

Convent Avenue Baptist Church  
Wednesday Bible Study 6/30/10  
Pastor Jesse Williams

*The Articles of Faith; What we believe...*

**Article XVI. Civil Government**

Psalms 22:28; Proverbs 8:15; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 1:9-10  
Matthew 22:15-22; Romans 13:1-7; Ephesians 6:11-12

This doctrinal teaching of the church reminds us that as people of God we have *dual citizenship*. That is, we are *heavenly citizens* in the Kingdom of God because of the salvation that we have received through Jesus Christ; but we are also still *earthly citizens* who live in this world and must therefore live with governmental structures that exist in our community, city, state and nation. If we are not careful, there is a strong temptation to think that because we are Christian we don't have to be concerned about the law of the land where we live as much. But this article of faith teaches us that as Christians we do have a responsibility to be good citizens, follow the law, and be in critical dialogue with the civil government structures that affect us. As people of God, we understand that government and the elected and appointed government officials who serve are entities that are established as instruments in God's plan. God rules and super-rules above all governments in the world, so government officials and politicians should understand that they are accountable to God for how they use the power and influence associated with their office. Government exists as a way of serving and protecting people, and God desires to use government and government officials in that way. Unfortunately though, some in government tend to forget this divine accountability and instead fall into the tragic trap of *playing politics* instead of serving people as God would have them do. In instances such as this, it is a calling and responsibility of God's people to hold them accountable and critique and correct government. And if necessary, God's people can and should engage in acts of *civil disobedience* in order to bring about change and transformation if government is not functioning in agreement with God's will and ways.

If one reads the bible closely and critically, you will note that God's people have had to grow and evolve in the midst of times and places where government functioned in both Godly and ungodly ways. Often God used a chosen person to critique government and bring about social change. In the Old Testament, Moses and the children of Israel clashed with Pharaoh and the Egyptian government. When Israel became its own nation, God called prophets like Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha to confront the kings and the government that they ran when they were going against God's will. During the Exile, God used Daniel and the three Hebrew boys to disobey unrighteous laws by the kings of Babylon and eventually change the laws of the land.

In the New Testament, we see clearly how Jesus is referred to as King of the Jews and King of Kings and how that creates conflict with Herod, Pilate and eventually Caesar. We also know that Paul clashed with the government of his day and appealed to have his case heard by Caesar in Rome. Throughout the book of Acts we see how the disciples were beaten, thrown in jail and abused by the government officials at the time because they were proclaiming Jesus Christ.

In more recent history, we know how many brothers and sisters such as Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others who engaged in acts of civil disobedience in the civil

rights movement in the USA, and in many other movements around the world have had to confront government for the sake of righteousness.

As Christians we are responsible for being good citizens and obeying the law, but we are also equally responsible for critiquing government and holding it accountable when it is not operating in a way that is consistent with God's will. Regarding this issue of civil government, it is important for us to remember the following:

### **1) Governments are established by God and are accountable to God**

Government structures and those who work in government exist there by the grace of God. God holds them accountable for serving humanity in a way that reflects His will and His way. Government officials and politicians will be held accountable by God for the ways that they have used their offices. The laws that government establishes should be for the good of all and Christians are supposed to obey the law. When we obey the law, we are being a good witness for Jesus Christ in our communities. So, we should respect government and the laws that it establishes because God is above all governments and intends to work through them to protect and serve people.

### **2) We should sincerely pray for all government officials**

Those who work in any level of government have a tremendous responsibility and burden to carry. From the President of the United States to the local community public servant, everyone who works in government is regularly tempted to misuse or abuse the authority of their office for a number of different purposes. God's people should pray earnestly for all government officials so that they will stay grounded and focused on God's desire and will for how their position, power and influence should be used.

### **3) When necessary, we must critique government and work to change it**

Like Daniel and the prophets in the Old Testament, Jesus and Paul in the New Testament, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and our mothers and fathers in the civil rights movement in this country, we must engage in acts of civil disobedience, protest and dialogue when government is operating in an ungodly way. The prophetic critique and ministry that runs throughout the bible is a part of our calling too. As Christians, we must not be afraid to speak truth to power and work for social change when we see unrighteousness in our communities and nation. This does not mean we are disrespecting the law, rather it means that in God's sight the particular law or practice itself is in fact unjust; so therefore we are respecting the law by transforming it into a righteous law or practice. God used people to do this all throughout the bible, and that prophetic calling must continue with us in the church today.