

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT?

Roger D. Campbell

Do you suppose there is a civil government anywhere in the world that has the exact structural arrangement and policies that the Roman Empire had in the days of Jesus and the first-century disciples? There may be some aspects of present-day governments that resemble those of the ancient Roman Empire that was in power in the Middle East when the New Testament was written, but the odds are extremely high that no modern-day arrangement is a one-hundred-per-cent carbon copy of the Roman setup.

If that be the case, why should a child of God living in the 21st century even be concerned about what the New Testament teaches about Christians' responsibility to their civil government? The specifics may not be exactly the same, but the New Testament principles still apply because they are a part of the teaching of the Christ that endures and lives forever (1 Peter 1:23-25), being in force until the end of the age/world (Matt. 28:20).

What does the New Testament teach about my obligation to the government under which I live? This general instruction is found in Titus 3:1: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." That statement, coupled with more extensive teaching recorded in 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7, as well as other New Testament prin-

ciples, leads us to make the following conclusions about our responsibility to the civil government.

1) *A Christian is to obey civil authorities.* First, the message of Titus 3:1 is, "...obey magistrates." Second, the opening instruction of Romans 13:1 is, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers." Third, Christians are further charged, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man" (1 Peter 2:13). The context of this last passage clearly shows that the expression "ordinance of man" is not a reference to some man-made religious regulation, but rather to the decree of civil authorities, "the king" and "governors" are noted (1 Peter 2:13,14). When the Holy Spirit's instruction is to "obey," "be subject to," and "submit to" the laws of the land, that is a pretty plain message, would you not agree?

2) *A Christian is to obey the civil government "for the Lord's sake"* (1 Peter 2:13). Because "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1), resisting such authorities is equal to resisting God's ordained authority and arrangement (13:2). Obeying civil authorities is part of obeying the Lord, "For so is the will of God" (1 Peter 2:15).

3) *A Christian is to obey every aspect of civil law.* Going back to 1 Peter 2:13, we read, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake...." "Every ordinance" would include what the civil authori-

ties decree about building codes, littering highways, tax obligations, the size of passport photos, how far a church building must sit away from a street/road, and you name it. We may be tempted to label certain laws as "unreasonable," "ridiculous," or even "insane," but the law is the law. If I have the right to disregard a law that I count as inconvenient, excessively costly, etc., then why would another person not have the right to disregard a different law? What is it that ensues when people decide to use their own gut feelings to determine with which government ordinances they will comply, and which they will disregard? The word is "chaos" or "lawlessness."

4) *A Christian is to obey civil authorities at all levels.* Peter's Spirit-guided instruction to submit to civil ordinances was, "...whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers..." (1 Peter 2:13,14). Kings, governors, and delegated authority are mentioned, indicating that all branches and levels of civil government fall under the category of "the powers that be" to whom we are to submit ourselves. In our country that would include national, state, district, county, and city laws.

5) *A Christian is to obey civil*

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Christian's Responsibility...



Editorial...

JONAH AND NINEVEH

Garland M. Robinson

God is love (1 John 4:8). His compassion and mercy is abundant (Psalm 100:5; 103:17; Matt. 14:14). Luke 19:10 says, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

As the people of God, we are to exhibit the same compassion and loving kindness toward all. “...Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8). “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him” (1 John 3:17; cf. Jude 22)?

Because of God’s great love, His plan from the beginning has been to save mankind from their sins. “...He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:4; cf. 1 Peter 1:20).

Though the Old Testament Scriptures deal predominately with God’s watchful care over the Israelites and then later the Jews, He also cared for the Gentiles. He cared for people and nations before the children of Jacob (Israel) were born. When Adam and Eve sinned, God promised redemption (Gen. 3:15; cf. Rom. 5:14-18). God gave instruction to Cain and Abel regarding righteous worship (Gen. 4:3-8; cf. Rom. 10:17). Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:22). Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). Abraham became the father of the faithful but was not an Israelite (Rom. 4:1,12,16; James 2:21). Melchizedek was a priest of the most high God (Gen. 14:18). Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, was the priest of Midian (Exodus 3:1; 18:1).

When the Israelites were passing through Moab, Balak, the king of the Moabites, summoned Balaam, a prophet from far-away Mesopotamia, to come and curse Israel (Num. 22). When Balaam inquired of God about it, he was forbidden to curse them.

He expressed a very noble statement when he responded to the summons by saying, “...If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more” (Num. 22:18; cf. 1 Peter 4:11). What a shame it was when he rebelled and rejected God’s Word (Num. 22:34). His name has become synonymous with covetousness and rebellion (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Rev. 2:14).

God called upon several Israelite prophets to prophesy regarding Gentile nations. Prophets such as Amos, Obadiah and Nahum foretold events among the Gentiles. Because of God’s great love, He called upon Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh to get them to repent.

The origin of Nineveh goes as far back as Genesis 10:6-12. It was undoubtedly one of the oldest cities in the world in Jonah’s time. It is mentioned in the records of Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.). It is also mentioned in Babylonian records that extend back to the 21st century B.C.

Nineveh was a royal residence of kings and served as the capital of Assyria during the reign of Sargon II (722-705 B.C.). It was especially loved by Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) who made it the chief city of his empire (2 Kings 19:36). He constructed massive walls around it and built the oldest known aqueduct in history that brought water into the city from 35 miles away.

Regarding the people of Nineveh, God said “...their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:2). More than a hundred years later we read similar words revealed through Nahum who wrote that it was a bloody city full of lies and robbery (Nahum 3:1-7).

The people of Nineveh had transgressed God’s law for far too long. The time of their impending doom was near as God was ready to destroy the entire city. However, one more

chance would be given for them to repent, turn themselves around and reverence Jehovah. Jonah was the man chosen to deliver the message. “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah...saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:1-2).

Even with Jonah’s attempt to escape the Lord’s command, God made good come from it. The mariners aboard the ship saw the great power and majesty of God and gave Him praise and honor. “Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows” (Jonah 1:14-16).

God rules in the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:17,25,32; 5:21; cf. Jonah 1:17). He is able to use events in this world to work His eternal purpose (cf. Rom. 8:28). What men intend for evil, God can use for good (Gen. 50:20). The many persecutions and atrocities that befell the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 11:22-28) was used by God to spread the Gospel into places it would not have otherwise gone as quickly. Paul wrote to the church at Philippi concerning this very thing: “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Phil. 1:12-14).

Jonah’s words to the people of Nineveh were very sharp and distinct. Though his motive was not right, he cried aloud and did not spare. “And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, **Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown**” (Jonah 3:4). The power of the word of God brought about conviction and repentance in the hearts of his hearers (cf. Rom. 1:16).

There’s no indication Jonah’s

reluctance to preach as God directed (the first time he was given the order) was due to fear on his part. He didn't fear the people, nor the job! It was rather due to the fact that Jonah did not wish the people of Nineveh to repent and be spared of God's wrath. When the people repented in sack cloth and ashes, Jonah said, "...was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:2-3).

How tragic! How could it possibly be that any of God's people would not want those who are lost to be saved? But, none the less, that was Jonah's disgrace. He thought more for his own comfort and a gourd that shaded his head than the 120,000 who could not discern their right hand from their left (Jonah 4:8-11). Shame, shame on Jonah! May we never travel that same road. God does not desire that any perish. He wants all to come to the knowledge of the truth and repent (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4).

John the Baptist had a stern and reproving message similar to Jonah's. Matthew records: "...when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, **he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance**" (Matt. 3:7-8). His message regarding the adultery of Herod and Herodias was plain, "*for John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her*" (Matt. 14:3-4). When Salome, the daughter of Herodias, finished her lascivious performance (dancing) before Herod, he was so excited that he promised to give her anything she would ask. Her wicked mother had already conspired to ask for the head of John to be brought to her on a platter. Though Herod was sorry he had made such a rash vow, he yielded to their devious plans. Oh, what wicked devices men can weave when they depart from the living God and refuse to be restored in repentance!

Our Lord's preaching was like Jonah's. He preached the truth and

did not hold back. "*Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee*" (Matt. 11:20-24).

What Jonah preached was the command of God. He was only doing what God had ordered to be done. "*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it*" (Jonah 1:1-2). He was told a second time, "*Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee*" (Jonah 3:2). This was God's order and Jonah was not about to escape it though he tried desperately to do so. His preaching was not his own words. It was the word of God!

The apostle Paul made clear to those in the church at Corinth and for all who would read his inspired words that the things he taught were the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37; cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:2). He had the gift of prophecy and used it to impart the divine will of God (1 Cor. 13:2). We are not inspired like Jonah and Paul, but when we preach the inspired word, our preaching is powerful and sharper than a twoedged sword (2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 4:12).

When Jonah repented of running away, God was merciful to him and gave him a second chance (Jonah 2:1-10). When he preached the whole city of Nineveh would be overthrown by the mighty hand of Jehovah, "*...the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them*" (3:5). This shows beyond a doubt that God "*...is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

God was well aware of the ruthlessness of Nineveh. He knew of their idolatry, adultery, drunkenness and pride. He was witness to their witchcraft, robbery, lying and whoredoms. None-the-less, He was willing to forgive if they would repent and turn to Him. And, that's exactly what they did. "*And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not*" (Jonah 3:10).

Oh, how we all should work and pray that the wicked will repent and turn to God before it's too late! Our loving and merciful Father will abundantly pardon and the angels will rejoice (Luke 15:7,10). "*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*" (Isa. 55:7).

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TAKING THE WORD OF GOD TO ISLAM #4

John Hall

CONFLICTS IN DOCTRINE BETWEEN THE KORAN AND THE BIBLE

II. The Godhead (Triune Nature) and His Divine Characteristics

Koran: Denies the Godhead (5:72-74), and describes Allah as one who does not love those who reject faith (30:44-45; 3:32; 40:35).

Bible: Defends the Godhead (Matt. 3:16-17; 1 John 5:7; Col. 2:9) and describes Jehovah as loving everyone, even while they are/were in sin (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 8:38-39; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2, 4:19). He does not forgive until they repent, but He loves them just the same.

III. Relationships of Muslims with Others

1. Marriage:

POLYGAMY

Koran: Allows for a man to have up to four wives if he can afford them (4:3, 24-25; 23:6; 30:21). The only exception was Mohammed who could have more wives than any other man (33:50-53).

Bible: Though God may not have immediately punished polygamy under the Old Law, this was never His desired system (Deut. 17:17; Matt. 19:3-5; 1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 3:2,12; 5:9). God has never allowed a prophet or teacher to live differently than what he has preached and/or to exalt himself above the law (2 Thess. 2:4; 1 Cor. 4:6; Rom. 2:21).

DIVORCE

Koran: A Muslim man can divorce for any reason (2:226-232; 33:4,49; 58:2-4). Realistically, a Muslim could have an unlimited amount of wives, all with the approval of God.

Bible: God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and only approves of remarriage for the innocent party if the divorce was for fornication (Matt. 5:32; 19:5-9) or death (1 Cor. 7:39).

CANDIDATES FOR AND CONDUCT IN MARRIAGE

Koran: If there are no women available, men were allowed to marry young girls (4:25) as Mohammed did. Husbands are allowed to beat their wives (4:34).

Bible: The husband is to give honor to the wife because she is weaker than him (1 Peter 3:7). He is to love her as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25).

VIOLENCE

Koran: Muslims should fight back against those who fight them (2:190) because persecution is worse than slaughter (2:191,217). Allah is described as loving those who fight for him (61:4), which is why on occasion his followers are told to bear weapons while praying (4:102).

Bible: Christ taught His disciples they were *not* to fight back when provoked (Matt. 5:38-41; 26:52; John 18:36), but should instead return good for evil (Matt. 5:43-44; John 15:20, 1 Thess. 5:15). Inspired apostles of Jesus Christ indicate the government (Rom. 13:1-4), not we ourselves (12:19), is to be the distributor of punishment for evildoers; hence, we should not leave our sphere of authority to take away the realm of authority from the government (1 Peter 2:13-14). Persecution for Christians should be expected (John 15:20), not feared (Matt. 10:28); and endured (Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12-13), not resisted. Jehovah does not approve of (He in fact hates) those who are quick to shed blood (Prov. 6:16-19).

CONFLICTS IN DOCTRINE BETWEEN ISLAMIC HADITH AND THE BIBLE

III. Relationships of Muslims with Others

1. Women

Hadith: Women:

- Are considered to have less intelligence than men (1:301).
- Will be the majority of those in hell (1:301, 8:555).
- Will represent such a large number in hell because they are disobedient to husbands (1:28).
- Can only travel with her husband or another man who she cannot marry (4:250).

2. Other requirements and beliefs

Hadith: Muslims:

- Are commanded to bathe on

Fridays (3:833).

b. Are taught dogs are unclean and not even angels can enter a house where there is a dog or even pictures of a dog or other living creature (4:448).

c. Believe pets can alert man to the presence of either an angel or the devil (4:522).

Bible: The Bible teaches women are of great value to God (Exodus 10:9-11; 1 Tim. 2:15; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:6; Acts 16:13-14). Galatians 3:28 declares there is no longer “male or female” for we are “one in Christ Jesus.” Though men and women have been given different *roles* in areas such as the family or the church (Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:11-12), their souls have not been given different *values* to God. Jesus does not specify “what shall a man give in exchange for a male soul?” because *all* souls are equally valuable to God. While a life of disobedience to a husband can result in eternal punishment (Eph. 5:22,24), so can a life of mistreating a wife (1 Peter 3:7). Holding the traditions of man above the commandments of God make a religion and its worship vain (Matt. 15:8-9).

CREATION OF MAN

Koran: Speaks of two days of creation (41:9), followed by supplying hills and mountains for four days (41:11), followed by two days for the creation of the seven heavens (41:12), for a total of eight days of creation. While in other places it describes six days of creation (32:4). Man was created from blood (96:2), sperm (16:4), dust (3:59), mud (7:12), sticky clay (37:11), water (25:54), and nothing (52:35). Allah also created man weak and imperfect (4:28).

Bible: God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh (Gen. 2:2). He created man of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7) and woman of his rib (Gen. 2:21-22). God created man wholly good (Gen. 1:31).

ANGELS

Koran: Tells angels to worship man (15:26-35; 2:34; 7:11-12; 17:61; 18:51).

Bible: Man is not to be worshiped (Acts 14:13-15; Matt. 4:10).

Man was made a little lower than the angels (Psa. 8:4-5).

HEAVEN

Koran: There are seven “heavens” (2:29; 23:86-87; 17:44), one of which is called “paradise” (76:11-22; 55:46-78). All of these are described in physical terms: a garden (76:12), bearing fruits of every kind (55:52), no heat nor cold (76:13), with silver and crystal goblets (76:15), with wine to drink (76:17), with many youthful servants (6:19), and sleeping on soft carpets (55:54). For men, there will be access to women with wide and lovely eyes (44:54), virgins who no man nor devil has touched (55:56), and they will be men’s “companions” (55:72) who God Himself will wed them to (44:54). Muslims achieve heaven by doing more good than bad (23:102-103).

Bible: There are three “heavens” (Gen. 1:20; 15:5; Matt. 5:16; 2 Cor. 12:2), the “third” of which (the abode of God) is not earned by good works but is a gift made possible through Jesus Christ (John 10:27-28; Rom. 6:23). It is not a carnal place where

carnal activities continue such as those carried out in marriage (Matt. 22:30).

HELL

Koran: Hell is described as a place of physical punishment, not spiritual torment. The unfaithful will be dragged into fire upon their faces (54:48), dragged by their hair (70:16), with their faces blackened (39:60), subjected to hooked rods of iron (22:21), neither die nor live (87:12-13), drink and have boiling water poured on them (18:30), then be forced to drink extremely cold water (38:57-59), and eat bitter, thorny fruit (88:2-7). “Malik” is the primary angel in charge of hell, where he will be in charge of tormenting its inhabitants (43:74,77). The Koran refers to hell, doom, or fiery punishment in 92 of its 114 chapters (80%).

Bible: In the New Testament, “hell” (*gehenna*) is mentioned a total of 12 times. Hell is a spiritual death or punishment because it is an eternal separation from God (Matt. 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Rev. 20:10). It is a place of everlasting punishment

(Matt. 25:46) that is compared to a fire that will never be quenched (Mark 9:43-48), or a lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:14-15). It is where all sinners go (those on the left hand, the goats, the wicked; Matt. 25:30-46; Rev. 21:8).

Part 4 of 4

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[CORRECTION: “In the first installment of this series (page 67 of the September 2011 issue), I mentioned that Saddam Hussein was a member of the Shi’ite party. A reader wrote me and pointed out that Saddam Hussein was not a Shi’ite. I looked up various sources, and this appears to be the more common stance. He was politically of the Ba’ath party, but seemed to show more allegiance to, or at least sympathy for, the Sunni sect than he did the Shi’ite sect. My apologies for that mistake. You know you’ve got a great readership when people are testing to make sure the information is accurate (cf. Acts 17:11).”]

For Deeper Study... BEWARE OF THE DOGS

Stephen Wiggins

Philippians 3:2 states, “*Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.*” The apostle employs a trio of imperatives all translated “beware” from the same word and grammatical form. Its repetition at the beginning of successive clauses is a rhetorical device known as *anaphora*. It means a bringing back or repeating over again. Scripture abounds with this usage. It adds weight to many of its solemn statements and arguments by directing attention to them (Bullinger, 199). Thus, the rapidity of thought in quick succession is designed for effect on the reader (Robertson, 1100). Paul uses it here to underscore the significance and perhaps urgency of what God wants his people to know and do. Not once, not twice, but three times in one verse God calls upon us to BEWARE!

BEWARE!

“Beware” translates a term which literally means to *see* with the eye. In

this context, however, the meaning extends to embrace the connotation *watch out* or *notice carefully* in the sense of paying attention or being on guard against dangers; with the implication of preparedness in order to respond appropriately should the need arise (BDAG, 179; Louw/Nida, 333). Jesus uses the term in this sense when he warns: “**Take heed** that no man lead you astray” (Matt. 24:4, ASV). Paul employs the same when encouraging saints to be vigilant concerning the potential dangers of apostasy: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth **take heed** lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Then in a context where the apostle warns of being led astray through error dispensed by false prophets: “**Take heed** lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of man, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). Not only should one **take heed** to *what* they

hear (Mark 4:24) but even *how* they hear it (Luke 8:18)! The term highlights that responsibility of the redeemed to exercise watchfulness as it pertains to their spiritual welfare. More specifically, God’s people must be alert to the dangers of false teachers and sensitive to those doctrines which are not in compliance with biblical truth.

THE IMPERATIVE

New Testament students have long recognized that the *verb* occupies an important place in the Greek language. The flexibility and range of verbal usage in Greek commends itself to a more in-depth analysis in order to bring out nuances not ordinarily conveyed by translation. This is especially true with regard to what are traditionally called *tense* and *mood*. The choice of a particular verb, along with its specific verbal aspect (expressed in the verb tense-form), resides with the language user. It is from this perspec-

tive that any grammatical analysis of the verb must begin in order to fully appreciate what the speaker/writer wants to articulate (Porter, 20-21). Such interpretive efforts which attempt to unpack the full significance of the verbal usage pay great exegetical dividends. Thus, two observations are in order.

First, Paul places all three verbs in the *imperative* mood. Whereas the imperative has a variety of uses in the New Testament (request, greetings, permission, etc.), the most common usage expresses a command. For this reason when grammarians cite categories of usage they usually list first the “imperative of command” (Brooks/Winbery, 127). Thus, normally the imperative addresses the volition. It appeals to the human will when used to direct or demand the action of another; it imposes one’s will upon another. The idea of authority or right to command is implied in the usage (Wallace, 446, 485). Contextual considerations make it obvious that this is why the apostle employs the imperative here. He issues an inspired directive in an attempt to bring about a desired action. He commands the redeemed: *Beware!... Beware!... Beware!*

The imperative communicates the divine command to be watchful toward those who seek to lead God’s people astray doctrinally. One linguist calls it an “imperative of warning” (Young, 145). With the use of the imperative, God (through the apostle) imposes his will upon the church. God *commands* the saints to be on the *look out* for false teachers and their heretical views which pervert the Gospel. This is what the force of the imperative entails from the original language. For one to fail in this regard through the shirking of that obligation or complacency of disposition, equals flagrant disobedience to the divine will. The consequences of failure are tragic. It couldn’t be any clearer.

PRESENT TENSE

Second, Paul places all three verbs in the *present* tense even though other options were available. This choice of tense is significant because it relates the *kind of action* the apostle wants to portray with the verb. One of the most important, but most misunderstood, concepts concerning the Greek verb is that *time* is not the primary signifi-

cance of what is related by Greek tense, and this is especially true in the non-indicative moods such as the imperative. This may initially seem confusing since in English, “tense” conveys the “time of action” related by the verb. But in Greek it is different. The basic genius of the Greek verb is not its ability to indicate *when* the action of the verb occurs but rather the *type of action* the writer wishes to portray. This is called *aspect* and it simply relates the way in which the writer perceives the verbal action to unfold (Mounce, 126; Porter, 20). The relevance here is that by Paul using the imperative on the present tense stem he commands an ongoing process or continuous action which has the force: *I command you to continuously beware!*

In light of the historical context, this grammatical structure may carry the force to both *begin* and *continue* a watch of vigilance which stresses both the inception and progress of the action commanded. (Grammarians call this the “ingressive/progressive imperative”). Or, the emphasis may be to simply *continue* something the Philippians were already in the process of doing. (This is called the “customary imperative”). In other words, Paul may be issuing a command for action that may or may not have already been implemented (Wallace, 721). The original recipients of the epistle would have known precisely what Paul was communicating when they read the command in their first century setting. The application for twenty-first century churches of Christ seems obvious: If we are not already doing what inspiration here instructs, then we had better get started; and, if we are already practicing that vigilance which this divine directive demands, then we must constantly remain diligent in the task!

What cannot be over emphasized is that the present imperative carries with it a built-in action that demands a progressive and ongoing response to the divine decree. It must be appreciated by Christians today that the command to *beware* is not something that can be obeyed with a one time or even sporadic occurrence. It must become our habitual and continuous practice. Because of the structured differences in Greek and English it is often impossible to transfer this continuous aspect in translation without result-

ing in stilted English. Therefore it is necessary for the preacher to articulate this gem of truth to his present day audience (Wuest, 39). One may view with certainty that the divine mandate calls for a habitual and constant watchfulness on our part. There will never be a time this side of eternity wherein the Christian may surmise it is permissible to be lax in the art of vigilance in looking out for false teachers. Our spiritual welfare depends on it.

THE JUDAIZERS

Paul commands Christians to continuously be on alert for brotherhood agitators whom he describes with three epithets: *the dogs, the evil workers, the concision*. That the definite article precedes each of these three expressions points to the identity of a well-known class of first-century heretics (Vincent, 443; Lightfoot, 143). Further, just as all three clauses begin with the thrice-repeated verb “beware”, each of the verb’s three direct objects begins with a “k” sound in Greek. This repetition of sound is by literary design, and not incidental (O’Brien, 347). Through the figure of speech known as *alliteration* the apostle’s word choice is intended to stimulate the attention of his reading audience (Bullinger, 171). Of course, this acoustic effect is virtually impossible to preserve in English translation. But Paul’s rhetoric may be illustrated, in part, with a rendering which imitates the sounds of the original: *Beware of the curs! Beware of the cut-throats! Beware of the concision!* (Thielman, 360).

By his use of the term *dogs*, the apostle refers not to the four-legged, canine kind. Rather, he employs a derogatory term in which he spares no imagery to stigmatize his heretical opponents, the “false brethren” of his day (Gal. 2:4). Don’t miss the fact that in ancient times a dog was viewed differently than our present day concept of a pampered, domesticated pooch. The metaphor is soaked in the backdrop of ancient society where dogs were detested as low-life scavengers by Jew and Gentile alike (Fee, 295). The figure when applied to humans equals a classic insult. Thus, enemies of the righteous are tagged as worthless “dogs” (Psa. 22:16). Israel’s apostate leaders are “dumb dogs” (Isa 56:10). Jesus counsels not to waste

spiritual energy on despicable “dogs,” i.e., spiritual ingrates (Matt. 7:6). The false teacher, once knowing the truth, but later an apostate to the divine will, is the “dog” who has returned to his own puke (2 Peter 2:20-22). These *dogs* are going to hell. God said so (Rev. 22:15). It’s not a pretty picture. Sin never is.

Within the clause “*the evil workers*,” the adjective “evil” is in the first attributive position. This pertains to where the adjective is placed in relation to the noun in Greek syntax. The significance of this syntactical construction is that the adjective receives greater emphasis than the noun (Robertson, 776). This means that Paul is not so much concerned with emphasizing these heretics as “workers” as he is in stressing that they are “evil workers.” In another place, the apostle styles this same factious clique as “*deceitful workers*” who, though in league with Satan, sought to masquerade as loyalists to Christ (2 Cor. 11:13-15). The immediate context serves as a commentary on why the apostle describes these as *evil* doers: “*they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is perdition, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things*” (Phil. 3:18-19). Many suppose that as long as religious people are involved in “spiritual” works that their efforts should be considered “good” by society. Not so. There are those who “profess that they know God, but by their works they deny him” (Titus 1:16).

With mention of *the concision*, modern readers receive a clear clue as to the identity of the *dogs* and *evil workers* whom Paul references. The Judaizers conglomerated certain aspects of the Law of Moses with the Gospel of Christ. They then sought to bind their new-fangled doctrine on Gentile converts. Specifically, they insisted circumcision was indispensable to salvation (Acts 15:1). But this perverted the Gospel resulting in apostasy for those who embraced it (Gal. 1:6-7; 5:4). This serves as the background for Paul sarcastically dubbing these troublemakers “*the concision*,” a term meaning *mutilation* — an exaggerated allusion to circumcision (BDAG, 528; Louw/Nida, 225). This expression leads directly to the contrast in Paul’s next statement: “*for we are the circumcision*” (v.3). Under the New Testament, those genuinely

called “*the circumcision*” are the *spiritual* descendants of Abraham, faithful members of the Lord’s church (Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:26-29; cf. Col. 2:11, “*the circumcision of Christ*”). By contrasting “*the concision*” (*katatome*) with “*the circumcision*” (*peritome*) the apostle employs wordplay called *paronomasia*. This is where an author uses similar words in close proximity; words that are not the same but which resemble one another in look and sound (Bullinger, 306). Thus, to those Judaizers who prided themselves as “*the circumcision*,” Paul characterizes as *the mutilation* party who had reduced that ancient sign of the old covenant to a mere laceration of the flesh devoid of any spiritual significance (Nicoll, 3:449). The apostle’s parody was like a well-placed dagger to the heart of his opponents!

My translation of the verse attempts to reflect some of the grammatical nuances discussed in this article: *I command you to continuously beware of the dogs! I command you to continuously beware of the wicked workers! I command you to continuously beware of the mutilation clique!*

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Tragically, we live in a day and time when far too many brethren seem to have forfeited any sense of responsibility for the command to remain alert to the potential dangers of false teachers. For many, such is nothing more than a forgotten relic of our ancient past. Churches of Christ today must learn not to be insensitive to this God-given obligation. Any failure in this regard equals rebellion to the divine will. Brethren *must* forever be on the lookout for false teachers who jeopardize the spiritual welfare of the redeemed. God repeatedly says so. Learn to be vigilant for the Cause of Christ in this regard.

2) Squeamish brethren who deem themselves among the politically correct of a polite society may find their sensitivities repulsed at Paul’s polemical passion and choice of colorful language to describe the brotherhood troublemakers of his day. No sympathy, however, should be extended to these modern day soft-shells whose cultured veneer of sophistication will not allow them with bloodied sword to “fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). God considers these naive brethren odious to the Cause of Christ

for their breach of loyalty. At the venture of offending God, learn not to pacify these traitorous brethren.

For a list of Sources in writing this article, see: seektheoldpaths.com/stopd11.htm#SOUR

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Christian’s Responsibility...

(Continued from page 89)

authorities, regardless of the type of government under which he lives. This principle is tough for some to accept willingly, but it is true. In the U.S., we are blessed to live in a republic in which we are privileged to vote and elect government officials who are supposed to represent us and our best interests. Those to whom the apostles wrote inspired messages in the first century about obeying governmental powers were not living in a republic or anything akin to such. They lived in a day when kings, often ruthless, self-serving men, reigned. Still, the message of God was to submit to them. If the U.S. or some other nation should some day, either by choice or by force, adopt a form of government that has little or no concern for the common people, God’s charge to “obey magistrates” would still be in force.

6) *While Christians are obligated to obey civil authorities, if there are governmental regulations that are not in harmony with God’s law, Christians must choose to obey what God says.* Because God’s people are to act “as obedient children” at all times (1 Peter 1:14), if man’s laws are at odds with the teaching of the Bible, God’s children are to obey the Bible. Yes, in every situation, “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Remember, we are not at liberty to not submit to a government law simply because we do not like it. A saint’s decision to not submit to a civil law must be based on a “thus saith the Lord” and not on his own personal likes or preferences.

These half-dozen principles we have noted are not based on culture. Rather, they are biblical truths that apply in every society in every generation.

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

lived with her daughter in Memphis. Her family will certainly miss her but also her friends and brethren in the Gospel will too. But, as the 'good book' says, she has gone on to her reward as multitudes have before her. We look forward to that day when the redeemed of the ages will meet in that celestial home above" ...**Editor, Garland Robinson**. "The **CHURCH OF CHRIST in Doyle, Tennessee**, is in need of a pulpit minister. Average attendance is about 80. If interested, send resume to **Doyle Church of Christ, PO Box 218, Doyle, TN 38559** or email at doylepreachersearch@yahoo.com" ...**Doyle Church of Christ**. "The **LEAKESVILLE CHURCH OF CHRIST** in Leakesville, Mississippi, is in need of a Gospel preacher. The Sunday morning attendance is about 25-30. We would very much like for someone to work with us. We can furnish a house and utilities. If you are interested or know someone who is, please contact **Ronald Byrd** at 601-394-9565 (cowladygb@tds.net) or **22960 Hwy 42, Richton, MS 39476**" ...**Leakesville Church Of Christ**." "Please put me on your mailing list. Thank you so much!" ...**Betty White, Fordyce, AR**. "Christian greetings to all. I really appreciate your efforts to propagate the Gospel of our almighty Lord Jesus Christ our God, our salvation and Saviour. I believe that all of you are doing the right and truly the Gospel of God. Continue the good works. God will always be with you with grace, mercy and love. Always include me on your mailing list. Thanks" ...**Corazon Santiago, Los Angeles, CA**. "We dearly appreciate the paper "*Seek The Old Paths*." Thank you. It is so desperately needed in the church today. Please add this name to your mailing list and enclose the September 2011 issue. I would like to have six copies of this issue. Thank you so much" ...**Logan Lee, Bedford, IN**. "Dear East End Church of Christ. I've been receiving the monthly publication as a courtesy of the Crandull church of Christ in Shady Valley, Tennessee where Tracy Dugger preaches. Since Tracy and I have been corresponding over the years, he has helped me with materials needed for my study. I enjoy *Seek The Old Paths* and I've learned a lot through continued study by sound teaching such as this. Thank you for your help in my continued study" ...**Claude Mazza, Haynesville, VA**. "Please send to these addresses, students from our Tuesday night class" ...**B. A. Kincade, Wewoka, OK**. "I appreciate the paper you send every month. God bless you for standing for the truth" ...**Thelma Clark, Mobile, AL**. "Some of our members have deceased at the Woodburn, Kentucky congregation. Please reduce the amount of STOP you're sending us. We do appreciate receiving your paper and the fact that it is *all truth*. God bless your work. Thank you" ...**A. R. Huffman, Bowling Green, KY**. "I'd like to get my apartment manager on your list. He has been the best apartment manager I have ever had in all the apartments I have ever lived at. He is not just a good apartment manager, he's a friend to everyone that rents one of the apartments and watches out for everyone. Thank you for spreading the Word of Jesus Christ" ...**Linda Whitehurst, Cassville, MO**. "Thank you for the STOP publication. We have recently moved and need a change of address as we would like to continue receiving the publication" ...**Dale Goggins, League City, TX**. "Would you please put our congregation, the **Cubb Creek Church of Christ** on your mailing list for *Seek The Old Paths* for a bundle of 50? I have been reading your publication for many years. May God bless you and your work. We will be looking for your papers" ...**Hubert Jones, Gainesboro, TN**. "Brother Garland, I hate to write this since our congregation has quit picking up the new bulletins I've been leaving at the meeting house. I had thought they would subscribe for them to be sent to their home. Maybe though, I'll give them away to the community

sooner or later. I still enjoy them very much. Cut down my bundle and send to my address and I'll send a little money now and then to help pay for it. Thank you for your kind efforts. I still love reading anything from God's word. I've been a Christian since I was very young and love every bit of being one. I'm 88, a widow lady for several years. I raised 11 children" ...**Harrisburg, AR**. "Appreciate the publication. Check is inclosed for support. The church at Bethany is receiving two bundles. Please discontinue one of them. Thanks and God bless" ...**Elders, Bethany church of Christ, McMinnville, TN**. "In the September 2011 issue of *Seek The Old Paths*, the truth was very well spoken about a person not being able to go to heaven when following the **NIV (New International Version)**. In fact, many of the modern versions will lead people astray when followed. It's strange to me that some preachers/teachers will teach against the creeds of men, but when those creeds are added to (or taken from) the Bible, they still call it the word of God. What does James 1:8 call this man? Keep up the good work of truthfulness" ...**Joe Turbeville, Dresden, TN**. "I am and have been receiving your publication, *Seek The Old Paths*, which I find most helpful in my learning and study of our Heavenly Father's word. This was made possible through my friend and brother Tracy Dugger who preaches at the Crandull Church of Christ in Shady Valley, Tennessee. However, since I wrote you with my change of address, I have not received any from July. In other words, I need for you if at all possible, to send me the August and September issues. The October issue, I received last night is most interesting. However, I need September's so I can place the topical study together, a two part study, and I do not have the first part. Thank you. Also, do you have any advanced Bible study courses that can be taken by way of mail? Any help in this area will be appreciated" ...**Claude Mazza, Haynesville, VA**.

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