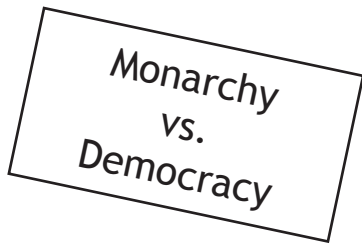


Is God Our King or Our President?

Nathan L. Meyers



One day I was talking with a coworker about the power of God to judge and rule the world. My coworker declared, "I think God is twisted to have destroyed the whole earth with a flood, including innocent babies." I explained that God destroyed the world because of its great wickedness. The people had the opportunity to enter the ark and save themselves and their children, but they refused. I also said, "God will again destroy the whole world, but this time with fire, not with water." "But God can't do that," my coworker cried, "this is America, the land of the free!"

Perhaps in this land of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," men have lost the concept of absolute authority. In the United States, we do not have a monarchy, but a democracy. We are not ruled by a king, but by three branches of a representative government. None of these three branches—the executive, legislative, and judicial—have absolute power. They are held in check by each other. The President can veto the legislature's laws; the Supreme Court can declare laws unconstitutional; and the President can be impeached. If citizens of the United States do not like a leader, they can decide not to reelect him. If they do not like a law, they can protest against it. If they do not like a judge's ruling, they can appeal to a higher court.

However, God is not a president, and His church is not a democracy. God is "a great King over all the earth." Ps. 47:2 In God's kingdom, the power of all three branches is vested in Him. Isaiah 33:22 says, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us." God has the power to judge every person, to make every law, and to execute every decision.

We know that God always was King, and always will be King of heaven and earth, but He manifests Himself as King in three different ages. In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself as the King of Israel; in the New Testament era, He is King over the Church; and at the end of the world, He will be King over all nations, ruling them with a rod of iron.

Israel rejected God as their king

Nearly 4000 years ago, God called Abraham out of his homeland and promised to make of Him a great nation. It was God's desire to be the King of this nation. The Lord led Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God called Moses to lead their descendents out of Egypt, and raised up Joshua to lead them into the Promised Land. There God raised up many judges to guide His nation. But the people were not content to have the Lord be their King. They came to Samuel and said, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations." 1 Sa. 8:5 This displeased both Samuel and the Lord. The Lord told Samuel, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." 1 Sa. 8:7

After giving Israel a king, the Lord did not forsake His chosen people, but they continued to forsake Him repeatedly. In Hosea 13:9-11, the Lord cried, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king; where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath." This is a sad commentary of a people who rejected their King and their God. But sadder still is the declaration of the Jews when Pilate presented their King to them one last time and said, "Shall I crucify your King?" And the chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Jn. 19:15

Christ is King of the church

The Jews may have rejected their King and crucified Him, but Christ arose from the grave as King over a new and more glorious kingdom. Ep. 1: 20-23 He was crucified with the title "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" above His head; but He arose from the dead as "the head of the body, the church ... the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Mt. 27:37; Col. 1:18

The first believers testified in word and action that Jesus was their King. They were accused of doing "contrary

to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.” Ac. 17:7 Although these believers were respectful of their earthly rulers, they had given supreme allegiance to another King. The apostles boldly declared, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Ac. 5:29 In the first church, Christ’s words were the final authority in everything; His judgments were unquestioned; His will was faithfully carried out. His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom, but rather a spiritual kingdom in which Christ ruled supreme in the hearts of believers and in their assemblies. The citizens of this kingdom fought with truth, conquered with love, and won by dying. They obeyed their King not because they had to, but because they wanted to serve the One who loved them and died for them.

The difference between a king and a president can be very subtle—as subtle as the serpent in the Garden of Eden was. Although both have the power to rule, a president’s actions are subject to the approval of the people, whereas a king’s actions are sovereign. The serpent came to Eve and challenged God’s commands to her. He got her to change God’s word and act according to her own laws. Eve and the serpent voted God’s word down, two to one. Eve had reduced God to a president.

The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day amended God’s commandments with man-made traditions. Jesus charged these Jews with transgressing the commandment of God by their tradition. Mt. 15:3 The scribes and Pharisees had reduced God to a president by usurping the authority to add and annul laws.

In the age of the church, councils and theologians have amended and reinterpreted God’s Word. As a result, the church took up the sword, infant baptism, penance, mass, indulgences, and many other pagan devices. In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther noticed some of these errors in the Roman Catholic Church and sought to call the church back to the authority of the Scriptures. A few years after Luther began his reform in 1517, Ulrich Zwingli began a similar reform in Zurich, Switzerland. Although Zwingli opposed the Roman Catholic mass and images in the churches, he allowed the local government leaders to control his reforms. Zwingli submitted to their decisions

about how the reforms should proceed, but some of his disciples pushed for a more radical reform. They opposed infant baptism and insisted that the reformation should not be placed in the hands of the government.

Finally, the town council ruled that Zwingli’s disciples must submit to the council’s decisions or be persecuted. On January 21, 1525, these disciples met together and decided that they must obey God rather than man. They crowned Christ as their King, obeying Him regardless of what the rulers of this world decreed. These first Anabaptists, known as the Swiss Brethren, suffered dearly for their devotion to their King. On January 5, 1527, Felix

Manz was drowned; and on September 6, 1529, Georg Blaurock was burned at the stake. Many more martyrdoms followed. These believers are an example to us of what it means to make Christ our King. They obeyed His will as best they knew how, and left the outcome in the hands of their King.

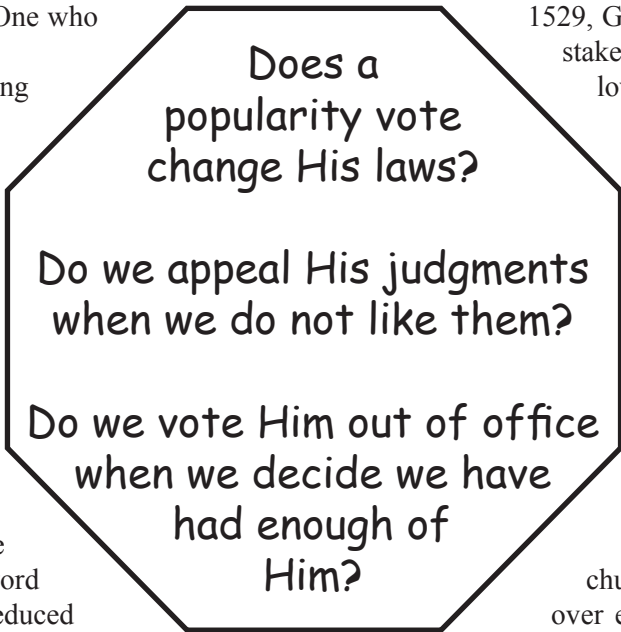
Even today, churches think to change God’s Word by blessing divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, immodesty, worldly lifestyles, and many other things contrary to God’s Word. In our churches, God must reign as King over every decision that is made. His word must be final and absolute. We cannot allow God to become a mere president in

our churches.

If Christ is to reign in our churches, He must also reign in our own individual lives. Jesus must have absolute authority over everything in our lives. Every thought we think, the clothes we wear, the music to which we listen, the books we read, the car we drive, the money we spend (and save), the images we view—must all be beneath His control.

Is Christ sitting as King on the throne of your heart? Or has He been reduced to a president? Does a popularity vote change His laws? Do we appeal His judgments when we do not like them? Do we vote Him out of office when we decide we have had enough of Him?

How do we make sure that God is the King and not a president of our lives? We must do three things to be sure. First, remove any additions to, subtractions from, or misinterpretations of God’s Word. If we are twisting and



manipulating Scripture to meet our wants, we must repent and correct our thinking. Second, renounce any object or practice in our lives that is contrary to God's Word. God's Word must be obeyed absolutely. And third, purpose to do whatever God asks. If God is a king, then we must fulfill His requests. In a world where the truth is being attacked and the teachings and practices of the Bible are being ne-

glected, our King is looking for faithful servants.

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Christ is our King, and as such we ought to fear and reverence Him. But He is not a cruel tyrant of whom we need to be afraid. In fact, Jesus said, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Jn. 15:15 We should view ourselves as Christ's servants as Paul did (Rom. 1:1), but we are more than servants—we are His friends. We sit

with Him in heavenly places. He gives us mercy when we fail and grace when we are weak. When we surrender our constitutional rights to Him, He gives us a freedom greater than what any democracy can offer.

Christ will come as King of kings

When Christ came the first time, He came riding a lowly donkey. Zechariah foretold: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Ze. 9:9; Lu. 19:38 But when Christ comes the second time, He will come riding a white horse, prepared to judge and make war. He will come to smite the nations with a sharp sword out of His mouth and to rule them with a rod of iron. Re. 19:15 "And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one." Ze. 14:9 For those who have truly made God their King, these prophecies assure us of certain victory. But those who have rejected Christ as their King or have reduced Him to a president will find that Christ "hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." Re. 19:16 ~