

## Scriptural Criteria for a Christian Nation

Psalm 2:10-12; Acts 4:24-27

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What is a Christian nation? Is it a nation where Christianity is merely tolerated among a host of many other religions? Or is it a nation where biblical and confessional Christianity is established by law as the only true religion within its jurisdiction? These and many more questions like these will occupy our focus for a number of sermons in the future as we delve into a practical series of sermons wherein we shall consider the scriptural teaching and covenantal application of the Solemn League and Covenant (and its perpetual and descending obligation) to the civil realm of society. Having considered the biblical and historical nature and obligation of national covenanting (and of the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 in particular) in a previous sermon series, I will encourage you to review those sermons for the biblical and historical warrant for applying the Solemn League and Covenant to the kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland (and to all his dominions as well). This series is not intended to re-lay that same foundation, but is rather intended to build upon it by way of practical application of those same moral principles found in Scripture and in the Solemn League and Covenant to the civil governments of nations (and particularly to those nations bound by the Solemn League and Covenant).

But before proceeding to our main points and text, let me respond to a possible objection that may be raised in the minds of some who hear this sermon.

**Objection:** Why spend time in a sermon (let alone a series of sermons) on matters related to the civil government? Christ's kingdom is not of this world. We should rather spend our time addressing only the salvation of souls and matters related to the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

**Answer:** Now while I agree that the primary subject of preaching is that of the salvation of sinners through Jesus Christ, I do not agree that Christ's salvation is limited to the soul of man (or mere spiritual matters). The salvation of Christ, dear ones, extends as far as the curse of God extends upon mankind due to sin. Did the curse of God extend only to the soul? Absolutely not! The curse of God extended to the body of man, to the toil of man, to the birth of man, and to the social relationships of man in civil society. Who would dare look at the wickedness and tyranny of laws and leaders in nations today, and yet declare that sin and God's curse has not extended to the civil realm of society? More importantly, consider the record of biblical revelation in which God clearly reveals how sin polluted the civil realm (beginning in the book of Genesis and forward) as well as the individual, familial, and ecclesiastical realms of mankind (for example, in the book of Genesis from the very beginning we see the curse upon the civil society that built the tower of Babel, Genesis 11:1-9; the tyranny of the kings in enslaving Lot and his family, Genesis 14:12; the civil toleration of gross sodomy in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 19:1-11). Thus, if the redemption of Christ is to be complete and to reach as far as does the curse, civil rulers and civil governments must come to Christ (as we see shall be the case as predicted in Psalm 72:8-11, and note that this prophecy is fulfilled in history "throughout all generations" verse 5; Zechariah 2:11; Revelation 11:15).

Moreover, it is an error to interpret the words of Christ ("my kingdom is not of this world", literally "my kingdom is not out of this world") spoken to the Roman governor, Pilate (in John 18:36) to mean that Christ's dominion as Mediator does not extend over civil governments. It is indeed true that Christ's kingdom does not

ORIGINATE from “out of” this world (for it is often called the “kingdom of heaven” as it originates with Christ who reigns over all from His mediatorial throne at God’s right hand in heaven). But though Christ’s kingdom does not ORIGINATE from “out of” this world, it does come TO this world and brings life, righteousness, and peace through the power of the God’s Spirit and through the Gospel of Jesus Christ (as we see this kingdom announced by John the Baptist and by Christ Himself, Matthew 3:2; Matthew 12:28; Mark 1:15). Thus, the kingdom of Christ brings Christ’s gracious and righteous rule to bear in all of creation where sin has spread its deadly rebellion and power to destroy. There where tyranny and corruption pollute is where Christ spreads his life-giving power of renewal through His life, death, and resurrection. And as was said earlier, one of those realms where sin has so pervasively manifested its ugly head is in the realm of civil government. Therefore, the redeeming power of Christ and His heavenly kingdom must and does bring peace not only to individuals and to families, but also brings peace to nations and their civil leaders (as official representatives of the nations).

Another way of saying the same thing is that Christ, as God’s appointed Mediator, exercises a universal dominion by way of His royal rule over all things to the glory of God and to the benefit and profit of His church (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:19-23). This universal dominion includes, therefore, all kings and kingdoms, all rulers and nations without exception, even those as we shall see who rebel against and resist Christ (Psalm 22:27,28; Jeremiah 10:7; Revelation 19:15,16). Christ’s universal dominion over all nations (not only Israel) is demonstrated throughout Scripture in the judgment He brings upon nations that persist in rebelling against Him and His Moral Law (upon Egypt, Isaiah 19:1,4; upon Moab, Jeremiah 48:1,7; upon Babylon, Jeremiah 50:1,2; upon Tyre, Amos 1:9). Thus, Christ’s kingdom and His rule as God’s appointed Mediator, dear ones, is not limited in its dominion to individuals, or to families, or to the church, but rather extends its universal rule to whatever sin has corrupted (which certainly includes civil magistrates, civil governments, and nations). Therefore, when I preach on the application of Christ’s kingdom to the realm of civil government (as I shall do in this series), I have not moved from addressing Christ’s redemption, I have simply moved to addressing the effects of Christ’s redemption and His kingdom from the individual to the nation.

In the sermon this Lord’s Day, I will focus our attention on two questions: (1) What Is a Christian Nation? (2) What Is Not a Christian Nation?

## **I. What Is a Christian Nation (Psalm 2:10-12)?**

A. Let’s consider our text and note some characteristics of a Christian nation. And let me say that though one may find certain aspects of this psalm applied historically to David or Solomon, clearly the Psalm is ultimately fulfilled in the mediatorial rule of Jesus Christ (as quoted by the apostles in reference to Christ in Acts 4:24-27).

1. In verses 1-3 of Psalm 2, we find a description of the hostility of the Gentile nations and their rulers who proudly and defiantly oppose the reign of Jehovah’s anointed Prince saying, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” Note carefully that these rulers of the nations do not necessarily dispute the fact that Christ, the Messiah, rules as God’s appointed Mediator and King. Nor do they necessarily dispute that they are bound by the bands and cords of His Moral Law. These Gentile magistrates rather hate the fact that Christ rules as King over them and their nations and that His Moral Law binds them to obedience to Him. Also note that this rule of Christ over the Gentile rulers and nations is not merely His essential rule as the Second Person of the Trinity, but rather focuses on His mediatorial rule which is given to Him by God as God’s “anointed” (verse 2), i.e. as God’s Christ (from the Greek) or as God’s Messiah (from the

Hebrew). Thus, in this first section of Psalm 2, we see that Christ's dominion as Mediator (not merely as Creator) extends not only over Israel, but also over all Gentile nations and their rulers, and that Christ holds that appointed position whether or not the Gentile nations and rulers submit to Him out of faith, love, and holy fear. The universal dominion of Christ as Mediator depends not upon the response of nations or kings, but depends only upon the decree of God who has seated Christ, as Mediator, at His right hand (Psalm 110:1).

2. In verses 4-6 of Psalm 2, our eyes are turned from the hostility and hatred of the nations and their rulers against God and His anointed Prince to the response of the Lord Almighty from His heavenly throne where the Lord laughs at these lowly, pitiful nations and their vain rulers who futilely act as though they can unseat Christ from the throne or can tear themselves away from the unbreakable bonds of His Moral Law. In spite of all the futile attempts of earthly magistrates to rule the kingdoms of this world as rebels against the Messianic King of kings and Lord of lords, Jehovah sovereignly declares, "YET [i.e. in spite of the rebellion and resistance of Gentile rulers and nations against Christ—GLP] have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (the earthly Zion in Jerusalem stands here for that heavenly Zion from where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns as we see in Acts 2:29-36). It's as if the Lord said, "You fools, do what you will to hate and despise my anointed King, YET I have seated Christ upon the throne as my mediatorial King, and you can do nothing to unseat Him." Thus, in this second section, we note that the nations of this world and their rulers fight a futile battle against Christ and His kingdom.

3. In verses 7-9 of Psalm 2, the anointed King, Jesus Christ, speaks for Himself, and in His own words He reiterates and confirms what God the Father has just stated in the previous verses. God's eternal decree in the Covenant of Redemption was that the Son should become the Messianic heir of all nations upon the earth. The Gentile nations and their rulers are therefore Christ's possession over whom He exercises His universal dominion to the good and benefit of His church. Thus, in this third section, we note that Christ's universal dominion as Mediator is firmly and unalterably anchored in the eternal decree of God as found in the Covenant of Redemption.

4. Now we come to our text in verses 10-12 of Psalm 2, where the kings and judges of the earth are exhorted to be wise and not foolish by serving the LORD and kissing the Son. Let me say that kings and judges of the earth are here spoken to in their official capacity as rulers of nations (and not simply in their personal capacity as private individuals) as we see from what is said in Acts 4:24-27 (where Herod and Pilate are addressed in their official capacities as rulers of nations and kingdoms). The Lord is not saying in these verses, "Submit to Christ, the Son of God, in your personal, private life, but rule however you wish in your public, official life." What a mockery and complete distortion of those obligations the Lord lays here upon the nations and their rulers. Both to "serve" and to "kiss" communicate similar ideas: namely, humbly submit to the gracious and righteous rule, to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to Moral Law of God through His only Mediator, Jesus Christ (note in 1 Samuel 10:1 that Samuel kissed Saul as a sign of humble submission to Saul's rule as king). In effect, this portion of Psalm 2 says, "If you civil rulers refuse to humbly submit to Jehovah and His Mediator, you will perish in your sin and rebellion. Submit or perish. Life and death is placed before you: choose life. However, know that if you will not officially in your rule and in your government and in your constitutions submit to Jesus Christ as God's mediatorial King, you will be crushed." And so, dear ones, it has ever been throughout history. Christ may be patient with nations for shorter or longer periods of time, but Christ, the Mediator, will sooner or later show forth His judgment to obstinate rebels as a demonstration of His mediatorial dominion over all things.

5. In summary, I would submit that Psalm 2 provides us with the following 5 characteristics of a Christian nation.

a. First, for a nation to own God is to own the Triune God (as revealed in the Old and New Testaments) as alone and distinctly "served" as the ultimate end of a Christian nation and is

specifically stated to be so in the constitution of a Christian nation (Psalm 2:11).

b. Second, for a nation to own Christ is to own Christ as the only Mediator between God and man for salvation, and it is distinctly to “kiss” Him and to submit to Him as having universal and national dominion over the country, and it is specifically stated as such in the constitution and laws of a Christian nation (Psalm 2:12).

c. Third, for a nation to own Christ as God’s only Mediator is necessarily to own the Moral Law given by Him (as summarized in the Ten Commandments and found throughout Holy Scripture). To own God’s Moral Law as a nation is to own it as that universal, binding rule according to which all laws of the nation must conform (and not just Commandments 5-10, but also Commandments 1-4—i.e. both Tables of God’s Law). Lawful civil rights are not founded upon people’s desires, people’s opinions, people’s consciences, the majority of people, the reason of man, or what is alleged to be in the best interests of the nation, but rather lawful civil rights are founded upon the Moral Law of God (in nature and Scripture). For God has instituted civil government for His own glory (Romans 13:1) and civil magistrates as His ministers (Romans 13:4). A Christian nation then will explicitly state in its constitution that God’s Moral Law is the supreme Law of the land (Deuteronomy 4:5-8; Matthew 5:17-19).

d. Fourth, for a nation to own Christ as God’s only Mediator is to own the one true Christian religion ordained by Christ, the Mediator, and revealed in the Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture (and as professed by faithful, biblical Reformed nations in their national Confessions of Faith) as that religion alone that must be officially established, supported, and protected by law. For a nation that merely tolerates Christ, merely tolerates the Scripture, and merely tolerates biblical Christianity along with every other religious sect and expression of religion or lack thereof (from atheism to Satanism) has simply enshrined Christ and Christianity as one religion among many, one religion among equals, one religion in the pantheon of religions of that nation. There is no neutrality in religion (a nation cannot serve two gods or thousands of gods and yet claim that it is a Christian nation). The official religion of such a nation is not Christianity, but is rather polytheism (and is no different from the polytheism of Greece or of Rome). According to the First Commandment, the God of the Bible will not tolerate any rival gods or religions (“Thou shalt have no other gods before me” Exodus 20:3). And that doesn’t mean that God tolerates other gods as long as they’re not placed ahead of Him in importance but simply placed beside Him. The commandment means that God does not tolerate any other god before Him i.e. in His presence at all (whether superior, equal, or inferior to Himself). For Jehovah’s Divine presence fills all the universe and even transcends the universe He has created (so that any nation within God’s universe that tolerates other gods, falls under God’s righteous judgment). God did not tolerate other gods in Israel, nor did He tolerate other gods in the Gentile nations (as we see from the judgments He brought upon those nations due to their specified idolatry, Isaiah 19:1ff). There is an important principle here that we must understand: that which a nation officially tolerates by law, it officially promotes, establishes, and protects by law. In other words, a nation that officially tolerates all religions by law (including Christianity) is a nation that has officially declared by law its religion to be polytheism (rather than Christianity).

e. Fifth, for a nation to own Christ as God’s only Mediator is to own the view that only those who give sufficient testimony and swear before the Triune God of the Bible that they adhere to the previous characteristics of a Christian nation (just mentioned) may serve as civil magistrates within a Christian nation. If any person (regardless of the god he worships, or the religion he professes, or even the denial of all religion) is qualified by the constitution and laws of the land to serve as a civil magistrate, then clearly you cannot have a Christian nation nor view Christ as God’s only Mediator between God and man as taught in Psalm 2 (see the qualifications for civil magistrates in Exodus 18:21; 2 Samuel 23:2,3; Romans 13:4). For in such a nation where this is the case, the offices of state will be occupied by men from various religions who

will govern according to the precepts that their religion teaches them (contrary to the moral precepts found in Holy Scripture). I submit, a nation can only be a Christian nation in so far as the official representatives of that nation profess and swear the Triune God of the Bible, Christ as God's only Mediator, the Moral Law of God as summarized in the Ten Commandments as the supreme law of the land, and the one true Christian religion of the Bible (as summarized in faithful Confessions of Faith like the *Westminster Confession of Faith*). These, I submit, are 5 characteristics of a Christian nation. Nations that do not own all these truths and declare them in their constitutions, covenants, and laws are not Christian nations.

## II. What Is Not a Christian Nation?

A. In this section, I would like to briefly submit for your consideration an example of a nation that is considered by many Christians to be a Christian nation, and yet a nation that does not manifest any of the distinctive characteristics of a Christian nation just summarized and drawn out from Psalm 2. That nation is the United States of America. Before continuing, let no one conclude from what I am about to say that I do not care for, or pray for this country, the land of my nativity (and that of my children and grandchildren). It is true that I do not love my country for her many sins and her covenant-breaking committed against Jehovah and His Christ. But it is because I love my country and long to see the United States blessed, to come to Christ, and to "kiss the Son" that I bring these important matters to light, so that as Christians we might know and understand the cancer of religious pluralism (and official state-sanctioned polytheism) that has infected this nation from its very beginning, and rather turn in faith, love, and repentance to Christ who alone can bring us to own the sacred and faithful Solemn League and Covenant of our British forefathers. Let's briefly consider the Constitution of the United States in regard to these 5 previously stated characteristics of a Christian nation. If a nation officially owns the God, the Christ, the Law, and the Christian religion of the Bible, one would especially expect to find it revealed in its national constitution, but what do we find in the Constitution of the United States?

1. There is no mention in the Constitution of the United States of the Triune God of Scripture, no mention of Jesus Christ (as God's appointed Mediator), no mention of the Moral Law of God as found in the Bible, no mention of the Christian religion as revealed in Scripture, and no mention of civil magistrates owning and swearing these tenants in order to hold office.

2. To the contrary, the only source of power acknowledged in the Constitution is: "WE THE PEOPLE of the United States" (note that WE THE PEOPLE was written in especially large letters in the original document for emphasis). I ask, Is that declaration of the source of all national authority and power the declaration of a Christian nation?

3. In Article VI of the United States Constitution we read: "This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof: and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be **the supreme Law of the land**: and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby" (emphases added in bold). I ask, Is that declaration of the supreme Law of the land the declaration of a Christian nation?

4. Also in Article VI of the United States Constitution we read: "The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support this Constitution; **but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States**" (emphases added in bold). In other words, the Constitution does not disqualify from public office even those who might be religiously enemies of Jesus Christ as God's only appointed Mediator (even a professed Satanist or an avowed atheist is not disqualified if he was able to get enough votes

to win an election). Now I ask, Is that declaration of no religious tests in order to hold office a declaration of a Christian nation?

5. In Article I in the Amendments to the Constitution of the United States (or what are popularly known as the Bill of Rights) we read concerning the establishment of religion: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, **or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . .**” (emphases added in bold). Is the Christian religion that was established by Jesus Christ (God’s only appointed Mediator) as revealed in the Bible established as the official religion of this nation? Or rather, is any religion (or lack thereof) officially tolerated and thereby officially promoted and preserved as equal to Christianity? I ask, Is that declaration of official toleration of polytheism the declaration of a Christian nation?

6. Now it is not as though those founding fathers who drafted and signed the Constitution simply forgot in their haste to include these 5 characteristics of a Christian nation in the United States Constitution. No these matters were discussed in Committee and in the State legislatures and were completely discounted as having no place in the Constitution of the United States. In other words, it was a deliberate and unified consensus on the part of the founding fathers to avoid the 5 previously stated characteristics of a Christian nation. And because this nation has not officially “kissed the Son” or officially “served” Jehovah and His Christ, as the only Mediator between God and man and having dominion over all nations and civil magistrates (and particularly this nation), but has rather by its Constitution and laws taken counsel together to break the moral, biblical, covenantal bands asunder, and to cast away the moral, biblical, covenantal cords, Psalm 2 tells us clearly what the response of Christ will be to such a nation and its leaders: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Psalm 2:9). The only remedy to our national sins that have brought and will continue to bring God’s righteous judgment upon this nation (and the nations of this world) is to kiss the Son in faith, love, repentance, and new obedience.

B. We must stop here for now, but will pick up this subject in the following sermon. In closing, let me leave with you the Conclusion from a national covenant that is explicitly Christian (and a national covenant that I submit still binds us to God by sacred obligations—The Solemn League and Covenant 1643):

And, because these kingdoms are guilty of many sins and provocations against GOD, and his Son JESUS CHRIST, as is too manifest by our present distresses and dangers, the fruits thereof; we profess and declare, before GOD and the world, our unfeigned desire to be humbled for our own sins, and for the sins of these kingdoms: especially, that we have not, as we ought, valued the inestimable benefit of the gospel; that we have not labored for the purity and power thereof; and that we have not endeavored to receive CHRIST in our hearts, nor to walk worthy of him in our lives; which are the causes of other sins and transgression so much abounding amongst us: and our true and unfeigned purpose, desire, and endeavor, for ourselves, and all others under our power and charge, both in public and in private, in all duties we owe to GOD and man, to amend our lives, and each one to go before another in the example of a real reformation; that the LORD may turn away his wrath and heavy indignation, and establish these churches and kingdoms in truth and peace. And this Covenant we make in the presence of ALMIGHTY GOD, the Searcher of all hearts, with a true intention to perform the same, as we shall answer at that great day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed; most humbly beseeching the LORD to strengthen us by his HOLY SPIRIT for this end, and to bless our desires and proceedings with such success, as may be deliverance and safety to his people, and encouragement to other Christian churches, groaning under, or in danger of, the yoke of

antichristian tyranny, to join in the same or like association and covenant, to the glory of GOD, the enlargement of the kingdom of JESUS CHRIST, and the peace and tranquility of Christian kingdoms and commonwealths.

Now, dear ones, that is the national expression and declaration of a Christian nation. When the Lord Jesus Christ brings in the fullness of the Gentile nations to Himself, this will express the heart and faith of all nations in the world (even the nation of Israel). So let it be Lord Jesus. Amen.

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