

GOD AND GOVERNMENT:
SHOULD A CHRISTIAN GO TO WAR?
Feb. 24, 2002

INTRO: For some time we have been working on a new constitution to help govern the Bergthaler churches of our area. We have divided the doctrinal statement into two sections. There is the major doctrinal statement and the doctrinal distinctives. In the doctrinal distinctives we have three statements that affect our present topic of God and Government. Hopefully we will soon have the new constitutions to you and you may wish to check these three areas. They are: 2.2.1 Non resistance; 2.2.9 swearing of oaths and 2.2.10 lawsuits.

When we were working on the statement I felt that I should preach on the topic of God and Government as it was a topic seldom even mentioned. Not only is it seldom mentioned and never preached on, but our people are reading the materials printed by other denominations or by non denominational organizations such as Radio Bible Class and they are swinging away from historical Mennonite teaching.

As I gave thought to speaking on this, and it was about a month before September 11th. of 2001, I thought that war appeared to be far off and it was not urgent. After September 11th. I realized that very quickly we could be called on to go to war for our country. Then when we voted on our constitution and several questions were asked regarding, especially 2.2.1, the statement on non resistance, I felt that I should give time to this topic. I will deal with it thoroughly so that hereafter I can simply recommend enquirers regarding this topic to listen to the tapes.

It will take a number of messages to deal with this topic. I believe that when you deal with topics like this in sermonettes you create Christianettes. Let me further encourage you that if you are diligent in understanding this topic you will learn far more than just the topic of God and Government. If you wish to understand this topic, I encourage you to take notes (Young people 10 & up?). When I am finished, you will be able to take just the main outline that I will give you and you will be able to see the whole topic at a glance. If you just come to church, take no notes, and do no study afterwards you will not benefit nearly as much as you could. You will only get a very small part of the value of many hours of painstaking study I have put into it. If you give yourself to understanding this topic and you study your sermon notes and the major outline, you will get a lot better grasp of this topic. You will benefit if you do this even if you do not agree with my conclusions.

As I thought of dealing with this matter I mentioned to you that I had written a paper on it during my Bible School days but that I could not locate the paper. After that a number of you have said you were praying that I would find those papers and asked if I had found them yet. Thank you to those of you who prayed that I would find the paper I wrote while I was in Bible school on this topic (explain).

In this series I want to speak to you of human government under a sovereign God. By a sovereign God I do not mean someone who decides exactly what is to be done and then it is done that way. I do not mean that He sees to it that everything is done exactly as he wishes. It means that if something is not done as He wishes, He has the right to do what He wishes.

Now let me explain first what I mean by Government. What I mean by government is *to rule or direct the affairs of man by right or authority*. In government there are two major reference points. There are those who govern, the superiors; and those who are governed, the subjects. Let it be remembered that authority has to do with right not might. You see, one might be able to beat up a policeman, that is might. But one does not have the right to beat up a policeman. That has to do with authority. A puny person in authority has the right to order a giant or a person to obey the law. It does not have to do with might; it has to do with right.

I. BEFORE CHRIST

As we look at God and Government in the OT we will divide it into two sections. First, from creation to the monarchy. That is from Adam to King Saul. You see, during the time of Saul a major change took place in government. But there were several important steps in the progression of government from the time of Adam to the time of King Saul.

A. From Creation to the Monarchy

We will further divide this time from creation to the monarchy into three sections. First, from creation to the flood; then from the flood to the Exodus; and finally, from the Exodus to the monarchy or the time of the kings.

1. From creation to the flood

We are going to look at several time periods which will bring us to the time of the NT. In each of these time periods we will look at secular and sacred government. Let me explain what I mean by

secular and sacred. Funk and Wagnall's College Dictionary gives this as the first definition for secular: Of or pertaining to this world or the present life; temporal; worldly; distinguished from spiritual. Under secular government I mean government over such things as animal management or tax collections to care for the needs of the country and so on.

By sacred government I mean government in the area of man's spiritual life. For example, prescribing what kind of sacrifice to bring for a certain kind of sin. Or what days are to be kept holy. So sacred government is thus distinguished from secular government.

a. Secular government

In Genesis 1-3 we have the creation of Adam and Eve. It should not surprise us to find instruction for government as soon as creation took place (Read Gen. 1:26-30). Notice all the governmental instructions in that passage. Man's dominion in verse 26 and 28 over the animal world. Then man's dominion over the plant world (29). This is government over secular matters.

When one considers early government we would call it very primitive and in its very early stages of development. Man's government over creation was clearly set out, although not in detailed instruction. However, one of the early instructions regarding the animal kingdom was that Adam was to categorize and name the animals (2:19-20). The Lord planted a Garden in Eden and He put the man in the garden with the instructions to "tend and keep it" (2:15).

Then by creating the male of the human species first and the female second, God set up an order of government that made the male responsible for the female. It would then very obviously mean that the children were subject to both father and mother. So in family government the order of authority is like this: God - man - woman - children. The two earliest institutions are government and family and in that order. We have the institution of the family in Genesis 2:18-24.

So mankind has been set as governor over God's earthly creation and the father is set over the family.

I find no record in Scripture of man ruling over man from creation to the flood. In Genesis 4:1-8 we have a record of the first murder (read). But man is not yet set up to rule over man and God is governor over man (read 4:9-15). Here we see God ruling over man and judging the murderer. This will change as time goes on. And so, in secular matters man rules over creation and God rules over man.

Interestingly, there are no recorded wars in Scripture from creation until the flood. We will come to the first war after the flood. So we have no recorded wars during the first 1700 years of man's history.

But what about sacred things? How was it governed? Or were there sacred matters? Well, let us see.

b. Sacred government

Look at the first sacred matter recorded in Scripture. Remember, by sacred we are speaking of that which is spiritual in nature. (Read Genesis 2:15-17.) Here is our first spiritual matter in the Bible. It was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The eating of this tree would bring death. Furthermore, it would create a sin nature within man that he would pass down to all his offspring.

What do we learn here of government in sacred matters? First, God is the supreme authority. He sets the rules. Second, we learn that He instructed the male, not the female. It now became the man's responsibility to see to it that his wife knew about the forbidden tree. Did Adam do his job? Apparently so (See Genesis 3:1-3).

In Genesis 3 we have the fall of man. In disobedience to God, the governing authority in sacred matters, man ate from the forbidden tree. After their sin God did not go to Eve, He went to Adam (See Gen. 3:8-11). Adam was responsible under God to see to the spiritual

life of his wife. When God came to Adam and Adam told him what Eve had done, then God went to Eve. She was still responsible for her own sin, even though it was Adam's task to see to this part of life.

What do we learn from this with regard to spiritual government? The order is: God -> Husband -> Wife. Although this is a very basic truth, it will remain as the groundwork for all family government throughout man's history until the new heaven and the new earth. These early truths are simply foundational. The amazing thing is that today we are tampering rather unashamedly with these fundamental principles of government.

How did spiritual instruction take place from creation to the flood? Man was instructed by God spiritually and it was handed down from generation to generation by oral tradition, not by written instruction as we have in the Bible. The father of each family had the responsibility to see to the spiritual training of his family.

But, what we learn about man in his spiritual life, as he grew in population is that he degenerated spiritually. After about 1700 years of existence, man had degenerated to such an extent that we find God wanting to make an end of mankind (read Gen. 6:5-13). "But," the Scripture says, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD." And so God would start over with a family.

Concl: What have we learned of God and government from creation to the flood? We have learned that man was set over secular matters and God ruled in sacred matters. We also have learned that the father is responsible for family matters. We will now consider God and government from the flood to the Exodus.

2. From the flood to the Exodus

a. Secular government

It is interesting that we have 5 chapters in the Bible given to the first 1700 years of mankind's existence. Then the next 4 chapters

are given to an account of one godly man and his family. What I want us to notice is a new command with regard to government. Notice first in Genesis 9:1-3 a regiving of the original governing rights to man over God's impersonal creation. But now two entirely new concepts are added. Man has full rights over God's impersonal creation but now he is restricted with regard to one aspect of that impersonal creation. He is not to eat meat that has blood in it. God has declared blood sacred and from this point on, man is to respect blood. No doubt this is because His own Son will some day give His life blood for the sin of mankind (See also Lev. 17:10-14).

But the addition to instruction in government that speaks to our topic is found in Genesis 9:5-6. Here, in my findings, is the first authority given by God to man to govern over his fellow man. In order to carry out this command, some kind of governing body must exist among mankind.

This command establishes and grants authority to man to exercise capital punishment when it becomes necessary. I take rather strong exception with today's pacifists who insist that capital punishment should be abolished. It is given here to man and in my studies of Scripture is never recinded.

This is a huge development in government. Until now, man was authorized to govern over God's impersonal creation. Now he is authorized to govern over man as well.

As far as family government is concerned, it seems that during this time there is also a bit of a progression. The firstborn son received the birthright which entitled him to certain privileges and responsibilities in a family. Having received the birthright he would receive a double portion of the inheritance but he would become responsible to care for his mother. The family line also was carried on through the firstborn as well.

There is one further interesting development in government during this time period. During this time we have the first recorded war in the

Bible. It took place during the time of Abraham. Abraham grew up in Mesopotamia in the midst of a very ungodly people. Vast archives have been found at Mari and Ebla that inform us that by this time there were highly organized kingdoms which had a king and a queen and princes. These kings were called lords, a title with which we are familiar from history.

A king at that time ruled a tribe and a much smaller area than we are familiar with for a king. For example, if we had kings like this today, LaCrete might have a king. Fort Vermillion would have a king. Buffalo Head Prairie might have a king.

In Genesis 14:8-16 we have the first recorded war in Scripture (read). When I began to prepare for this series I called Pastor Koop and Samuel Nafziger for any helpful materials they might have on our present topic. Mr. Nafziger gave me a file of material and a book by Guy F. Hershberger, an Old Order Mennonite. After looking at the list of contents and briefly browsing through this book I phoned and asked if there was any chance of purchasing the book. He said there was and I could have it for the price marked inside the cover. Well the book is written in 1944, the time of World War II, and the price was \$2.50. Well, the book was such a wealth of information that I gave him seven times what he asked and I still came away feeling like any Mennonite does when he gets a good deal. I suppose I would have gladly paid \$50.00 for that book.

Well, this book takes the position that God's will always was that man take a non-resistant position, even in the OT. I disagree with many of our Mennonites on that matter and on the matter of capital punishment. Harold S. Bender, a very scholarly Mennonite wrote the foreword to Hershberger's book. He writes in the introduction these insightful words, "Throughout the Mennonite church there will certainly be an almost universal endorsement of the author's final conclusions. On some of the intermediate points, however, there may be some disagreement, particularly concerning the difficult problem of war and peace in the Old Testament" (Pg. viii).

In Genesis 14, after Abraham's war with the four kings, we find that Melchizedek, whose name means king of righteousness and who is a type of Christ if not a Christophany, blessed Abraham (read Gen. 14:17-24). When Adam and Eve sinned, God punished them. When Cain killed Abel, God punished him. When Abraham got involved in warfare with armed servants and attacked his enemies and defeated them, God did not punish him. There does not seem to be divine disapproval for this action Abraham took.

So we have quite a development taking place in government of man over man during this part of man's history.

b. Spiritual government

Spiritual government remains unchanged. God is the governor of man in spiritual matters. Instruction in spiritual life seems to have been handed down by oral tradition from father to family.

CONCL: We have briefly considered the history of God and government in the affairs of man. What we have seen thus far is that man was originally set to govern God's non-personal creation on earth. We also saw that spiritually, the man is the head of the home and responsible to pass spiritual truth down to his family. After the flood, we see man set to govern over man as well as over the impersonal creation. All of this time, secular government is in the hands of man, while spiritual government is handled by God Himself. We have seen the beginning of war. But we can say that we have only one recorded war in the first 2500 years of man's history. Not bad right?

In the next message, Lord willing, we will look at how things progressed or maybe we should say regressed during the rest of the OT. Do not tune out during this foundational time period. It is not rightly possible to understand the NT fully without some understanding of the OT history on this matter.