

### Chapter 3 – Biblical Principles Concerning Government

What does the Bible say government should look like or how it should function?

Is there any value to patriotism?

#### 1. Civil governments are established by God to bring many benefits to human societies.

##### a. Old Testament teachings regarding civil government

###### (1) Governments are responsible to punish wrongdoers

And for your life-blood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:5-6).

###### (2) Anarchy is a highly destructive evil (Judges 18-25)

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6; cf. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

###### (3) Governments should execute justice and defend the weak

How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? . . . Give justice to the weak and fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Ps. 82:2-4).

(1) Rulers must judge with fairness and righteousness, and not "show partiality" but judge only according to the law and the facts in the case.

(2) They also must pay special attention to defending "the weak and the fatherless" and by implication others who have little power to defend themselves.

(3) They are to use their power to stop "the wicked" from harming others, particularly those who are "weak" and "needy."

###### (4) Governments should execute swift punishment as a deterrent to crime

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil (Eccl. 8:11).

###### (5) All nations and all governments are accountable to the one true God (see Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32; Amos 1-2; Obadiah -- written to Edom; Jonah -- sent to Nineveh; Nahum -- written to Nineveh; Hab. 2; Zeph. 2).

###### (6) God is sovereign over all human governmental rulers (Ex. 9:16; Isa. 44:28-45:1; Ps. 75:6-7; Dan 4:17, 25, 32)

###### (7) Old Testament wisdom literature gives other detailed insight about government

###### (8) What is different about the specific laws for the nation of Israel given in Exodus – Deuteronomy?

(i) The place of Israel

(ii) Israel as a theocracy

(iii) God's end-time judgment breaking into current history

(iv) Extensive application of the death penalty

(v) Conclusion

##### b. New Testament teachings regarding civil government

###### (1) Romans 13:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For *there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup> for *he is God's servant for your good.* But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For *he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.* <sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

(i) God has appointed the authorities who have governmental power (vv. 1, 2).

(ii) Civil rulers are a "terror to bad conduct" (v. 3).

(iii) They give "approval" or praise to those who do what is good (v. 3).

(iv) Governmental officials serve God. (vv. 4, 6).

(v) Government officials are doing "good" as they carry out their work (v. 4).

(vi) Government authorities execute God's wrath on wrongdoers & thereby carry out retribution (v. 4).

###### (2) 1 Peter 2:13-14

Be subject for the Lord's sake for every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to the governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

###### (3) What about "turning the other cheek" as in Matthew 5:39?

But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

##### c. Summary of Old and New Testament teachings on government

- (1) Human government was established by God to bring multiple benefits to human society, and this happened at the re-establishment of human society after the flood had destroyed the earth.
  - (2) God authorizes government to punish those who do evil, both as a deterrent to further wrongdoing and in order to carry out God's wrath against evil.
  - (3) Government should reward and encourage doing good.
  - (4) Government should establish justice and take special care to defend the weak and defenseless
  - (5) Civil government officials serve God in their tasks.
  - (6) These tasks that government carries out are "good" in God's sight.
  - (7) Without civil government, anarchy soon develops and the unrestrained evil in human hearts leads to a horrible outpouring of wickedness in human conduct.
  - (8) God holds all nations, and the governments of all nations, accountable to him
  - (9) God sovereignly establishes specific rulers over human governments.
- d. There would be civil governments even in a sinless world
2. Government cannot save people or fundamentally change human hearts
    - a. Personal salvation is a work of God, not government
    - b. Inwardly transformed people are necessary for a transformed society
    - c. But governments significantly influence people's moral convictions and behavior, and the moral fabric of a nation
  3. Principles for a right relationship between church and state
    - a. The church should not govern "the things that are Caesar's."
    - b. The civil government should not govern "the things that are God's"
    - c. Civil government should support and encourage churches and bona-fide religious groups in general
    - d. The most difficult church/ state questions arise when people disagree over whether something belongs to the realm of church or the realm of the state
  4. All governments should establish a strong and clear separation of powers
  5. The rule of law must apply even to the rulers in a nation
    - And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, *he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law*, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, *and he shall read in it all the days of his life*, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of his law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart might not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel (Dt 17:18-20).
  6. The purpose of government is to serve the people, not to be served by the people
    - "Here I am; testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you." They said, "You have not defrauded us or pressed us or taken anything from any man's hand" (1 Sam. 12:3-4).
    - These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: He will *take* your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots . . . and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest . . . He will *take* your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will *take* the best of your fields and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will *take* the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards . . . He will *take* your male servants and female servants . . . He will *take* the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves (1 Sam. 8:11-17).
  7. The Bible gives indirect but significant support to the idea that government should be chosen by the people (some kind of democracy)
    - (1) The equality of all people in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; Gen. 9:6; James 3:9)
    - (2) Accountability of rulers to the people helps prevent a misuse of their power.
    - (3) If government is to serve for the benefit of the people (Rom. 13:4), the government does not exist ultimately for the good of the *king* or the good of the *emperor* or the good of the *ruling council*, but for the good of the people themselves.
    - (4) Government seems to work best with the consent of those who are governed. (See: Ex. 4:29-31; 1 Sam. 7:5-6; 1 Sam. 10:24; 2 Sam. 2:4; 1 Kings 1:39; 1 Kings 12:1; Acts 6:3. By contrast see: 1 Kings 12:15-16; Exod. 3:9-10; Judges 14:4; 2 Kings 25:1-21; Matt. 2:16-17; Luke 13:1; Acts 12:1-2.)  
 We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, *deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed*. (Declaration of Independence)
  8. Governments should safeguard human liberty
    - a. Biblical arguments for human liberty
      - Slavery and oppression are always viewed negatively in Scripture, while freedom is viewed positively (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 28:28-29, 33; Judges 2:16-23; Isa. 61:1)
      - And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan" (Lev. 25:10).

- I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live (Deut. 30:19).
- Choose this day whom you will serve (Josh. 24:15).
- Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).
- The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price (Rev. 22:17).

b. Governments should protect human liberty

c. How much restriction of liberty is necessary?

- Every incremental increase in governmental regulation of life is also an incremental removal of some measure of human liberty.

9. Nations should value patriotism

a. Biblical reasons for patriotism (Acts 17:26; Gen. 12:2; Gen. 22:18; Gen.10:32; Job 12:23; Rom.13:1).

- Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors . . . (1 Peter 2:13-14).
- Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, *respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed* (Rom. 13:7).
- My son, fear the Lord and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise (Prov. 24:21).
- Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich (Eccl. 10:20).
- Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon . . . . Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jer. 29:4-7)
- Nations *divide and disperse government power throughout the earth*
- The signers of the U. S. Declaration of Independence realized that they were establishing themselves as a *separate nation*:

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, *the separate and equal station* to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitled them, it is respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

b. The benefits of patriotism in a nation

- (1) A sense of belonging to a larger community of people
- (2) Gratitude for the benefits that a nation provides
- (3) A shared sense of pride in the achievements of other fellow-citizens of the same nation
- (4) A sense of pride for the good things that a nation has done
- (6) A sense of obligation to serve the nation and do good for it in various ways
- (7) A sense of obligation to live by and to transmit to newcomers and succeeding generations a shared sense of moral values and standards

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