

Series at Cedarcroft Bible Chapel  
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## CHRISTIANS & THE STATE

### Introduction

Time of increasing tensions between even Xns and government, whether federal, state or local govt.

Various areas of tension:

- public school vs Xn school for declining no. of students
- state oversight of Xn schools
- tax exemption for Xn organizations
- prayer & Bible reading in public schools
- religious interest groups using public school property
- growing pluralism in US, w/ pressure for women's rights, gay rights, etc.

Two major areas of concern for Xns:

- (1) What is right thing to do in each case?
- (2) Who has authority and how much?

Want to concentrate on 2nd area:

- What does Bible say about relationship of believers – individually and collectively – to the state?

### The Old Testament Background

#### Creation (Gen 1 & 2)

God has created both earth & mankind, so He owns them to use as He sees fit (cp Rom 9:16-24, esp 20-21).

Man does not absolutely own himself or anything else, but holds self and property as a *trust* from God.

Biblical view contrasts sharply with

- (1) Statism - state has absolute authority
- (2) Individualism - individual has abs authority

#### God's Worldwide Covenants

Adamic Covenant (Gen 1:28; 2:15-25)

Mankind is given authority over earth, its plants & animals.

Family authority also established.

The Fall apparently did not nullify this disposition, though it is made more difficult by curses:

- On childbirth, family, agriculture (3:16-19)
- On relations with animals (9:2)

Here we have origin of human authority, property and (with fall) of crime;  
nothing explicit on govt. beyond family.

#### Noachian Covenant (Gen 9:1-17)

Apparently extends man's authority over man (vv 5-6) when cp with cases of  
Cain, Lamech earlier.

Looks like some sort of govt with power of life & death is instituted to punish sin.

#### God's Limitations on Man via These Worldwide Arrangements

##### Seen in God's Judgments:

Flood (Gen 6-8) - for general wickedness

Babel (Gen 11) - for disobedience, pride

Sodom & Gomorrah (Gen 18-19) - for great wickedness, sodomy; misuse  
of wealth (Ezk 16:49-50); note evid of protective function of  
righteous.

##### Denounced by God's Prophets:

Amos against various nations:

Damascus (1:3) - threshing Gilead

Philistia, Tyre (1:6,9) - deportation

Edom (1:11) - warfare, cruelty, vengeance

Ammon (1:13) - aggression, atrocities

Moab (2:1) - murder, desecration of corpse?

Jonah & Nahum against Nineveh:

Jonah (1:2) - wickedness

Nahum (1:2) - enmity toward God

(1:15) - afflicting Judah

(3:19) - afflicting others

Daniel against Babylonian kings:

Nebuchadnezzar (ch 4) - pride

Belshazzar (ch 5) - pride, mocking God

#### **God's Covenants with Israel**

Above covenants made with all people, may still be in force even where Gospel has not  
penetrated.

Covenants below (incl NT) apply to restricted groups at enactment (Israel, church), but  
prob to be broadened in Millennium.

#### Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12,13,15,17,22)

No explicit form of govt established.

Promises of blessing developed.

## Mosaic Covenant (Exodus - Deuteronomy)

Offices of prophet, priest & king established, with latter two (at least) kept separate.

- (1) Prophet (Deut 18:15-22) - chosen by God individually; put to death if false (presumably by govt); act as "advisors" for govt.
- (2) Priest (Ex 28-29) - chosen by God as dynasty, clearly specified by law (enforced by whom?); no govt functions.
- (3) King (Deut 17:14-20) - chosen by God, to be set up by people later (becomes dynasty under Davidic covenant); restrictions: Israelite, few horses (military), wives (alliances, idolatry, promiscuity), moderate wealth; period of judges suggest some ambivalence re/ form of govt?

## Interaction of Individual & Offices

- (1) Individ. & King:
  - Ehud & Eglon (Judg 3:12-30, esp 21)
  - David & Saul (1 Sam 18 - 2 Sam 2, esp 24:10-14)
  - contrast Hazael (2 Kings 8:8-15)
- (2) King & Prophet:
  - obeying: Rehoboam & Shemaiah (1 Kings 12:21-24)
  - resisting: Jeroboam (13:1-10, esp 4,6)
  - testing: Ahab & Michaiah (22:26-28)
  - killing: Joash & Zechariah (2 Chr 24:21-22)
- (3) King & Priest:
  - Uzziah & Azariah (2 Chr 26:16-24)
  - Athaliah & Jehoiada (2 Kings 11:1-16)

## Proverbs on Duties of King & Citizen

- (1) King
  - 16:10-15 - divine commission, concern w/ truth, punishment
  - 25:2 - investigation
  - 29:4,12,14 - dangers of bribery, falsehood
  - 31:2-9 - dangers of women & wine; defend defenseless
- (2) Citizen
  - 16:13-14; 20:2; 25:15 - be righteous, don't make trouble; persuade
  - 24:21-22 - fear God & the king
  - 25:6-7 - be humble

## The New Testament Teaching

### Basic Passages

Matthew 22:15-22: Pay Taxes to Caesar

Background History: Palestine conquered by Romans 63 BC; rule thru Herod the Great 37-4 BC, then a series of Rom governors after Archelaus deposed AD 6; at this time (Jesus' ministry) governor was Pilate (incidents of Rom stds.; taking temple money to build aqueduct; killing Galileans while sacrificing)

Jewish views covered a wide spectrum:  
Sadducees, Herodians - cooperation  
Pharisees - grudging obedience  
Zealots - revolt

Taxation: high, imposed, corruption

Coinage: images, inscriptions

Dilemma posed by Jesus' opponents to put him on spot:

- (1) Allow payment: collaboration w/ enemy, condoning emperor's claims; discredited w/ crowd
- (2) Forbid payment: treason; discredited w/ govt

Jesus' answer:

gets coin from opponents, who (having one) have left selves open (and demonstrated hypocrisy)  
Jesus' tells them to give it back to owner

Teaching on govt:

two spheres clearly indicated, but relationship not; separate? God's sphere includes govt's?  
note terminology: not "temple & Caesar", but "God and Caesar"  
clearly Jesus teaches responsibility to both, but not an equality of authority; Jesus hardly pictures God as being excluded from Caesar's sphere.

Romans 13:1-7: Obey Your Rulers

- (1) God is source not only of authority in general, but of every particular authority as well.
- (2) Therefore we disobey God in resisting authorities.
- (3-4) Govt authority is intended to limit evil (and succeeds); it serves God by rewarding righteous & punishing wicked.
- (5) therefore we submit both to obey God & avoid govt punishment.
- (6-7) we must pay taxes, even tribute money to govt, respect its officers, submit to them.

1 Peter 2:11-17: Live as Servants of God

(11-12) context: we are "strangers" here on earth, so we must resist living like

- "natives"; we are to have a "beautiful lifestyle."  
(13-14) this lifestyle involves submission to govt authorities for God's sake as they are intended to reward righteous & punish wicked.  
(15) God's purpose in this for us as "strangers": "put to silence ignorance of foolish men."  
(16-17) summary: don't use Christian freedom as pretext for wickedness; honor all, love Xns, fear God, honor king.

### Some Specific Examples

John the Baptist & Herod Antipas (Mk 6:16-29, esp 17-18)

Apparently JB publicly rebukes political leader; no attempt to organize revolt.

Peter & John vs Temple Authorities (Acts 4:1-31, esp 18-20; 5:17-42, esp 28-29, 38-42)

Refuse to obey authorities when they forbid what God demands; but take consequences rather than organizing revolt; non-violent resistance.

Paul w/ Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10, esp 3-5, 6; cp 24:21)

Paul seems to be uneasy about his remarks to High Priest and his trick in splitting Sanhedrin; suggests responsibility to show respect even when not "deserved."

Paul w/ Felix (Acts 24:10-27, esp 11-12, 19-20, 24-25, 26)

Appeals to evidence, witnesses; uses opportunities to present Gospel; apparently refuses to pay a bribe.

Paul w/ Festus (Acts 25:6-12, esp 7-8, 9-11)

Appeals to evidence; admits right of tribunal to put him to death; uses available legal remedies.

Paul w/ Festus, Agrippa (Acts 26:1-32, esp 22-29)

Again uses opportunity to present Gospel.

### Conclusions

Limits to State (& Religious) Authority

No men given "blank check" from God;

Prophets are closest, but they are closely tested and have no political power;

The authority of religious leaders over political is persuasive & moral only.

Obedience to God Takes Precedence

Individual or group must obey its conscience, though this does not exempt them from political penalties.

Leaders have greater responsibility as they may punish.

No Automatic Right to Rebel

Disobedience of leaders does not cancel their authority over subordinates, though subordinates may have to disobey in particular points.

Case of Ehud suggests that rebellion may need explicit revelation; no evid for different NT ethic here.