

Dual Citizenship

Confusing the Roles of Church and State

Christians resist when the government demands disobedience to God

Read Acts 5:25-29,40-42

- In what way did the Jewish Council's command call for disobedience to God?
- How did the apostles respond to this governmental command?
- What price did they pay for their resistance?

Exodus 1:15-21 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

- How did God show that he approved of their resistance to Pharaoh's command?
- Can you think of any examples of nations or governments today who demand disobedience to God?

Christians do not rebel against the government

God had rejected King Saul for his lack of faith (1 Samuel 15). Young David had been anointed to be the new king of Israel (1 Samuel 16). Who would have blamed David for starting a revolution and attempting to overthrow the government of the increasingly cruel and crazed Saul? Hadn't God himself declared that Saul was out and David in? Didn't Saul deserve to be deposed for his reckless and godless behavior? Didn't he have it coming for hunting David down and trying to kill him?

Yet consider David's response when he had a golden opportunity to kill Saul in a cave (1 Samuel 24) and in Saul's camp in the middle of the night (1 Samuel 26).

1 Samuel 26:7-11 So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered

your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice." But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."

- According to human standards, what reasons could David give for killing Saul?
- Why did David refuse to kill Saul?

Read Acts 4:23-30

The apostles Peter and John had been arrested for healing a cripple and for preaching the gospel in the temple courtyard. The Jewish Council had ordered them to stop teaching and preaching about Jesus, or else! And then the council set the apostles free. When Peter and John rejoined the believers, the talk was not about how they could arm and defend themselves. Instead, they all talked to God. They prayed.

- When Peter and John rejoined the believers, the talk was not about how they could arm and defend themselves. Instead, they all talked to God. They prayed. Why did they not feel the need to rebel against authorities?
- What did they ask for boldness to do?

What happens when the church makes civil government its business

Some churches today lobby the state and federal government to enact legislation to curb sin in society. These churches feel that they are doing their Christian duty to clean up society, and they believe that legislation can be an effective tool to accomplish this purpose. (See Civil Government, pp. 193-203.)

- What harmful effect does this have on the church?
- Consider some examples of the church making civil government its business. For each example indicate (1) the impact such an action had on the church itself and (2) the impact it had on how the world perceived the church.
 - The Bishop of Rome
 - The Crusades
 - John Calvin

Agree or Disagree

- **Agree or disagree:** The church should become organized to lobby in support of godly laws.
- **Agree or disagree:** The church has a responsibility to tell its members which political candidates they should vote for.
- **Agree or disagree:** It is important that churches sponsor demonstrations and pickets at organizations and businesses that promote sin.
- **Agree or disagree:** The church is obligated to go on public record regarding current government policies and programs involving moral issues.

When civil government gets involved in the work of the church

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” That statement contains two clauses. The first is called the Establishment Clause and the second is called the Free Exercise Clause.

- What is the purpose of the Establishment Clause? What is the purpose of the Free Exercise Clause?
- Although the United States Constitution attempts to separate church and state, it is impossible to separate them completely. List some examples of how the church and state have ties to each other.
- Are you satisfied with the church and state relationship as it exists in our country?

Use the following illustrations from church history, what confusion resulted when the state became involved in the work of the church? Apply Scripture to each situation.

Constantine

- Constantine meant to help the church when he gave it a favored status. However, the church was harmed. Can you guess how?

Scriptural application -- Titus 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

- What qualifications did the elders of God’s church need to possess?
- Why does the church need this kind of leader and not government leaders to do the work of leading God’s people?

Napoleon Bonaparte

- What harmful effect do you think this had on the church?

Scriptural application -- Ezekiel 34:1-6

- What had the religious leaders (“shepherds”) of Israel failed to do for God’s people?
- What is still the sad result when the church abdicates its leadership to the government?

The Prussian Government

- What harmful effect do you think this had on the church?

Scriptural application -- Romans 16:17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

- How does Paul insist that children of God must treat false teachers?
- Why is doctrinal unfaithfulness too high a price for the church to pay, no matter what external benefits the church may receive if it compromises?

Scriptural application – Jude 3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

- What does Jude encourage his readers to do?
- How does the church rise to the challenge of helping Christians understand and avoid the humanistic philosophies of the world?

Summary

The government is ill-equipped to lead the church or carry out the church's mission. The government is designed to control outward behavior by force or threat of punishment. This is inconsistent with the church's mission of preaching the gospel and leading people to give their hearts to the God who loves them. Much harm has come to the church when the government has overstepped its bounds and become involved in the work and leadership of the church. Much confusion has resulted when the church has abdicated its authority and responsibility to the government by turning to the government for help in carrying out the church's mission.