

The Christian and Civil Government (41st)

(The study today provides some general suggestions regarding individual responsibility toward civil government. Obviously, no society or government will rise any higher than the people and the values and goals established by them.)

We have presented several podcasts showing that the idea of civil government being a “nursing father” to the house of God or that civil government is to be a guardian to the congregation of God is a pagan/Catholic/Reformed/Protestant concept and not the historic position of the Baptists. As Charles F. James said, “The world—even the Christian world—was slow to understand and to lay hold of the true principle of soul liberty—a principle which had always been fundamental with the Baptists, and which, in the providence of God, they were destined to teach to their fellows.” *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia*, page 141. It is sad (to say the least) that many professing Baptists today know nothing of this truth! It is hopeful that the past studies have given some enlightenment concerning this matter. Too many people are more interested in the pursuit of seeking intellectualism of the so-called classics or the vain philosophies of man than learning historical truth as given to us by the providential hand of Almighty God.

Though it was previously mentioned in passing, I would like to discuss somewhat the role that a Christian may play in civil government. Obviously, there is a difference in the role of an individual Christian and that of a congregation or denomination or a religious institution in establishing government over mankind.

One thing that should be known is that one of, if not the most powerful person in civil government is the county sheriff. Recently, while the federal and state governments in some places issued orders for congregations not to assemble due to certain diseases, many of the sheriffs made it clear that they would not enforce such orders. Some years back many sheriffs across the nation agreed that they would not support federal gun laws that violated the Second Amendment of the Constitution. Since the sheriff is one who is voted into office, the people of population of the county can control who does or does not occupy the office of county sheriff. Therefore, if you want to protect the right of freedom of religion, one of the most effective way to assure that you have the proper person in the office of the county sheriff. One important caveat is that the sheriff may be a tyrant and abuse the power given to him. We live in a sinful world and fallen man will do wickedly unless checked by either the power of man or by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is important that the person occupying the office of sheriff is a man of honest integrity and under the microscope of the people over whom he serves. However, the reason that I mention the importance of the role of the county sheriff is if someone who desires to be active in the political system and wants to know where to start to provide freedom of conscience and peace in the land is that he can be active in local politics and particularly with the office of the county sheriff. Obviously, this might equally include the office of the chief of police. While congress on the state or federal level may make laws, an unenforced law is ineffective. And, it is no wonder why the federal government is working to supply the local officials with training, equipment, and funds with strings attached so that they might control how sheriffs and chief of polices perform their jobs.

With this being said, let us direct our attention more specifically with the difference in the role of the congregation and the individual regarding civil government. First, when studying the Scriptures, one is hard pressed to find anything that resembles an organized denomination as is generally found in organized religion today. Therefore, when such an organization places itself in the political arena supporting or campaigning against any political figure or political action it is outside the realm of scriptural support. Equally, such an organization does not have the biblical authority to impose its

political ideologies on its membership, especially when such a member does not agree with the organized structure ruling over it. Secondly, this principle must equally apply to a congregation or assembly of the Lord. In other words, it is a violation of the conscience of each member when the leadership of a congregation strives to force some or all of the members to follow them in their political or civil opinions.

Jesus Christ plainly stated in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His congregation. It is obvious that He did this before the Day of Pentecost because the three thousands that were converted that day were *added* to the one hundred and twenty that were previously meeting together in a congregational capacity. See Acts 1:15; 2:41. Prior to Christ going back to glory He gave the commission to His assembly to “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 always, even unto the end of the world,” Matthew 28:19-20. (Regardless of whether one believes that this commission was given to the congregation or only to the apostles, the end results is the same because we are instructed in Ephesians chapter two that the assembly is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone,” Ephesians 2:20.) The teaching to be done in the great commission is only “all things whatsoever I” (that is, Christ) “have commanded you.” Not one time is it found in the New Testament where the house of the Lord is commanded to change society, establish civil government, or become involved in the organizations and political arenas of the world. Jesus plainly stated that His kingdom is not of this world, John 19:36.

While the house of the Lord is not to become involved in the civil affairs of the world, individual members as citizens may do so. In fact, if we expect civil government to be established on righteous principles and govern righteously we must have just men in authority. The Holy Scriptures declare, “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God,” II Samuel 23:3. Even pagans and unbelievers in general believe just and honest rulers are preferred over tyrants and unjust men. Obviously, when a Christian rules he will seek to be just in all his actions. For example, a judge who is a Christian cannot endorse or enforce an unjust law. He cannot knowingly support any law that is contrary to the Word of God. Too often senators or representatives will support an unrighteous ruling in order to try to get support later for a good law. Several years ago I visited our local state representative seeking his support for home schooling. There was a bill that I desired that he not support or vote for its passing. He said that he really was only supporting it to get other politicians to support a ruling for home school. I sought to persuade him to vote justly rather than for political expediency. I made it known to him that I wanted an honest representative that would only stand for just and right laws. While I was quite forthright in my appeal to him, I sought to not be offensive or self righteous. Each time I met him afterwards over the years we have always enjoyed each other’s company, and he is still my state representative and is not aligned with a political system that I can support. I say this to say that we need to do all we can and to do it with a Christian spirit.

I desire to say at this point that as a rule I believe it is best that ministers not be continually devoted to such work. When the congregation at Jerusalem ordained deacons, it was so that ministers would give themselves “continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word,” Acts 6:4. Even though men like Isaac Backus, John Leland, and others in the early days of this country devoted time and were used of the Lord to secure religious freedom, most of their time was spent in preaching the gospel. The Lord may providentially use a minister on various occasions, but it is not their calling to run for political office and become involved the political system. On the other hand, we should pray that the Lord would raise up godly men who have the desire, wisdom, and strength to labor in the political arena justly. May the Lord deliver us from a system of politics where one only has the option of voting for the lesser of two evils. Where this is the case we only have evil men ruling over us. Also, we need to endeavor to hold such men accountable because when this is done even wicked men

may be forced to vote for that which is right to keep their political station. It is obvious that we should always pray for those in authority over us, I Timothy 2:1-4. As Christians, we are to pray for our leaders: pray that God give them wisdom to rule over us justly; pray that God would either convert or restrain wicked rulers; pray that wicked rulers be revealed and removed from ruling over us. God can remove a Haman today as He did in the days of Esther. However, if we are going to sit back and do nothing and the nation continue to decline into gross immorality, God has declared that the nation that forgets Him will be turned into hell, Psalm 9:17.

In closing I want to say that the salvation of a nation and the security of the people do not rely on a perfect set of laws and constitutions, nor does it rely on honest and just leadership. It relies on the blessing of the Lord God. Obviously, the Lord will only bless a people that are just and righteous in their daily living.

Much more can be said regarding this subject; however, I do not want to weary the audience by belaboring this matter. Our time is up for today. Farewell.