

Dual Citizenship

Challenges and Opportunities

Introduction

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?

Christian citizenship is an opportunity

Jesus has placed us in the world, even though we do not belong to it

John 17:15-18 -- *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.*

- Jesus offered this prayer to the Father on behalf of his believers—that includes you and me. What did Jesus mean when he said that his believers are “not of the world”?
- Although we are “not of the world,” Jesus emphasizes that he has sent us into the world and that he does not want his Father to take us out of the world. Would Jesus want us to set up a separate Christian society apart from the worldly culture in which we find ourselves? Would Jesus want us simply to tolerate our earthly citizenship and stay out of government affairs?

A nation needs Christian citizens

1 Corinthians 2:14 *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

- We have seen again and again in this study how government operates on the basis of human reason. Citizens vote, leaders govern, and a nation functions on the basis of human reason. But there is a problem. Human reason has been corrupted by sin. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 2:14 about human reason’s inability to grasp spiritual truth?
- Consider the desire to live an honorable, law-abiding life. How do faith and human reason offer different reasons for doing this?

Although human reason *can* lead to decent moral choices, it doesn't *always* do so.

Romans 1:18 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*

- How does Paul describe the effect sin can have on our ability to reason?
- Give some examples of how we actually use human reason to justify sin.
- Give some examples of how the government and its leaders' use of human reason has also been affected by sin.

Psalm 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*

- What advantage do we Christians have in what guides our use of human reason?
- What blessing, then, are Christian citizens and leaders to a government or nation?

Government should not overtake the role of the Church

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 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.