus Christ. The Apostles could have acknowledged the High Priest's rightful God given authority and agreed to teach elsewhere. However, they defied that authority on the basis that God's Word trumps governmental authority even when that authority was appointed by God.

For example, if the government said it was unlawful to meet for worship services, would that mean Christians must move to a country where such laws do not exist? That was an option the Apostles did not chose to exercise. Everyone needs to hear the gospel just like every Christian must worship regardless of their locality. If government exceeded their authority, Christians would have no other option but "*to obey God rather than men.*"

What should be done if the government made it unlawful to worship anywhere on a temporary basis for our own

protection? Say a new virus caused a worldwide pandemic and if the government did not ban all assembling in large groups, more people would get sick and some may die. In this scenario, the government exceeded their authority once again, but it was for our own protection. Would the Apostles have allowed a cessation of teaching on a temporary basis to protect the lives of those they hope to convert? Should Christians forsake worshipping on a temporary basis to protect their own lives?

The latter question is easier to answer. Christians have a relationship with Christ that should preclude any notion that life on earth is at all important. *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it"* (Matt. 16:25). The opportunity to die in service for Christ by contracting a virus while worshipping Him should be very appealing to Christians (Heb. 11:13-16). If a Christian gets sick and dies from a virus while in worship to Christ, praise be the Lord! The church would not be responsible for their death. The Lord gives life and He takes it away (Job 1:21).

What about non-Christians? It seems very reasonable given the temporary scenario to avoid large groups due to a pandemic in order to protect those who have not come to Christ. Non-Christians do not worship the Lord anyway and teaching them would not necessarily cease due to a large group restriction imposed by the government. Teaching the lost could be done on a personal basis and certainly could be conducted over the internet or phone outside of worship services.

Someone will argue that the Lord allows sick people to miss services; therefore, allowances should be made to prevent sickness. The Lord allows members to miss services due to sickness (Jas. 5:14-15) and for those caring for the sick (Jas. 2:14-17). However, no allowance is given to healthy members to miss services unless they were providentially hindered (Matt. 12:1-12). If the virus in our scenario never goes away, will the healthy ever go to church again? For the last 2000 years, members of the Church accepted the risk of getting sick at the assembling of the saints but never made it their excuse. What is really being argued is the assertion that members may miss worship if they find a reasonable excuse. So if a family member dies and we need to bury them during worship services then that should be allowed. *"Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead"* (Matt. 8:21-22). Is it harsh to put the Lord first in our lives (Mk. 12:30)?

Someone may ask what the difference is between a government employee being told to miss worship for work and anyone else being told by the government to miss worship for a virus? Both situations represent the government dictating the missing of worship. The difference is in the relationship the member has with the government as an employee. All Christians must provide for his own (1 Tim. 5:8). If any employer

tells a Christian they must work or lose their job, it is necessarily inferred that the Christian must work; else he is worse than an infidel. However, if that same government employer told the same employee that they had to miss worship to protect him from a virus, that would represent the government exceeding their authority. That would be an unlawful order. A Christian must be astute enough to know the difference between lawful and unlawful orders. When government tries to regulate God's Word, that is when it exceeds God's given authority. Christians at that point must "*obey God rather than men*" (Heb. 10:25).

Admittedly, these scenarios make Christians uncomfortable. Most Christians never imagined such situations that could possibly require them to defy the government. It should be noted that Christians are blessed to live in the United States that has laws preventing the State from regulating religion. Even in recent developments with the coronavirus, government entities were reprimanded when they tried to impose rules regulating religious conduct. Christians in other countries may not be so blessed.

His Eye Is On The Sparrow

By David Padfield

In Matthew 10 Jesus sent out the twelve apostles and "*gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease*" ([Matthew 10:1](#)). This commission was limited in that they were not allowed to "*go into the way of the Gentiles*" or "*enter a city of the Samaritans*" ([Matthew 10:5](#)). Instead, they were sent "*to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" ([Matthew 10:6](#)). Our Lord also warned them that persecution would accompany their preaching ([Matthew 10:16-22](#)). As an encouragement in the midst of this persecution, Jesus told the disciples of His Father's care: "*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows*" ([Matthew 10:27-31](#)).

"Sparrow" is the name given to several different species of birds in the Bible -- they ate grain and insects and gathered in noisy flocks. Sparrows would often build their untidy nests in the eaves of houses, but were not driven away when they built their nests in the Temple ([Psalms 84:3](#)). These insignificant little birds were such social creatures that a lone sparrow was the symbol of deep loneliness ([Psalms 102:7](#)).

In the days of our Lord sparrows were sold for a very low price -- two of them for a copper coin ([Matthew 10:29](#)). A copper coin, an asarion, was a very small Roman coin, was worth about 1/16 of a silver denarius, and was therefore worth less than a quarter in U.S. currency today. Those who were poor and could not afford to sacrifice a

sheep or a goat might bring a sparrow to the Temple (cf. [Leviticus 14:1-7](#)).

So insignificant were these little birds that if you bought four sparrows the seller would throw in one more for free ([Luke 12:4-7](#)). It was this extra sparrow of which Jesus said, *"and not one of them is forgotten before God."* His care for His creation is so great that even this extra sparrow is noted and observed by God!

The point our Lord was making is this: if God is concerned about the tiny sparrow and notes its fate, how much greater must His concern be for man, who is immeasurably greater in value than the sparrow!

God's Eye Is On Things We Deem Insignificant

Sometimes it seems that God is the only one who cares for sparrows. Cats and birds of prey like to hunt and eat them, and little boys have been known to torment them. Adults complain about how they multiply and consider them pests. Yet, Jesus said, *"not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will"* ([Matthew 10:29](#)). It is interesting that Jesus chose the most common of all birds to teach a profound truth: in God's eyes, no one is insignificant!

God not only provides food for *"the birds of the air,"* but He also *"clothes the grass of the field"* ([Matthew 6:25-34](#)). The *"lilies of the field"* were the scarlet poppies -- they bloomed for only one day on the hillsides of Israel, and yet in their brief life they were clothed with a beauty which surpassed *"Solomon in all his glory,"* and when they died they were *"thrown into the oven."*

In the days of our Lord ovens consisted of a clay box set on bricks over a fire. When it was desired to rapidly raise the temperature of it, some handfuls of dried grasses and wild flowers were thrown inside the oven and set alight. The flowers had but one day of life; and then they were set alight to help a woman to heat an oven when she was baking in a hurry; and yet God clothes them with a beauty which is beyond man's power to imitate. If God gives such beauty to a short-lived flower, how much more will he care for man?

Surely, the generosity, which is lavished upon a flower for one day, will not be forgetful of man, the crown of His creation.

David was impressed by God's care for us: *"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen -- even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!"* ([Psalms 8:3-9](#)).

God Does Not Always Prevent Evil From Happening To Us

Though God does provide care for the sparrows, the fact that "*not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will*" ([Matthew 10:29](#)) means that sometimes bad things can happen. Although He watches over the sparrows, this does not prevent them being hunted by predators. Although He watches over every one of us, this does not mean that our lives will be free from care.

God had placed a "hedge" around Job ([Job 1:8-11](#)), but allowed Satan to tempt Job ([Job 1:12](#)). In the midst of his trials he did not lose his trust in God ([Job 1:21](#)). In one of the most beautiful passages in the book of Job, we hear Job say of God, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*" ([Job 13:15](#)).

We can be assured that with every temptation there will also be a way of escape. "*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*" ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)). My brethren, there are no special cases! When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on!

God's Care Continues For Us

We may not esteem the tiny sparrow, but Jesus used it to illustrate our heavenly Father's watchful care: "*you are of more value than many sparrows*" ([Matthew 10:31](#)). If God is concerned about the tiny sparrow, how much greater must His concern be for man, who is immeasurably greater in value than the sparrow!

There is no place for worry in the life of a sparrow, and no attempt stockpile supplies for the future -- yet their lives go on. The point Jesus is making is not that the birds do not work; it has been said that no one works harder than a sparrow to make a living; the point He is making is that they do not worry. Sparrows do not strain to see into a future, which they cannot see, and do not seek to find security in the things they have accumulated for the future.

Worry is needless, useless and even injurious ([Matthew 6:25-32](#)). Worry, which wears out the mind also, wears out the body. Worry affects our judgment, lessens our powers of decision, and renders us progressively incapable of dealing with life. Worry is a manifestation of our lack of faith in God ([Matthew 6:30](#)). We need to learn to be content ([Philippians 4:4-13](#)).

In the midst of turbulent times Habakkuk said, "*Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls -- Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation*" ([Habakkuk 3:17-18](#)).

God's continued care for us should bring contentment in our lives. "*But godli-*

ness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" ([1 Timothy 6:6-10](#)).

Conclusion

In 1904, a songwriter, Mrs. Civilla Martin, went to visit a bedridden friend in Elmira, New York. Mrs. Martin asked the woman if she ever got discouraged because of her physical condition. Her friend quickly responded: "Mrs. Martin, how can I be discouraged when my heavenly Father watches over each little sparrow and I know He loves and cares for me?"

On her journey back home, Mrs. Martin completed the writing of her new text, which has since been a source of much encouragement to many of God's people:

Why should I feel discouraged,
why should the shadows come,
why should my heart be lonely
and long for Heaven and home,
when Jesus is my portion?
My constant Friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow,
and I know He watches me...

"Let not your heart be troubled,"
His tender word I hear,
and resting on His goodness,
I lose my doubts and fears;
though by the path He leadeth,
but one step I may see:
His eye is on the sparrow,
and I know He watches me...

Whenever I am tempted,
whenever clouds arise,
when song gives place to sighing,
when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him;
from care He sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow,
and I know He watches me...

God's care for us is immeasurable -- He allowed His only begotten Son to die in our stead ([John 3:16](#)). When we consider the "*riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering*" this ought to soften our heart, "*knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance*" ([Romans 2:3-4](#)).

God's care for us will sustain us throughout life, for "*we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*" ([Romans 8:28](#)).

God's care for us extends beyond the grave and into that home of the soul, for those who "*do His commandments*" have the right to the tree of life, and "*may enter in through the gates into the city*" ([Revelation 22:14](#)).