

## The Intersection of Church and Secular Politics

- I. The domains of Christ and Caesar (secular civil power) are separate. **MAT 22:21.**
  - A. Christ's kingdom is spiritual and not of this world. **LUK 17:20-21; 18:36.**
  - B. Christ's kingdom is a nation in this world. **MAT 21:43 c/w 1PE 2:9.**
    1. The church has a national leader: Christ.
    2. The church's Leader has an administration: the pastorate.
    3. The church is an embassy in this world with ambassadors. **2CO 5:20; EPH 6:20.**
    4. The church has a body of law to regulate it: Scripture.
    5. The church has regular conventions: worship assemblies.
    6. The church has a state dinner: communion.
    7. The church has a judicial system to apply its law and punish offenders: the church court where its members are jurors who examine evidence in the light of Scripture and make appropriate determination.
    8. The church has an immigration policy: repentance, faith, baptism.
    9. The church has a military to advance its domain and protect it from the enemy. It consists of pastors, teachers, evangelists, church members: all who wield a spiritual sword, the word of God. **EPH 6:17; 2CO 10:3-5.**
    10. The church does not have the power of the civil *magistrate* (a civil officer charged with the administration of the laws, a member of the executive government) but it can separate company from offenders and turn them over to civil power as needed.
      - a. Saints are to be subject to the magistracy where obedience to God is not at stake. **TIT 3:1 c/w ACT 5:28-29.**
      - b. Civil powers may not concern themselves with some offenses that the church cannot condone (eg. heresy, envy, effeminacy, covetousness).
      - c. But there are offenses which the church cannot condone which the civil power should have a concern in (eg. murder, theft, extortion, fraud, rape, child molestation, kidnapping) and such an offender may have to be turned over to civil authorities.
  - C. The church has a duty to teach both man's relationship to God and man's relationship to his fellow-man. **MAT 22:37-39.**
    1. Though its principles are universal, the church's power of enforcement of God's law is limited to its internal order. **1CO 5:9-13.**
      - a. It concerns not itself with secular punishment but turns one out of the kingdom of grace unto the kingdom of Satan. **1CO 5:4-5; 1TI 1:19-20.**
      - b. The offender, having grieved the Spirit, loses the blessings and protection of the Spirit and is turned over to his flesh, as the prodigal son. **LUK 15:13.**
      - c. By the loss of his spiritual understanding, peace and joy of the Holy Ghost, by the chastenings of God, by the miseries into which he digs himself, etc., it is hoped that the fleshly ways be destroyed unto sorrowful repentance. **2CO 2:6-7.**
      - d. Some of God's judgments are silent ones. **HOS 4:17; PSA 81:12.**
    2. The church must condemn known blasphemy and false worship which are direct offenses against God, and separate company from such.
      - a. God Himself is the directly aggrieved party, the only "victim."
      - b. Under the O.T. such sins were punishable by execution unto death. **LEV 24:16; DEU 13:1-5.**
      - c. Mind that God is well able to handle impious men Himself with judgments on their lives. **LEV 10:1-2; ACT 5:1-11; 1CO 11:29-30.**

- d. History has shown that the best way to combat these errors is not by the force of the sword but by the persuasion of conscience. **ACT 17:29-31.**
3. How one relates to God is a matter of personal opinion that ought to be a matter of persuasion, not coercion. **2CO 5:11.**
  - a. It is a weak argument that can only prevail by force, especially in a matter of a “victimless crime” (where there is no direct tort of a fellow-man).
  - b. The State need only concern itself with man’s duties towards his fellow-man. **ACT 18:12-17 c/w 1PE 2:19.**
  - c. “...and it would be well if every civil magistrate would act the same part, and not meddle with religious affairs, any further than to preserve the public peace.” (John Gill on Acts 18:14-15)
  - d. “A better answer could not be given by man; and it was highly becoming the acknowledged meekness, gentleness, and benevolence of this amiable man. He concluded that the state had no right to control any man’s religious opinion; that was between the object of his worship and his own conscience; and therefore he was not authorized to intermeddle with subjects of this nature, which the law left to every man’s private judgment. Had all the rulers of the people in every country acted as this sensible and benevolent Roman, laws against liberty of conscience, concerning religious persecution, would not be found to be, as they not are, blots and disgraces on the statute books of almost all the civilized nations of Europe.” (Adam Clarke)
  - e. “Government has no more to do with the religious opinions of men than it has with the principles of mathematics.” (Elder John Leland)
  - f. “If government can answer for individuals at the day of judgment, let men be controlled by it in religious matters; otherwise let men be free.” (Elder John Leland)

II. Jesus Christ was a special kind of political disturber.

- A. His coming was the shaking of heaven and earth. **HAG 2:6-7, 21-22.**
- B. His kingdom would break in pieces and consume the kingdoms of this world. **DAN 2:44.**
- C. He came to shake up society. **MAT 10:34-36.**
- D. He challenged the nation’s leadership. **LUK 20:17-19.**
- E. His victory over death and the grave gave Him rule over all nations. **PSA 2:7-8 c/w HEB 1:1-5.**
- F. But Jesus was not a political factionist stirring up party strife. **MAT 12:19; 21:5.**
  1. He favored neither Pharisee, Sadducee nor Herod. **MAT 16:6; MAR 8:15.**
  2. He was not much concerned about taxation. **MAT 17:24-27; 22:17-21.**
  3. He submitted to Rome where He could, and later used them to punish Israel. **MAT 22:7.**
- G. His primary interest was spiritual matters.
  1. God’s kingdom and righteousness were emphasized to the disregard of present evil. **MAT 6:33-34.**
  2. God’s house was more important than Herod’s throne. **MAT 21:12-13.**
  3. He evaded offers of secular power. **MAT 4:8-10; JOH 6:15.**
  4. He came to liberate men from the bondage of Satan. **1JO 3:8.**
- H. Jesus Christ has shown the world the hollowness of political power over men while Someone else is King in their hearts.
  1. The primary glue of mighty human empires is force but the bond of Christ’s kingdom is charity. **COL 3:14.**

2. “I know men, and I tell you, Jesus is not a man. He commands us to believe, and gives no other reason than his awful word, I AM GOD. Philosophers try to solve the mysteries of the universe by their empty dissertations: fools: they are like the infant that cries to have the moon for a plaything. Christ never hesitates. He speaks with authority. His religion is a mystery; but it subsists by its own force. He seeks, and absolutely requires, the love of men, the most difficult thing in the world to obtain. Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal conquered the world, but had no friends. I myself am perhaps the only person of my day who loves Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself founded empires; but upon what? Force. Jesus founded his empire on Love; and at this hour millions would die for him. I myself have inspired multitudes with such affection that they would die for me. But my presence was necessary. Now that I am in St. Helena, where are my friends? I am forgotten, soon to return to the earth, and become food for worms. What an abyss between my misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, who is proclaimed, loved, adored, and which is extending over all the earth. Is this death? I tell you, the death of Christ is the death of God. I tell you, JESUS CHRIST IS GOD.”  
(Napoleon Bonaparte, cited in *Halley's Bible Handbook*, 24th Edition, pp. 542-543)

III. The church of Jesus Christ seeks friendly diplomatic relations with the secular government where it can.

A. Its primary business is the gospel and the promotion of all applicable law from God.

**MAR 16:15, 20; MAT 4:4; 2TI 3:16; PSA 119:128; COL 2:20-22.**

1. It emphasizes the New Testament of the Spirit of Christ which promotes life and liberty. **2CO 3:6, 17; 1CO 7:21-23.**
2. This spiritual life and liberty affirms self-discipline and self-restraint in deference to a higher purpose. **GAL 5:1, 13; 1PE 2:16.**
3. Such principles reduce the need for other masters and laws in everyday life.
4. “If your cause is just, if your principles are pure, and if your conduct is prudent, you need not fear the multitude of opposing hosts. He is the best friend to American liberty, who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, and who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down profanity and immorality of every kind. Whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I scruple not to call him an enemy of his country...” (John Witherspoon, preacher, president of Princeton, signer of the Declaration of Independence, abolitionist)
5. It affirms that men should seek God, the supreme happiness. **ACT 17:26-28 c/w PSA 144:15.**
6. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are necessary for the maximum human good, which is identification with God. **MAT 5:48.**
  - a. If one is not alive, he cannot seek God.
  - b. If one does not have liberty, his seeking of God is infirm.
  - c. If he cannot pursue happiness, he cannot seek God from Whom all blessing flows.
  - d. There was a measure of divine wisdom in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. --- That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

- B. It also promotes private property rights, including the mind, body and posterity. **EXO 20:13, 15; MAT 20:15; ACT 5:4; ROM 14:5; MAR 15:23; PSA 127:3-5.**
- C. It recognizes the need for civil authority, for public order, and rejects anarchy and sedition. **TIT 3:1; 1PE 2:13-17; 2PE 2:10; GAL 5:20.**
1. It is not automatically hostile to civil power but rather its best friend and conscience. **ACT 26:27-32; 1TI 2:1-2.**
  2. Its interests in man's relating to others are commonly in agreement with civil power. **1TI 1:8-11; 1PE 4:15-16.**
  3. It understands there are financial costs to human government and also that it is tyranny to be forced to make the state's bricks, especially without straw and especially when true religion is the issue. **ROM 13:7; LUK 20:25; EXO 5:6-9.**
- D. It will strive for conciliation where it can. **DAN 1:12-14.**
- E. But it cannot silence its message at the demand of any secular policy. **ACT 4:20.**
- F. It will protect innocent life when secular policy is against it. **EXO 1:16-17; ACT 9:23-25.**
- G. It will resist perversions of biblical family structure and government. **MAT 19:4-6; PSA 127:3.**
- H. It reserves the right under God of free and qualified association. **ACT 2:38-41; 1CO 5:13.**
1. Scripture determines who may join the church membership.
  2. Scripture determines the terms of membership and of severance.
  3. Its assembly is a private, not public gathering. Attendance is by permission of the church, not the force of secular power. c/w **2CH 26:16-21.**
  4. It is not an employer which contracts laborers as would a business. The turning of the house of God into a business enterprise displeases God. **JOH 2:13-17.**
- I. It cannot corrupt worship at the behest of the state. **DAN 3:18; REV 20:4.**
- J. It cannot abandon its duty of assembling at the behest of the state. **HEB 10:25.**
1. The church assembly exists for the corporate praise of its King and for His tribute. **EPH 3:21; ROM 12:1; 1PE 2:5.**
  2. Our Lord Jesus would not comply with secular power's demands to stifle His worship. **LUK 19:38-40.**
- K. The church is the creature of God, not of the state. **DAN 2:44; 1CO 3:9.**
1. Christ's kingdom (the gospel church) is in this world but not of this world nor subject to this world's ordinances, regardless of whether such ordinances are oppressive or apparently beneficent.
  2. Individual believers are subject to many of this world's ordinances but not the body politic which is the church.
  3. "If any number of real saints are incorporated by human law, they cannot be a church of Christ, by virtue of that formation, but a creature of the state..." (Elder John Leland)
  4. The church which incorporates under human law has loved another husband for the perceived advantages that he (the state) offers by incorporation. It answers to two masters, a real problem. **MAT 6:24.**
  5. Any creature is subject to its creator. **ROM 9:20.**
  6. The true church knows all too well what can happen when ecclesiastical power fornicates with civil power. **REV 17:1-6.**
  7. The church needs not the benefits of the state which incorporation offers and is better off without that.
    - a. It needs not the legal protections that incorporation provides since it is not a legal entity that can be sued at law. Individual believers may be sued but not

- the church.
- b. It needs not the tax benefits that incorporation provides since kickback giving is a poor example of sacrifice not entirely unlike Corban (**MAR 7:9-11**) and the tax benefit can end up being a muzzle of the church's voice in public policy.
  - c. Remember that the state can give nothing but what the cost of it is borne by someone else. Remember Paul's principle in **2CO 8:13**.
    - (1) "Government cannot create a special privilege for one American without simultaneously creating a special disadvantage for another American." (Dr. Walter Williams, 1936-2020)
    - (2) IMHO, there is some validity to the infamous Johnson Amendment of the Tax Code. Should other taxpayers who would not want to support a religion be forced to do so by the increased burden of tax they bear as a result of a reduced tax burden borne by members of that religion?
    - (3) Tax deductions for charitable giving to churches would seem to narrowly avoid the proscription in the First Amendment forbidding State-establishment of religion inasmuch as such a benefit is not unique to any particular religion.
    - (4) But then the question arises as to whether it is just for anyone, believer or unbeliever, to be forced to financially subsidize a religion with which he disagrees. Similar questions might be asked concerning taxation to support Planned Parenthood, antichrist public education, or of the tax deductions made available to donors to United Way (which supports abortion), etc.
8. The church's mission is best served simply by public policy that does not inhibit its message or duties.
    - a. This is far more valuable than a tax deduction or a legal shelter.
    - b. Our God has promised to supply our need. **PHIL 4:19; 2CO 9:8-11**.
    - c. This accords with His Spirit of liberty: liberty for believers to do well and liberty for unbelievers to not subsidize religion they oppose and to reject the church's message free of charge and answer to God for that.
  9. "Among the most inestimable of our blessings is that ... of liberty to worship our Creator in the way we think most agreeable in His will; a liberty deemed in other countries incompatible with good government and yet proved by our experience to be its best support." (Thomas Jefferson to Capt. John Thomas of Newhope Baptist Church, Nov. 18, 1807)

#### IV. Scripture speaks of various forms of human government.

- A. There are three basic dispensations of God's dealing with mankind: Adam to Moses; Moses to Christ; Christ to Consummation (the Church age). **ROM 5:14; GAL 3:19; EPH 3:21**.
  1. The influence of true religion in world affairs was reduced to virtually nothing by the time of Noah. **2PE 2:5**.
  2. Such was the end of a completely secularized society that still had dredges/remnants of basic social order. **MAT 24:37-39**.
- B. The first and foundational form is that of marriage and family, with the man being the head. **1CO 11:8-10 c/w 1TI 2:12-13; EPH 5:23**.
  1. From the beginning, this social structure recognized the existence and worship of

- God according to revelation. **GEN 4:3-4 c/w LUK 11:50-51.**
2. This system demonstrated that temporal power would struggle to recognize spiritual power.
    - a. Cain was the firstborn and the beginning of Adam's strength, and therefore had the preeminence. **GEN 4:7 c/w GEN 49:3.**
    - b. Mind that Cain (temporal power) knew God but could not endure the spiritual power's (Abel's) accepted religion. This is the essence of the struggle of the ages between carnal religion and spiritual religion, between State force and believer's duty.
    - c. Curiously, Cain's slaying of Abel opened the door for the first State-ordered marriage. **GEN 4:17.**
    - d. Cain also initiated the concept of "city." **GEN 4:17.**
- C. Post-Flood, family government descended from Noah to the development of political entities like cities, kingdoms and nations with defined borders. **GEN 10:9-12, 19, 32; 11:4.**
1. The concentration of political power was not in the best interests of God or man, so God broke them apart. **GEN 11:9; ACT 17:26-27.**
  2. The bounds of nations were established with a view to God's planned covenant nation of Israel. **DEU 32:7-8.**
    - a. Mind that God knows the value of a multi-national mankind. The potential for men to seek God is enhanced by competing political entities, per **ACT 17:26-27.**
    - b. God has throughout history used one nation to punish another for their wickedness and even made political powers to be sanctuary for the true worshippers of God. **ISA 10:5-6; JER 29:7; REV 12:15-16.**
    - c. Beast-government designs to remove the bounds of the people. **ISA 10:13.**
  3. It is noteworthy that the concept of kings and kingdoms is only mentioned after the Flood. This concurred with the division of men from Babel.
    - a. It was not uncommon for a kingdom to be a city, as were the well-blessed Sodom and Gomorrah. **GEN 13:10; 14:1-2.**
    - b. Sodom and Gomorrah (and their outlying city-kingdoms) decided to abandon righteousness for the "benefits" of a socio-political order that magnified sexual deviancy, and they were thus destroyed by God. **JUDE 1:7.**
    - c. "The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness." (State Motto of Hawaii). c/w **PRO 14:34.**
    - d. There are four fundamental elements that make for a favored land: good soil, good water, good natural resources (**DEU 8:9**) and a favorable climate. That which turns such lands into hell-holes is not men, but wickedness. Modern day Israel/Palestine was not always a dust-bowl. **DEU 11:10-12.**
  4. Basic distinctions set old Israel apart from other nations.
    - a. They were monotheistic (**DEU 6:4**): their values had one Divine Authority. Polytheism opens the door for a principle-free existence except for one overarching principle: "There are no principles."
    - b. They had the written revelation of God (**ROM 3:1-2**) which emphasized righteousness, morality, self-restraint, love of neighbor, life and one standard of law. **DEU 1:17.**
    - c. Their system of polity graduated from a patriarchal/tribal one to a more centralized form of government with one king to prepare them for Messiah.

- d. The dividing of Canaan by lot to the tribes of Israel (**ACT 13:19-20**) set up a form of a multi-state nation with a written constitution (the Law of Moses).
- (1) The tribal possessions were to be distinct though not all equal in size. **LEV 25:23; NUM 36:7; PSA 68:27 c/w 1SAM 9:21.**
  - (2) Each tribe had its own elders, heads, judges and officers. **JOS 24:1.**
  - (3) The tribes were expected to have an available militia to be called into duty as needed (**NUM 1:3; 31:3**), were deemed delinquent when they let their arms diminish (**JDG 5:8**) and cursed when they did not arise for national security. **JDG 5:23.**
- e. Israel abandoned God's blessings upon principles like the fear of God, self-discipline, self-government, self-accountability and self-defense, opting for an alternative security in the form of a "...king to judge us like all the nations" (**1SAM 8:5-7**).
- (1) This shift to centralized power was in the prophetic view (**GEN 49:10**) but would come at a cost of high taxation (**1SAM 8:10-22**). Nevertheless, God tolerated their choice and gave them instruction for national survival. **1SAM 12:13-15.**
  - (2) Onerous taxation by the central government for all of its projects and armies was what sparked a God-ordained rebellion, secession and refusal to have taxation without representation. **1KI 11:26-32; 12:16-19.**
  - (3) If the peoples' guardians of their liberties and rights have become the oppressors of the people, it is a just concept to appoint new guardians, a process undertaken by popular vote in a representative system and, if all reasonable recourse fails, the people may have to resist and change the system.
  - (4) NOTE: Liberty was a treasured principle in Israel that was hallowed by a fiftieth year jubile which limited exploitation (**LEV 25:10**) and for the breach of such liberty the nation was harshly judged and subsumed by Babylon. **JER 34:8-22.**
- f. Do not forget that there were distinct domains of power in Israel: the priest could only teach and administer constituted law (**DEU 17:8-13**), and the king could not assume the offices of the priesthood. **2CH 26:18.**
- g. The example of Israel shows us that:
- (1) decentralized, local government is far from a bad thing and the ceding of too much power to a central authority has negative implications.
  - (2) a multi-state nation of defined territories and interests is possible under a common constitution.
  - (3) a monarchy is a legitimate form of civil government.
  - (4) God's people may not always make the wisest choices concerning their own government but hope is not lost.
  - (5) the doctrine of *Rex Lex* (king is law) is subordinate to *Lex Rex* (law is king).
  - (6) the people have rights to life, liberty and property as gifts from God.
  - (7) the interests and consent of the governed have roles in how the governed should be governed.
  - (8) unjust regimes are subject to change and God may ordain it.
  - (9) the commonwealth of a body politic depends upon the recognition of

absolute truth, trust in God, godly conduct and the self-restraint of the people which secures themselves against divine wrath while also securing the life, liberty and property of the just.

- (10) whereas wickedness invites oppressive civil government, tyranny is itself wicked and resistance to it may be required (**HEB 11:32-33**). One cannot conclude that all forms of civil government must be always rendered unqualified and unlimited submission simply because "...the powers that be are ordained of God" (**ROM 13:1**).

D. History has provided many examples of civil government, including patriarchal, tribal, federal, monarchy, imperial, totalitarian, fascist, socialist, communist, democracy, republic, church-state hybrid, etc.

1. The commonwealth of the people has been greatly reduced under some, considerably enhanced under others.
2. As noted earlier, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are gifts of God which empower men to seek Him. Therefore, the denial of these things to men is to deprive God of what He desires: the attention and adoration of His creatures. **REV 4:11.**
3. To exclude the right of private property is to deny the very words of God (**MAT 20:15**) and surrender the power over one's own body and mind to another.
4. It is incumbent upon believers to soberly and wisely consider what form of civil government best agrees with God's own principles and also to know where to draw lines where civil policy usurps God's policy.
5. There are some areas where one's personal notions about civil policy would have to be considered unbiblical and therefore resisted by the godly. The dividing line: "What saith the Scripture?"