

D & C Lesson 44

BEING GOOD CITIZENS

Prepared by Duane S. Crowther, December 2001

1. A Declaration of Beliefs Regarding Governments and Laws in General

A. D&C Section 134 was adopted by unanimous vote at a general assembly of the Church held at Kirtland, Ohio August 17, 1835. [HC 2:247-249] *Verse analysis:*

v. 1A: “Governments were instituted of God for the benefit of men.”

v. 1B: God “holds men accountable for their acts” in relation to government, both in making and administering laws.

v. 2: No government can exist in peace unless it makes and holds inviolate laws which will “secure to each individual (1) the free exercise of conscience, (2) the right and control of property, and (3) the protection of life.”

v. 3A: “All governments necessarily require civil officers and magistrates to enforce the laws.”

v. 3B: Civil officers who will “administer the law in equity and justice should be sought for and upheld by the voice of the people.” (See *D&C 98:10.*)

v. 4A: “Religion is instituted of God.”

v. 4B: Men are responsible only to God for the exercise of their religion, “unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others.”

v. 4C: “We do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion.”

v. 4D: Civil magistrates should (1) “restrain crime, but never control conscience; should (2) punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul.”

v. 5A: “All men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments.”

v. 5B: “Sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly.”

v. 5C: “All governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest;” while “holding sacred the freedom of conscience.”

v. 6A: “Every man should be honored in his station.”

v. 6B: “Rulers and magistrates” are “placed for (1) the protection of the innocent and (2) the punishment of the guilty.”

v. 6C: All men should show respect and deference to the laws, for without them “peace and harmony would be supplanted by anarchy and terror.”

v. 6D: *Human laws* are instituted to regulate our interest as individuals and nations, *between man and man.*

v. 6E: *Divine laws*, which prescribe rules on spiritual concerns, for faith and worship, are given of heaven.

v. 6F: Man’s obedience to both human laws and divine laws are “both to be answered *by man to his Maker.*”

v. 7A: Rulers, states and governments have a right, and are bound to enact laws for the protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief.”

v. 7B: We do not believe rulers, states and governments have a right to (1) deprive citizens of their religious belief nor (1) proscribe their religious opinions, so long as (1) a regard and reverence are shown to the laws and (2) such religious opinions do not justify sedition nor conspiracy.

v. 8A: “The commission of crime should be punished according to the nature of the offense,” and crimes “should be punished according to their criminality and their tendency to evil among men.”

v. 8B: Crimes should be punished “by the laws of that government in which the offense is committed.”

v. 8C: “All men should step forward and use their ability in bringing offenders against good laws to punishment.”

v. 9: “We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges.”

v. 10A: “All religious societies have a right to deal with their members for disorderly conduct, according to the rules and regulations of such societies.”

v. 10B: Religious societies can [discipline their members] “for fellowship and good standing;” but can only “excommunicate them from their society and withdraw from them their fellowship.”

v. 10C: Religious societies don’t have authority (1) “to try men on the right of property or life, (2) to take from them this world’s goods, (3) or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or (4) to inflict any physical punishment upon them.”

v. 11A: “Men should appeal to the civil law for redress of all wrongs and grievances, where (1) personal abuse is inflicted or (2) the right of property or (3) character infringed, where such laws exist as will protect the same.”

v. 11B: “All men are justified in defending (1) themselves, (2) their friends, (3) and property, and (4) the government, from the unlawful assaults and encroachments of all persons in times of exigency, where immediate appeal cannot be made to the laws, and relief afforded.”

v. 12A: “We believe it just to preach the gospel to the nations of the earth, and warn the righteous to save themselves from the corruptions of the world.”

v. 12B: “We do not believe it right to interfere with bond servants, . . . such interference we believe to be unlawful and unjust, and dangerous to the peace . . .”

2. Other important passages on laws, governments and civil obedience

(A) *D&C 42:79, 84-86*: Members who kill, rob, steal, or lie shall be delivered up unto the laws of the land. (B) *D&C 58:21-22*: He that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land. Be subject to the powers that be until the Savior comes. (C) *D&C 63:26*: “I, the Lord, render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s.” (D) *D&C 98:4-10*: The Lord justifies us in befriending the constitutional law of the land. (E) *D&C 101:76-80*: Laws and the constitution are established “that every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him.”

3. Doing our civic duty

A. “Members should do their civic duty by supporting measures that strengthen society morally, economically, and culturally. Members are urged to be actively engaged in worthy causes to improve their communities and make them wholesome places in which to live and rear families.” [*Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2, p. 325*]

B. **Elder Russell M. Ballard**: “First: ‘*Be in the world.*’ Be involved; be informed. Try to be understanding and tolerant and to appreciate diversity. Make meaningful contributions to society through service and involvement. Second, ‘*Be not of the world.*’ Do not follow wrong paths or bend to accommodate or accept what is not right. . . . Members of the Church need to influence more than we are influenced. We should work to stem the tide of sin and evil instead of passively being swept

along by it. We each need to help solve the problem rather than avoid or ignore it.” [*Ensign*, May 1989, p. 80]

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