

February 2017

[Written in late 2016.]

Greetings brethren, from all of us here in the smoky skies of Tennessee. Because we have had a severe drought for the past three months, we have had many wildfires burning in and around the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, with smoke drifting into Knoxville and Maryville where our brethren live. There have been up to seventy-five fires burning at one time over thousands of acres and they have had to evacuate thousands from these areas, including Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge. It is considered the worst fire in this area in one hundred years.

This last week Gatlinburg suffered major losses of over one hundred structures, including a sixteen-story hotel. Also, over one thousand homes and cabins in the surrounding areas of Pigeon Forge have been damaged or destroyed with a loss of life of thirteen people, and others are still missing.

So far, none of the homes of brethren have been affected and we thank God for His continued protection in these days of trial and despair for so many. The sad part of all this, according to the news, is that forty-five percent or more of the fires were set on purpose by people with some axe to grind in this sin-sick, troubled world we live in today.

Leaving all that aside now, I thought for this monthly letter that I would write about what our responsibilities should be toward government and the newly-elected President, Donald Trump. The months leading up to the election were filled with strife and discord and even after Mr. Trump was chosen as the president-elect the violence and rebellion did not end. The trump has blown; should we be afraid? Not if we understand that our first approach as the called of God, is that all governments are ordained by God—that He is in control.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for

conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor (Romans 13:1–7, *New King James Version* throughout).

In reading this scripture it is assumed that the obedience demanded does not contradict explicit Christian duties in our salvation process.

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king (1 Peter 2:13–17).

A regime or government might be very unchristian according to our standards, even anti-Christian, but any government is better than no government at all.

The absence of government leads to anarchy, and people cannot survive long under anarchy. Anarchy is everyone doing what's right in his own eyes. Even if a ruler does not know God personally, he is still "the anointed of the Lord," in his official office or position, and should be respected as such. We, as the called of God, need to be obedient to our rulers and authorities, not always being in a state of rebellion against authority, which is part of our human nature. But one may ask, what if that government does not govern according to God's laws? Are we still required to be obedient to it?

Acts 5:29 says: "We ought to obey God rather than men." In following this principle, if your government requires you to disobey a command of God then you as a believer must refuse to obey, realizing that if you are punished, you should bear the punishment meekly, understanding that it is not the time to fight to enforce God's law.

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was

deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:18–23).

As the called of God, we should never join in rebellion against the government or seek its overthrow by violence. The only rebellion God says is right is the rebellion against our own human natures—natures that are not only against God but against all authority.

Believers should therefore be willing to obey the laws of their government including all traffic laws, paying their taxes, and other local levies regarding their properties. In general, they should be law-abiding, respectful, obedient subjects. However, there are three areas in which the called of God will differ considerably as to their proper responsibilities. They are as follows:

- 1) In the matter of voting.
- 2) Seeking elected office in government.
- 3) Going to war with the armed forces.

Here are some helpful guidelines as laid down in the Bible that should give us some understanding of why we should not be involved in these endeavors.

- 1) The called of God are in the world, but are not *of* it.

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world (John 17:14–16).

- 2) The whole world system is in the hands of the wicked one, and has been condemned by God.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5:19).

[W]hose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them (2 Corinthians 4:4).

That god is Satan the Devil, who will eventually be cast out when the Son of God is lifted up as the new ruler.

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself (John 12:31–32).

3) Our mission is not to improve the world we live in now, but to be saved out of it.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1–2).

God is calling us to come out of this world governed by Satan.

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities" (Revelation 18:4–5).

4) We, as believers of the revealed Truth, cannot avoid being citizens of some earthly country, yet we must always remember that our primary citizenship is in heaven—so much so that we are to regard ourselves as pilgrims or aliens in this world.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:11–12).

5) No soldier of the Lord, who is actively engaged in the salvation process, entangles himself in the affairs of this life to receive a physical crown, but instead seeks to please Him who enlisted him as a soldier.

No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier (2 Timothy 2:4).

The Christian walk is often spoken of as spiritual warfare. Effective service calls for singleness of purpose in coming out of this polluted world by developing the mind of Jesus Christ.

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them (2 Peter 2:20–21).

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

6) As ambassadors of Christ, we should only be witnesses of His Truth by living it before the unbelievers.

Christ also said: ". . . all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). The whole idea of taking human life is opposed to the teaching of Jesus Christ who said we are to "love our enemies," not kill them (Matthew 5:44). The called of God should be opposed to bearing arms and be grateful we are not at this time required to do so. The time will come, at Christ's Second Coming, when the called of God will fight to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth and will rule it for one thousand years. We all long for that day. If you want to fight now, fight against your own human nature.

7) Politics is another problem in this world that tends to become corrupted by the very nature of man when he tries to gain advantage through his office to rule over others. He is not committed to serving the people but to gaining recognition for himself in ruling over them.

Note what Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 20:25–27:

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.

Mr. Raymond Cole said in a recent sermon that "real conversion is the giving up of the self." This the politicians and the leaders of this world do not understand, because they do not know the Christ of the Bible.

8) If the called of God were to vote, they would naturally want to vote for an individual thought to be upright and honest according to Christ's standards. But who can find

a politician of that character today? Also, if we have come to realize and understand that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest and basest of men (Daniel 4:17)—if that is true—then how could we ever know and obey the will of God in the voting booth?

No one can know God's choice of a king or a president until it is revealed, or come to pass. All presidents are chosen by God, not the people. God gives us the leaders we deserve. William Penn once said: "Those people who will not be governed by God will be ruled by tyrants." Can you be governed by God through the man God has chosen to rule over you? If so, then you are a good candidate for the Kingdom of God to come because you have come to understand the importance of government.

Until then, what is our responsibility as the called of God? It is to be subject to those whom God has selected to rule over us. When Israel proved they would not obey God, He put a king over them to teach them some lessons about government. We can read of it in Jeremiah 27:6–13:

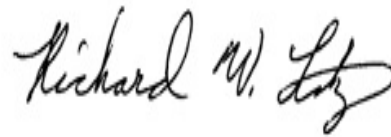
'And now I [the Eternal] have given all these lands [that I created] into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field [those who oppose him] I have also given him to serve him. So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his land comes [to be judged and conquered by the empire of Medo-Persia; pictured by a ram with two horns that the most High God, the Eternal, would use to bring King Nebuchadnezzar into subjection (Daniel 8:1–4)]; and then many nations and great kings shall make him [King Nebuchadnezzar] serve them. And it shall be [or until then], that the nation and kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish,' says the LORD, 'with the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. Therefore, do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who speak to you, saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." 'For they prophesy a lie to you, to remove you far from your land; and I will drive you out, and you will perish. But the nations that bring their necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let them remain in their own land', says the LORD, 'and they shall till it and dwell in it.' I also spoke to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live! Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the LORD has spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?" ' '

Did the people heed the words of Jeremiah? NO! So, many died by the sword, and by famine, and pestilence, as a result of rebellion against the government God had chosen to rule them.

Can you be governed by the authority placed there by God? Whether we can or cannot will determine just how much we will have to suffer in learning to be governed.

As I finish this letter it has finally begun to rain again. We received four and one-half inches yesterday, and more is predicted today to end this drought. Hopefully this rain will put out these wildfires we have been experiencing. Rain can be such a blessing when it comes at the right time. I pray that this doctrine about what our responsibilities toward government should be will also drop as rain in due season to water all who are the called of God in these days.

With all my respect and affection,
Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard W. Litz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'R'.

Richard W. Litz