

THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

(Part 30 – series on Baptist Distinctives)

TEXT: Matthew 5:13-15
Genesis 1:28

INTRODUCTION: The phrase “separation of church and state” is much touted in our day but greatly misunderstood. For hundreds of years Baptists have championed the cause of religious liberty on one hand and non-intrusion into the prerogatives of civil government on the other. As a result, Baptists have paid an awful price in suffering and persecution at the hands of both Catholics and Protestants.

What scriptural principle guided Baptists in being willing to take such a courageous and unpopular stand for the complete separation of church and state? It was none other than the absolute authority of the New Testament for church order. Other denominations that blur the line between church and state must appeal to the civil laws and theocracy of Israel in the Old Testament. Firm adherence to New Testament church order has led informed Baptists to reject unscriptural extremes.

OUTLINE: We have examined the principle of separation of church and state from three angles to both understand it and know how to apply it.

I. The Principle Explained

- A. The state should not use coercion in matters of conscience.
- B. The church should not look to the state for support or advantage.

II. The Persecution Endured

- A. During and after the Reformation in Europe
- B. In colonial America

III. The Precedent Emulated

- A. The absolute authority of the New Testament for church order
- B. The rejection of unscriptural extremes
 - 1. Neutrality and pacifism (Lk. 3:14; 14:31; Jn. 18:36; Rom. 13:1-4)
 - 2. “Christian Reconstructionism” and dominion theology (Matt. 5:13-14; Gen. 1:28)

CONCLUSION: Nowhere does the Bible teach that believers will help to usher in Christ’s kingdom by imposing God’s laws on society. Until Jesus returns to Himself inaugurate His glorious kingdom on earth, the rulership of the earth will be in the hands of “the basest of men” by God’s own decree (Dan. 4:17)! If we as Christ’s servants truly believe John 18:36 – that His kingdom “is not of this world” – we will

not be found fighting to establish Him as King over this present world system, which is doomed to destruction.

We as believers are not called to “win the world for Christ” so it will be mobilized and ready when He comes again. We are called to be “witnesses” for Him, depending upon the Holy Spirit to add to that “little flock” that will be privileged to inherit the Kingdom when the King returns. That kingdom in no way depends upon earthly kingdoms. Likewise the true Church is separate from earthly kingdoms.