

A.W Tozer



Living Sermons

THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATION TO GOVERNMENT

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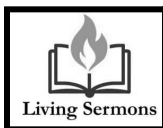
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Foreword

The relationship between the Christian and earthly government has been a subject of discussion, controversy, and misunderstanding throughout the history of the Church. In every generation, believers have had to wrestle with questions of citizenship, political loyalty, civil obedience, and the higher claims of the Kingdom of God.

*In this message, *The Christian's Relation to Government*, A. W. Tozer addresses these issues with his characteristic clarity, conviction, and unwavering commitment to biblical truth.*

Rather than approaching the subject from a political standpoint, Tozer examines it through the lens of Scripture. He reminds us that while human government is ordained by God and worthy of respect, no earthly authority occupies the highest place in the believer's life. Above every throne, every ruler, every nation, and every political system stands the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ.

With profound insight, Tozer explores the biblical balance between lawful obedience and spiritual fidelity. He demonstrates that Christians are called to be peaceful, law-abiding citizens whenever possible, yet they must never allow allegiance to any government to supersede obedience to God. When human laws conflict with divine commands, the believer's duty remains unchanged: God must be obeyed above all.

This sermon also contains a timely warning against the danger of identifying Christianity with any political ideology, national identity, or earthly system. Tozer points readers beyond the temporary affairs of nations to the eternal Kingdom of God—a Kingdom that transcends borders, races, languages, cultures, and governments.

Though originally preached decades ago, the message remains remarkably relevant. In an age marked by political division, national uncertainty, and competing loyalties,

Tozer calls the Church back to its true identity as a pilgrim people whose citizenship is ultimately in heaven.

As you read these pages, may you be challenged to think biblically about authority, citizenship, and Christian responsibility. More importantly, may you be reminded that while kingdoms rise and fall, while governments change and political systems pass away, the reign of Jesus Christ remains unshaken.

May this message strengthen your confidence in the sovereign rule of God and deepen your commitment to the Kingdom that cannot be moved.

— Wisdom Epsi
Chief Editor, LivingSermons.com

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Publisher's Note

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The message you are about to read was originally ministered in a live congregational setting. As such, it carries the weight, urgency, and atmosphere of that sacred gathering. Minor grammatical and structural adjustments have been made solely to enhance readability, without altering the substance, intent, or power of the original delivery.

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A Spirit-led Publishing Stewardship

Main Message

Begins Here



The Christian's Relation to Government

Scripture Reading

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."

— 1 Peter 2:13–16 (KJV)

Last week we considered the Christian's relation to society, conceived simply as his relation to the Gentiles—the unconverted people around him. Today we consider the Christian's relation to government. Again, only broad principles are laid down. The application of those principles must be left to the prayerful, spiritual, and watchful Christian.

Human Government Is of Divine Order

Human government is of divine order. This is something altogether different from the old doctrine of the divine right of kings, which placed kings over their people almost as gods and gave them authority over life and death. Such rulers could be arbitrary, cruel, oppressive, and self-willed, and justify it on the grounds that no one had a right to complain against the Lord's anointed.

That is one thing, but it is not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible does teach human government. Beginning in Genesis, and even implied earlier, you find the principle of human government. In Genesis 9 it is clearly laid down.

The idea of human government established by God developed from the family. The father, as the source and head of the family, naturally became its protector, defender, and provider. He was the first ruler.

From there the concept extended to the tribe, as developed throughout the Old Testament, then to the village, then to the city. In some ancient cases, a city was itself a government, as in Athens and Sparta. Eventually it extended to nations and finally to empires.

The Biblical Ideal of the King

In the Bible, the kingly ideal is very prominent. In fact, it is only fair to say that no other form of government is prominently recognised in Scripture except a ruler over a willing and contented people.

Curiously enough, the word *king* comes from the word *kin*.

Around this part of the country you rarely hear the word *kinfolk*. We usually say *relatives* or *relations*. But if you travel farther south, you will often hear people speak of their *kinfolk*. They mean those who are closely related to them, usually by blood.

Add a "g" to *kin* and you have *king*.

The word carries the thought not only of kinship but also of nobility. In the Old Testament ideal, the king was a close relative who possessed noble character and was elevated to leadership because of that nobility and relationship.

Just as a father protects and governs his family out of love, so the king, in the biblical concept, ruled because of love for his people. He was not a foreign usurper but one connected to them by relationship and devoted to their welfare.

God's Kingship and Human Kingship

Some object strongly to the kingly concept of God found throughout Scripture. They argue that the biblical language of God sitting upon a throne, being King over all the earth, and Christ being King of kings reflects a primitive and false idea of government.

But this objection misunderstands true kingship.

The biblical concept accords perfectly with genuine kingliness. A king is the noble head of his people. His glory comes not from the servile obedience of his subjects but from their happiness, prosperity, and well-being.

Read Psalm 72, where the heavenly King rules the earth.

Read Isaiah 11, where the Lord anoints Jesus as King over the nations.

In both passages, the glory of the King is seen in the freedom, prosperity, and blessing of His people.

This ideal runs like a golden thread throughout the entire Bible.

The Imperfection of Human Rule

The ideal itself is divine, but its human expression is imperfect because rulers are men, and men are fallen.

There is nothing perfect in this world.

People speak of the perfect marriage. There can be no perfect marriage because the two individuals involved are fallen creatures. People seek the perfect politician. There can be no perfect politician because every politician, even when he rises to the stature of a statesman, remains a fallen man. There are no perfect teachers, no perfect children, and no perfect human beings.

Government is divine in principle, but every form of government will reveal imperfections because those who govern are fallen men. Whether in a monarchy or a democracy, rulers are subject to selfishness and temptation.

Yet history has known noble rulers.

England remembers with fondness certain kings and queens whose reigns shone like bright stars in its history. The same may be said of many nations. I recall a statement made by the great Dr. Samuel Johnson. During a discussion concerning politics and forms of government, he remarked:

"Sir, I perceive that it matters little what form of government prevails in a country. The people will be happy if only the rulers be righteous men."

That sentence deserves to be written upon the halls of Congress and every governmental building in the world.

The people will be happy if their rulers are righteous.

Unfortunately, rulers are not always righteous because they are human and therefore subject to temptation.

Interpreting Scripture Correctly

Peter joins us here in teaching peaceful obedience to government. But these words must be understood alongside other Scriptures.

Always remember this principle:

Truth is never discovered merely by saying, "It is written."

Truth is discovered by saying, "It is written," and then, "Again, it is written."

Truth is never found in a single isolated verse. It is found when one verse is understood together with another, and another, and another, until the whole counsel of God lies before us. If you isolate one verse and make it supreme while ignoring all others, you can teach almost any error imaginable.

For example, a verse says:

"There is no God."

Someone may point to that and claim the Bible denies God's existence.

But the full verse reads:

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

— Psalm 14:1 (KJV)

The truth is discovered by reading the whole statement and comparing Scripture with Scripture.

I once heard someone say that God was created because, according to them, God came from demons. Such foolish ideas arise when people seize upon isolated texts without considering the whole revelation of God.

I remember a Christian woman employed as a maid in a home. She saw a piece of jewellery she liked and took it. When confronted, she replied, "I'm a Christian, and I took it because it's mine."

They asked how she could justify such reasoning.

She answered, "Doesn't Paul say, 'All things are yours'?"

She assumed that because all things were hers spiritually, she was entitled to take whatever she wanted physically.

That is a misuse of Scripture.

Obedience to Government and Obedience to God

Therefore, when Peter says:

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake..."

— 1 Peter 2:13

we must not imagine that this is the whole of biblical teaching on the matter.

It is one side of a larger truth.

Consider Peter himself.

The same man who wrote these words once stood before the authorities after preaching Christ. They commanded him never again to preach in the name of Jesus.

Peter answered:

"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."

— Acts 4:19 (KJV)

Then he went right out and continued preaching.

The very Peter who instructed believers to submit to human ordinances refused obedience when those ordinances contradicted the will of God.

So there you have it.

It is entirely proper for me to obey traffic laws, pay taxes, and respect the lawful regulations of my country.

But if human law ever forbids obedience to God, then the Christian must obey God.

Fortunately, such conflicts are rare.

Most laws, even in imperfect nations, are intended to preserve order and restrain wrongdoing. Therefore, there is usually no contradiction between civil law and divine law.

Yet whenever such a contradiction appears, obedience to God must take precedence.

There may come a time when the only good people are found in prison.

Jails were originally built by good people to restrain bad people. But a nation may deteriorate morally and politically until the majority become corrupt.

When that happens, the jails remain the same, but the occupants change.

The good people are placed behind bars.

That happened in Russia. It happened in Germany. I believe it is happening in China.

Daniel's Example

The rule before us is therefore twofold.

First, laws governing social conduct and civil order should be obeyed without question. Christians are not to be lawbreakers. They are to live peaceable, upright, law-abiding lives.

By doing so, they silence their critics.

Second, laws that interfere with our duty toward God are not binding upon the Christian conscience.

Daniel serves as an example.

While living in Babylon, he occupied a high governmental position. He was honest, faithful, law-abiding, and loyal. He served both his king and his God.

But one day a law was passed forbidding prayer.

Daniel did not hesitate.

He simply broke the law and continued praying toward Jerusalem.

As a result, he was thrown into the lions' den.

Yet it did him no harm.

The King above all kings overruled the earthly king and delivered His servant.

God did not always choose to deliver His people in that way, but in Daniel's case He did.

Obedience to God Above Human Law

There have been martyrs by the tens of thousands who have had to give their lives in order to obey the laws of God in societies that declared the laws of God to be wrong and forbade men to obey them.

So now I think we have it here. It is so simple that a wayfaring man need not err therein.

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him."

— 1 Peter 2:13–14 (KJV)

"For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

— 1 Peter 2:15 (KJV)

Insofar as the laws of man do not conflict with the laws of God, a Christian's duty is to be law-abiding.

But as soon as they conflict with the laws of God, the Christian's duty is to become a lawbreaker instantly.

The moment they tell me from Washington that I cannot preach the gospel, it will be my sacred duty to preach the gospel and go to jail.

But I am glad for our country, and I am glad that we do not have that problem.

I am glad nobody is waiting downstairs to arrest me when I leave here. At least, I am not expecting them to be there.

I am glad there is nobody telling me that I cannot preach. But if that day should ever come, or if I were thrust into a nation where such conditions existed, then it would be my duty to disobey those laws.

Let Us Beware of Nationalising Christianity

The reason for this, of course, is that God is above all, and Christ transcends all nations, all laws, and all countries. I might add here, though it repeats something I mentioned in yesterday's broadcast, that we must beware of trying to nationalise Christianity.

There is grave danger in doing so.

There is always the temptation to fuse Christianity with politics and use the gospel of Christ as a tool for political ends.

It must never be so.

Truth is master in itself and must never be used as a tool to achieve some end lying outside the truth itself.

We still have noble politicians in our day.

I heard of one recently. I read it in a brief item in *Time* magazine. I do not subscribe to that magazine, but someone told me there was something in it about Billy Graham, so I bought a copy and read it. In a small article it mentioned a politician who was running for the Senate. His platform was simply this:

"If it's right, I'm for it."

There is courage for you, brother. That kind of statement creates a place in our hearts.

"If it's right, I'm for it."

There are still some who use what is right as a means to political ends. There are also those who so fuse Christianity with a particular form of government that one is made to stand for the other.

That is always a mistake.

Christianity Is Not an "Ism"

Hitler tried to use Christianity as a tool of the state, and he went down.

Stalin tried it also, and he went down.

Khrushchev is trying it, and he too will go down.

It will always remain true that God Almighty, the Sovereign King, will not permit little men to make truth a tool for selfish purposes.

Therefore, let us never equate Christianity with any political system—Americanism, democracy, freedom, or any other "ism."

To do so is to misunderstand Christ completely and to go astray in interpreting the will of God in redemption.

Democracy existed before Christ was born in Bethlehem and before He died on the cross.

Likewise, Christianity has flourished in lands where democracy did not exist.

Therefore Christianity and democracy are not the same thing.

Certainly, the gracious influence of the Christian gospel has softened men's hearts, elevated their appreciation of individual worth, and helped secure many of the freedoms we still enjoy.

Insofar as Christianity has touched and softened human hearts, we have what is called the free world.

But Christianity and democracy are not identical.

The Church Rises Above All Governments

The Church rises above all governments.

Jesus said:

"And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars..."

— Matthew 24:6 (KJV)

Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

The hymn writer expressed it well:

"Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the Church of Jesus
Constant will remain."

And in Matthew 25 we read:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory."

— Matthew 25:31 (KJV)

Before Him shall be gathered all nations. He will separate them as a shepherd divides sheep from goats. The sheep will stand on His right hand and the goats on His left. Then He will pronounce the words of blessing and judgment.

Christ rises above all nations.

He stands above them all and apart from them all.

Pilgrims Within an Earthly Nation

We are pilgrims living within a nation.

We happen to be pilgrims in a nation which, without undue patriotic emotion, I believe is still the greatest and best nation in the world.

For that we are grateful.

But Christianity has flourished in the courts of Caesar. Christianity has flourished beneath the flashing sword of the executioner. Christianity is flourishing in China even now. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise.

It has gone underground, certainly, but it lives. There are still believers in Russia—solid, steadfast men who believe in God the Father Almighty and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord. If anyone thinks the Russian Orthodox Church never produced saints, let him come to my library and examine some of the books there.

I can show him teaching as profound and spiritual as anything ever spoken by Dr. Simpson, coming from the plains, steppes, and marshes of old Russia.

They think they have killed Christianity.

They have stopped some outward progress.

They have driven out missionaries.

They have subverted some leaders.

They have imprisoned and killed others.

They have closed church doors.

But they have not killed the Holy Ghost.

Neither have they destroyed the seed of the gospel.

The Gospel Cannot Be Destroyed

I received a letter recently from Dr. Barthel.

Perhaps it has already appeared in *The Weekly*.

I am not sure.

He wrote concerning an editorial I had written in which I said, "Let us not give up China."

He told me he had been thinking the same thing for a long time and that he was waiting daily for the political change that would open China again and give the gospel another opportunity to spread freely.

I believe that day will come.

Unless we are so near the end that our Lord returns first, one of two things will happen:

Either Christ will come in glory, or China will once again have an opportunity to receive the gospel openly.

Too many saints have watered China with their tears and sacrifices for us simply to surrender hundreds of millions of Chinese people to the devil.

The Kingdom of God Has No Nationality

The gospel of Christ rises above every political system, every party, every ideology, and every national interest.

While we live in the midst of these earthly affairs, we do the best we can to support what seems right, live peaceably, obey the law, and conduct ourselves properly.

But we always remember that we are only here for a little while.

The political blessings we enjoy are not Christianity.

They are providential gifts from God.

This financial prosperity God has granted so that resources may be available for evangelism in these last days.

This political freedom God has granted so that missionaries may be sent forth in these last days.

But Americanism is not Christianity.

The kingdom of God has no nationality.

The kingdom of God embraces the human race, with the Son of Man as its Head and King.

The New Creation

We have gathered, and are gathering, unto the new creation.

I quote this passage often, but it bears repeating:

"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

— Hebrews 12:22–24 (KJV)

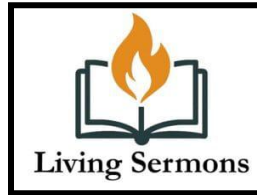
This is the new creation. It transcends national boundaries. It transcends languages. It transcends racial distinctions. It rises above them all. We have come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God.

Communion and Thanksgiving

As we proceed into the communion service, we celebrate our coming unto this holy Zion. We celebrate the blood of Jesus that speaks better things than the blood of Abel. We celebrate the blood of the everlasting covenant that has secured our peace with God. Brethren, I hope we are properly appreciative of these things.

I hope we are not guilty of ingratitude or carelessness concerning them. We thank God for political freedom that allows us to live and worship without the threat of imprisonment or death. But we thank God even more for that gospel which transcends national boundaries and racial distinctions, bringing us into the kingdom of the new creation and making us sons and daughters of God.

This is what we celebrate in the communion.

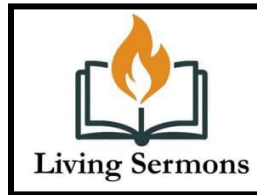


About the Speaker

Aiden Wilson Tozer (21 April 1897 – 12 May 1963) was an American pastor, preacher, editor, devotional writer, and prominent leader within the **Christian and Missionary Alliance**. Widely regarded as one of the most influential voices in twentieth-century evangelical Christianity, Tozer's ministry was marked by a passionate call to deeper fellowship with God, personal holiness, and spiritual renewal.

Associated with evangelicalism, the Holiness movement, and Keswick spirituality, Tozer became best known through his devotional classics, particularly *The Pursuit of God* (1948) and *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961). These works continue to inspire Christians worldwide, emphasizing the necessity of knowing God personally rather than merely knowing about Him. His writings consistently called believers to holiness, contemplative prayer, reverence for God, self-denial, death to self, and a continual awareness of God's presence.

Tozer believed that the modern Church often suffered from spiritual shallowness and urged believers to pursue a deeper, more intimate relationship with God. His messages challenged Christians to move beyond religious routine and cultivate a genuine life of worship, prayer, and surrender.



About Living Sermons

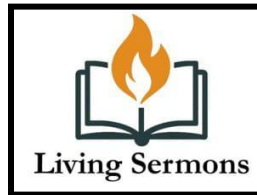
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Our mission is simple: to preserve the wisdom, revelation, and anointing carried in the preached Word and make it accessible in formats that can be studied, shared, and revisited for generations. By turning sermons into high-quality Christian books and eBooks, we extend the life and influence of each message far beyond the pulpit.

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