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The Attitude of Protest

The Attitude of Power

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By the attitude of protest we mean the Bible doctrine of separation from social bodies when they are guilty of violating the law of God. In this discussion we take it as meaning the position of dissent from the constitution of the government when that constitution violates the divine law.

Two facts are plain. The Bible requires nations to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, and to recognize the supremacy of his law over nations. A second fact is that the United States Constitution fails to recognize the Mediatorial Kingship of the Son of God, and in moral questions refuses to be guided by his law.

These two facts not only justify but require of him who would be loyal to Jesus as his King a protest against the sin of the nation. The attitude of protest, then, is the effort of the Christian to free himself from the sinful position of the nation.

The popular notion of such an attitude is that it is doing nothing; that it is sitting down, with folded arms, and making no effort to turn the battle against evil to the gate. The cry is, "Come and vote, and help to bring the nation back into loyalty to Jesus and his law. Either do something, or cease protesting." So say we all. If protesting against sin and maintaining

that position consistently, is doing nothing, then no Christian ought to take the attitude of protest.

If so disposed, we might ask those who believe in doing something other than protest, "What have you done by voting under a Constitution that ignores Christ and his law?" Christians have been voting since the adoption of the Constitution in 1788. What have they done to bring the nation back to loyal subjection to Jesus Christ? Is not the Constitution as silent as it ever was on the regal claims of David's Son and Lord? We do not say, for we do not believe, that Christians who have voted have not done some good, but our contention is, that they could have done more good had they all taken the attitude of protest.

I wish to show that the attitude of protest is not only doing something, but is the best means of securing results. The protestor is bound, not only to enter his protest, but also to give his reasons for protesting and he must do what he can, in harmony with his protest, to bring the nation to know and do the right.

1. In support of the position that the attitude of protest is the attitude of power, we make our appeal to the teachings of history, both sacred and profane.

Gather up the lessons taught from the beginning of history to its last page, and they show that the best means to accomplish the reformation of society is to protest against the evils of the social body. Working on the ark for one hundred and twenty years was Noah's protest against the evils of his day; and he not only condemned the world, but his protest was the means of preserving all who were saved. Abraham did

more for righteousness by staying out of Sodom than Lot did by going into Sodom, even though Lot's righteous soul was vexed from day to day. Moses had a thousand fold more influence for righteousness in refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, than he could have had on the throne of Pharaoh. Levi turned Israel from the sin of the golden calf by a practical dissent. The three young men with the burning fiery furnace before them, did everything possible when they said, "Be it known to thee, O King, that we will not worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Both Peter and Paul held that the Gentile believers were free from the law of Moses. Peter threw away his power by uniting with the Judaizing teachers. Paul, by his protest, saved the day for all Gentile believers. When Martin Luther protested against the teachings of Rome, appealed to the Word of God and said: "Here I stand; I can do no other", he shook the walls of the Vatican until they trembled. The name Protestant emphasizes the fact that separation from evil is strength; complicity with evil is weakness. Oliver Johnston, of the New York Tribune, said, "The abolitionists who went into politics injured their cause. The true abolitionists refused to use the sceptre of the ballot against the slave." We all know that the South offered no reward for a voting abolitionist, while they did offer large rewards for non-voting ones. Why? Because they knew that an abolitionist voting for a pro-slavery Constitution was about as harmless alive as he would be if he were dead. The verdict of history is that the attitude of protest is the attitude of power for reformation.

2. Because the attitude of protest is the position Christ asks his people to take.

We can sum up the teaching of the Bible here, in these two texts: "Neither be partakers of other men's sins," and, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." If the multitude rejects the authority of Christ and of his law, do not go along with them; dare to stand up and be counted, as opposed to the evil. The word declares the justice of the condemnation of those who do evil with the purpose of accomplishing good. Old and New Testament alike ring with the call, "Come out from among them and be ye separate." And when John had dipped his pen in the ink to write the doom of an ungodly system, he wrote the call, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not a partaker of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." The whole teaching of the word is, "Separate from the social body that is guilty of sin." The very word, "church" means, called out from, separated. And it is her separation from sin that gives the church power against sins. In view of the teaching of the Word, is it not pertinent to ask "Would our nation treat Christ and his law as it does, if every Christian took and maintained the attitude of protest because of the dishonor done to Christ and his law, in refusing even to mention them? Would Sabbath desecration, the saloon, blasphemy, be as common as they are? Has not the Church, in refusing to take the attitude of protest, hindered rather than helped the removal of national sins?" Surely the position Christ asks his people to occupy is the very strongest position they can take.

3. Because in separating from social evils, the protestor puts himself in a position in which he can be used by Christ to remove the evils against which he protests.

Israel could not stand before the Canaanites when there was an accursed thing in the camp. "The children of Ephraim being armed and carrying bows turned back in the day of battle." "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." The Church is strongest when she keeps herself unspotted from the world. Why strongest then? Because in separating from evil she steps out into a position in which the power of her risen Lord can come upon her. It is always true that when the Church witnesses boldly and consistently for the truth, the place is shaken by the power of the reigning Christ, as it was when John and Peter bore testimony against the sins of the Jews. Connection with sin cuts the bond of union that unites the believer on earth with the Lord of glory. When the believer goes in where Christ and his law are shut out, he is like Samson with his shorn locks and, like him we may say, we will go out and exercise our powers against our country's foes, only to find that the Lord has departed from us. "Without me ye can do nothing."

4. Because a protest against social evil arrests the attention of others, and leads them to examine the reasons of that protest.

Felix R. Brunot said that he was not converted to the principles of National Reform by any of its able lecturers; but by an uneducated Irishman who gave him his reasons for not voting. Dr. Barr of Philadelphia said, "It would be a national calamity if all Christians voted

For if they did, the voice of testimony against national sins would be hushed and there would be no voice to remind us of our duty to Christ and his law." To call men to examine the demands he makes on society, Christ expects his people to protest against sin.

5. Such a position gives consistency to testimony against social evils.

The force of the testimony against any evil, is measured by the consistency of the witness. We are not much impressed by any testimony that the moderate drinker gives in favor of temperance. The life contradicts the testimony. Most people are influenced more by what I do than by what I say. But when what I say is supported by what I do, then my testimony has power.

The power that is to lift society to a higher level must be exerted on the social body from without. Let us place the fulcrum of God's word as close as we can to the social body that is to be lifted, make the lever of testimony as strong as we can make it, but place the Christian as far out on the lever as possible, and the nation will be so lifted out of evil that voices will be heard in heaven saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ."

6. Because separation from evil, on account of which we have taken the attitude of protest, inspires hope that these evils will be removed.

Protest is powerful even when there seems to be but small hope of success. Elijah's protest against Ahab's wickedness seemed such a failure that Elijah wanted God to take away his life.

The protest of the three children in Babylon seemed to end in the furnace heated one seven times hotter than its wont. The protest of James, Peter and John seemed to end on the block, the cross and the barren isle. But was their protest a failure? Are these men not still working mightily? In the light of their history, we who dissent from the Constitution need not become disheartened. Whoever may write the history of our Country, when it has become one of the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, will write down that one of the mighty factors in bringing that glorious result was, that there were men and women who are willing to stay out of a Government that left out Christ.

When we act on the conviction that Jesus Christ is King of our whole life, that into whatever relation we enter, that wherever we go and whatever we do, we mean to be loyal to him, though the body may be hung or burnt, then the hope of final success supports the Soul.

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