



Five Wrong Views About Christians and Government

TO: LEGISLATORS

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I trust you had a refreshing time in your district last week and that you were able to catch up and invest in your marriage—as well as rest a bit. This week I want to begin addressing a biblical view of Church and State, or as titled here, Christians and Government. There are five aberrant views that I will attempt to discuss in the next five weeks of our study. Following that I will present the flipside: A proper biblically-reasoned understanding of Church and State.

A word of caution is in order here. We, I think desire the Members Bible Study to be primarily about one's personal growth in Christ. Such stems from the study and application of Scripture to one's personal life versus a discussion of policy issues (as reasoned from the Bible). Both are important and intrinsically intertwined, but from the outset I want to simply state my heart's desire here: Let us maintain an emphasis on personal spiritual growth as we study together.

INTRODUCTION

There are many fine Christian books pertaining to what the Bible says about the believer and his or her marriage, his or her family, church and employment. But very little conservative theology has been published regarding the believer's relationship to the state.¹ What does the Bible say about this? Furthermore, if Scripture gives guidelines for the proper functioning of the institutions of Marriage, Family, Church and Commerce, it stands to reason that it speaks to the proper functioning of the State, and it does! Since you are responsible for that, it makes sense to know about it. Let us examine what the Good Book has to say! What follows is the first of five aberrant answers as to how the Church should relate to the State.

I. **WRONG VIEW #1: GOVERNMENT SHOULD COMPEL RELIGION**

Does the Bible teach that government should compel its citizenry to follow a particular religion? A bit of Church History is in order here in answering that. Since the Reformation was primarily about a revolution in soteriology,² i.e. what the Bible taught about how one is saved, at that time of intense debate there was room for discussion of little else. Which meant a theological debate about the separation of the institution of the Church from the institution of the State would have to wait for another time (with the exception of the Anabaptist movement).³ Accordingly, the Church and State remained institutionally undifferentiated in many a Reformation country: Even to this date in countries such as Germany and England.⁴ Post Reformation, it is not until the American experiment in government that an institutional differentiation did occur.⁵ And this came about in pragmatic reaction to theocratic England,⁶ more so than exegetical discovery. Theocratic nations, be they reformed, unreformed, Islamic, Hindu or otherwise believe that government should compel religion. With the profligacy of theocratical constructs, the question remains is such supported by Scripture?

A. **JESUS DISTINGUISHED THE REALMS OF GOD AND OF CAESAR**

The crux passage of Scripture that prescribes present-day differentiation between Church and State is Luke 20:25:

And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and render to God the things that are God's."

Contextually this passage appears in the midst of Jesus avoiding the trickery of His persecutors. For Him to have answered their question, "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Luke 20:22) in the affirmative would suggest support for the hated Roman occupiers of Palestine. To say "no" would render Him a political revolutionary worthy of death. In answering, Jesus henceforth separates the Church Age from the theocratic



Five Wrong Views About Christians and Government

Israel of the Old Covenant. Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-14 are classic NT passages that further elaborate the distinct differentiation and separate purposes of the State from the Church. In addition, In the OT, all members of theocratic Israel were called “A kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exo. 19:6-7), a designation reserved for members of the Church only in 1 Pe. 2:9. Summarily, when Jesus said “render unto Caesar” He was “signal[ing] the endorsement of a different system...”⁷ The “things that are Caesars” are not to be under the control of the Church—nor are the things that are the responsibility of the Church to be under the control of the State. Make no mistake: America has this right! And, counter to intuition, the Church flourishes when it is separate—institutionally (but I am not implying influentially)—from the State. This fact is historically illustrated by America.

Jefferson was biblically-correct on this point:

Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or beliefs; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in nowise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.⁸

In other countries, wherein government leaders read these Bible studies, take note: Separating your government from “the things that are God’s” is biblically proper! Such will help your country prosper! Government should not compel religion. Whenever the Church is tied to the State, history shows that it loses its doctrine, purpose, mission, and impact.

B. JESUS REFUSED TO TRY TO COMPEL PEOPLE TO BELIEVE IN HIM

Jesus is not coercive. Coerce: “To make somebody do something against his or her will by using force or threats.” To this day, if you personally are not a follower of Christ, don’t expect Him to force you to submit to Himself. Unlike the Quran and the Islamic religion where

the sword is advocated to compel submission to Allah in their quest for world conquest, biblical Christianity knows nothing of this sort.

WHEREAS 9-11 WAS IN OBEDIENCE TO THE QURAN, THE CRUSADES WERE IN DEFIANCE OF THE BIBLE.

Notice the coercive strategy of Jesus’ disciples in Luke 9:52-54 and what resulted:

And He sent messengers on ahead of Him. And they went, and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make arrangements for Him. And they did not receive Him, because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”

James and John thought they had come up with a brilliant formula to assure that Jesus would gain an immediate, broad following. “But He turned and rebuked them” states 9:55. Not a good idea! Jesus coerces not.

C. GENUINE FAITH CANNOT BE FORCED

Many NT passages further illustrate the individual, voluntary nature tantamount to true saving faith. Several of many passages follow (Acts 28:23-4; Rev. 22:17 resp.)

And when they had set a day for him, [Paul] they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.

And the Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”

If you are not a believer remember this: Genuine belief need be voluntary. It follows then that a government cannot force its citizenry to believe either! This is a major



Five Wrong Views About Christians and Government

problem in theocratic nations wherein infants are compelled to be baptized in order to become a part of the State—years before they can reason, repent and receive Jesus by an act of their independent will. Institutional collusion leads to confusion.

D. NOT A WORLDLY KINGDOM

John 18:36 states the following:

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm.

Until Jesus returns and sets up the earthly form of His kingdom (at the conclusion of the Church Age and the seven-year Great Tribulation period) wherein He will physically rule over this world (cf. Rev. 20:4-7), His present kingdom is definitively spiritual in nature. That is to say this regarding the subject at hand:

HIS KINGDOM IS PRONOUNCEDLY NOT TO BE CONNECTED TO ANY POLITICAL ENTITIES

This isn't to say that His kingdom should not influence and transform the present physical world. It most certainly should (cf. Mt. 5:13-16)! John 18 is not a prescription for spiritual isolationism, monasticism or asceticism. Rather, it says this: His kingdom is to be manifest in heart change versus physical might wherein people are compelled to believe by and through various uses of force. Since His "kingdom is not of this world" it follows that Jesus does not sanction theocracy.

E. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF REJECTING THE 'COMPEL RELIGION' VIEW

As a political leader the application of this biblical precept means that lawmakers should work to uphold the constitutional tenant of freedom of religion. *All believers holding office should know the exegetical argument for religious freedom within society.* Further, to be able to enunciate this study will go a long way in assuaging the fears of groups like The Center for American Progress and the Freedom from Religion Foundation who fear that believers

holding office are espousing a return to theocracy. Office holders should not only herald and pledge allegiance to the First Amendment, ("Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion") but argue biblically for the genius and correctness of its existence!

F. WHAT ABOUT GIVING SOME TAX BENEFITS TO THE CHURCHES?

Additional implications of the State not compelling religion pertain to governmental subsidies of religion:

1. Presently our government financially supports chaplaincy programs in the military, and capitols. This amounts to subsidization of religion. I believe the aforementioned construct suggests that these expenditures be borne by religious entities and not the State. Such changes in governmental policy, pragmatically speaking, would actually lead to the furtherance of the true gospel to said audiences given the history of which religions actively support gospel outreach.
2. This exegetical study further suggests (in my humble opinion) that the State should not give tax dollars to Churches, no matter for the cause stated on the application. The government has already classified these entities as not-for-profit institutions. The genius construct of them⁹ is meant to be the other way around: Individuals are encouraged by the government to support the not-for-profit organizations' respective purposes via income tax-deductions. This is governmental incentive (versus involvement) which is both biblically and constitutionally permissible. Why? Such is non-discriminatory, which is the spirit of the First Amendment. In this way no denomination or religion receives preferential treatment by the State. In this way, Government is not compelling religion. And in this way Government is incentivizing its citizens to compel religion—which is sheer genius!

These clarifications are in keeping with the perspicuity of the aforementioned exegesis and the proviso of the First Amendment. Plus, such policy positions do not muddy the waters, or needlessly fuel contempt from secularists.



Five Wrong Views About Christians and Government

(Let us keep the Gospel the central issue!) Lastly, these positions are well in keeping with Romans 13:1.

G. THE SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE BEHIND THE 'COMPEL RELIGION' VIEW

Political leaders who espouse a “compel religion” view of Church and State are either biblically naïve or diabolically opposed to the Gospel’s extension. Let me explain.

1. Theocratic countries of other religions tend to persecute Christians by the use of their exclusive-religion laws. Such theocracies drive biblical Christianity out of their respective nations. (One of the great victories of the war in Iraq was the formulation of a new constitution wherein there exists freedom of religion!) Noting the presence of the underground Church in many a hostile nation—and God’s ability to supernaturally promulgate His Church in such countries—the Gospel effectively competes above ground when there exists a level playing field with other religions. Theocracies greatly tilt the playing field.
2. Mentioned earlier and worth repeating, “Christian states” too are misleading and are spiritually destructive overall. Why? When Christianity is compelled by the State, few end up possessing genuine faith. The Church-side of the theocracy usually ends up being led by non-believers who render the Church spiritually dead and ineffective in the society. Such destroys the transforming power of the Gospel and what remains in the end are empty, tax-supported edifices to a past faith.

CONCLUSION

For these two reasons, when a nation becomes a theocracy, the genuine work of God (from a human evaluation) is stifled. Theocracies don’t propagate; rather they hinder the work of the Church to a large extent. Ephesians 6:12-13 states what’s behind all this:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the

heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything to stand firm.

Theocracies are not of God, they are of Satan who knows where in the end the idea of compelled faith leads to. Such is destructive of God’s purposes. As elected officials may you **resist** *all* forms of theocratic encroachment. May God use this study to mature you in His wisdom from above as it pertains to you both personally and professionally.

Next week we will examine the wrong view of:

II. Government Should Exclude Religion

¹ In this study I will be borrowing from the new tome *Politics According to the Bible* (Dr. Wayne Grudem, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2011). Dr. Grudem is a wonderful personal friend. I will also be utilizing *Christ and Culture Revisited* (D.A. Carson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) wherein he revisits Richard Niebuhr’s sweeping cultural analysis of Church and State, a work that has proven to be a historically sustaining (albeit with a wandering hermeneutic) platform for reasoning and discussion on this subject. Another helpful theologically conservative book on this subject is *God and Government* (Charles Colson, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). This was previously published as *Kingdoms in Conflict*.

Note that I will be following Grudem’s outline in this study with his permission, as he has outlined this vast study with his unusually gifted abilities.

² The vast majority of the theses on the Wittenberg Door were soteriologically related.

³ See Verduin, Leonard *The Reformers and their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964)

⁴ Verduin calls this the “sacral society” wherein the two institutions are not yet divided. The premise (which the American experiment in government proves false) is that “there must be unanimity at the shrine if there is to be tranquility in the square.” Verduin, Leonard *The Anatomy of a Hybrid: A Study in Church-State Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) p 16

⁵ There exists a small component of American Evangelicalism today the purports theocratic non-differentiation that goes by the name “Christian Reconstructionism” Closely synonymous are “Theonomy” and “Dominion Theology.” The chief advocates of these movements are Rousas John Rushdoony and Greg Bahnsen.

⁶ Many of the New England Pilgrims faced fines and imprisonment for failing to attend services in the Church of England.

⁷ Grudem, Wayne *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) p 25

⁸ The Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom” drafted by Thomas Jefferson in 1179, passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1786.

⁹ Drucker, Peter *Managing the Non-Profit Organization* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992)