

## **The Christian and Civil Government (14<sup>th</sup>)**

(The lesson today involves the remaining verses listed by the Protestant confessions to support the congregation striving to change governmental rules and regulations and to promote a social climate under the tenets of the Bible.)

Today we return to our reviews of the confessions with a more particular view to the Protestant confession of the Cumberland Presbyterians as published August, 2001. Allow me to quote the last three articles of this confession.

The covenant community, governed by the Lord Christ, opposes, resists, and seeks to change all circumstances of oppression—political, economic, cultural, racial—by which persons are denied the essential dignity God intends for them in the work of creation. (Dt. 15:7-11; Ps. 41:1-3, 83:3-4; Pr. 21:13, 29:4, 14.)

The covenant community affirms the lordship of Christ who sought out the poor, the oppressed, the sick, and the helpless. In her corporate life and through her individual members, the church is an advocate for all victims of violence and all those whom the law or society treats as less than persons for whom Christ died. Such advocacy involves not only opposition to all unjust laws and forms of injustice but even more support for those attitudes and actions which embody the way of Christ, which is to overcome evil with good. (Mt. 9:35-38, 14:14, 15:32-39; Ro. 12:19-21.)

God gives the message and ministry of reconciliation to the church. The church, corporately and through her individual members, seeks to promote reconciliation, love, and justice among all persons, classes, races, and nations. (Mt. 28:18-20; 2 Co. 5:18-20.)

While the appellation of “covenant community” in the first article quoted above may refer to believers in general, the designations of “corporate life” and “corporately” are supplied in the following two articles to clearly deduce that the individual congregations are under consideration. As noted in previous podcasts the idea of the meaning of the word “church” in Protestant teaching is that of all believers in general. In fact, I recently heard two different Protestant ministers refer to “the church in Galatia” in their teachings regarding this book. Paul did not write to “the church” in Galatia. Plainly the Scriptures declare “unto the churches” (or congregations) “of Galatia,” Galatians 1:2. To disregard this to promote some theological opinion or denominational doctrine is to twist or wrest the Scriptures, II Peter 3:16. While the Greek word ἐκκλησία is used a generic way, the reality of it is expressed as a congregation or assembly. It is never invisible, denominational, provincial, or national. It is to be composed of regenerated and baptized believers and they are to live as such in the world. However, what an individual may do in his life does not infer that a congregation is to do. Obviously, as Christians we are to “do good unto all *men*” as we have opportunity and “especially unto them who are of the household of faith,” Galatians 6:10. And a Christian woman and mother is to aid and support her husband in teaching their children the Holy Scriptures but she is not to occupy a teaching position in the house of God, I Timothy 2:11-12; I Corinthians 14:34-35. This is one simple and clear example of where a believer is to do individually but not within the confines and authority of the assembly of the saints. Equally, while a Christian may be involved in public or in government regarding various social activities regarding civil affairs, no where do we find commands in the Scriptures for the congregation of the Lord—particularly the New Testament assembly—to be involved in governmental and public social activities regarding these civil affairs.

You will notice that the scriptural references supplied for the first article that we read from the confession are all from the Old Testament and generally were given to Israel under their theonomic government. The first reference is Deuteronomy 15:7-11. If we were to try to apply the principle taught in this passage to the congregation of the Lord we would have to limit the poor to those within the individual assembly. This passage did not expand beyond the umbrella of the nation of Israel. Yes, Israel was to show kindness to strangers, (cf. Exodus 22:21; 23:9), but this did not mean that Israel was to alleviate all the poor of the nations round about nor were they to go into those countries and impose their laws on them governmentally. Likewise, Israel was forbidden to charge usury to a fellow Israelite, but he could do so with strangers outside the camp, Deuteronomy 23:19-20. Also, while some animals Israel could not eat, they could sell them unto the stranger for him to eat, Deuteronomy 14:21. Therefore, the principle regarding Deuteronomy 15:7-11 refers to a “brother in Israel” and not to the population in general. In like manner, obviously a congregation ought to show love to their brother or fellow member, but it is not obligated to feed the poor of the world. In fact, the congregation is obligated to not feed some, even professing believers. The Thessalonians were instructed by the Lord that “if any would not work, neither should he eat,” II Thessalonians 3:10. Such principles may equally apply to the other Old Testament references supplied for the first article given above.

Now let us consider the New Testament passages supplied for the last two articles. The first is Matthew 9:35-38. In reality, the only verse here that is associated with the topic at hand is verse thirty-five: “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.” Without question, this verse is only summarizing the ministry of Christ and is not a commandment to the house of God. On the other hand, it is clear that anytime someone can alleviate sickness and disease he should do his best to do so if at all possible. Yet, this verse is not teaching this as a “ministry” of the congregation of God. The same may be applied for Matthew 14:14, the second passage listed.

The next passage listed is Matthew 15:32-39. This passage is telling about when Christ Jesus fed the “four thousand men, beside women and children.” It should be obvious to any Bible reader that this passage (or when Christ fed the five thousand) is not an injunction to the house of God to feed the poor. This reminds me of a stunt that a minister did several years ago to fill his congregation with children. He had ordered five thousand fish sandwiches from McDonald’s restaurant to give out to children that would come to his services via his “bus ministry.” In doing this, he bragged that he had fed the five thousands as Jesus did. Such exploits is a disgrace to the true ministry of Christianity whether by an individual or a professed congregation of God. It is evident that Christians should go to the aid and minister to their friends and neighbors that the Lord providentially brings in their lives. Is this not the plain teaching of the Good Samaritan? See Luke 10:29-37. Likewise, it is a blessing when a congregation that can mitigate the suffering of individuals. However, it is an entirely a different thing to teach that it is the duty of the assembly of Christ to oppose “all unjust laws and forms of injustice” in the arenas of “political, economic, cultural,” or “racial” settings. Also, such passages do not teach that the house of God is to “seek to promote reconciliation, love, and justice among all persons, classes, races, and nations.” Yes, the congregation is to judge its members, but it is not to pass judgment on those without, I Corinthians 5:9-12; I Peter 4:17. The same principles apply to Romans 12:19-21.

The last two passages supplied are Matthew 28:18-20 and II Corinthians 5:18-20. They are as follows: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.” And, “And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God

did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Without question, the house of God is to proclaim the gospel to all the world, but it is not a “social gospel” for the change of society. It is the gospel of salvation through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people who are obedient to the gospel live in poverty and dire circumstances. The gospel does not promise a better social status or a higher economic standard of living. Christ came to save His people from their sins, not to change their social environment. Obviously, when one is delivered from his sins often his quality of life is improved, but sometimes his social status is worse especially if he is being persecuted for his faith. Remember the words of Jesus, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes *shall be* they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me,” Matthew 10:34-38.

More needs to be said regarding these issues, but our time is exhausted for today. The Lord willing, we will follow up with this in our next podcast.