

**Authority within the State**

A. The purpose of civil government:  
 to restrain evil,  
 to punish wrongdoers, and  
 to preserve order

1. New Testament evidence

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. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed (Rom. 13:1–2).

“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Peter 2:13–14).

See all of Rom. 13.1-5 and note connection w/ Rom. 12:19;

note also Gen. 9.5-6 as background: And for your lifeblood 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. <sup>6</sup> “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

2. Further details from Old Testament (which seem to apply to governments generally b/c there is no reason to restrict them to God’s purposes for Israel alone)

a) caring for the poor, the needy, the defenseless

“How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah <sup>3</sup> Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. <sup>4</sup> Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” (Psa 82:2; cf. Dan. 4:27)

b) insuring some opportunity to earn a living

Lev. 25.8-55 (Jubilee) (but not trying to attain equality of possessions: no equalization of money, jewelry, flocks, herds, clothing; or houses within walled cities)

c) Examples of evil government, or no government at all:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen 6:5); Judges 17-21 (note 17.6, 18.1, 19.1, 21.25); Eccl. 8.11

3. Compare: Preamble to U.S. Constitution:

We, the People of the United States, in order to

form a more perfect union,  
 establish justice,  
 insure domestic tranquility,  
 provide for the common defense,  
 promote the general welfare, and  
 secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity,

do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

B. Responsibilities of Christian citizen

1. Obey government (see verses in A.1 above)

except when it would mean disobeying God.

The Jewish governing authority, the Sanhedrin, arrested some of the apostles and commanded them “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). But the apostles Peter and John answered, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), and later Peter proclaimed, “We must obey God rather than men” (5:29). This is a clear affirmation of the principle that *God requires his people to disobey the civil government if obedience would mean directly disobeying God.*

Other passages also establish this. In Daniel 3:13–27, King Nebuchadnezzar commanded three Jewish men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—to bow down and worship a golden statue that he had erected. But they refused and said, “We will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (v. 18). God showed his approval of their actions by rescuing them from the burning fiery furnace (vv. 19–30).

When Pharaoh commanded the Egyptian midwives to put newborn Hebrew baby boys to death, they disobeyed, and God approved of their disobedience (see Exod. 1:17, 21). When it was against the law for anyone to come into the presence of King Ahasuerus without being invited, Esther disobeyed the law and risked her own life to save her people, the Jews (see Esth. 4:16). Daniel, likewise, disobeyed a law that prohibited him from praying to God (see Dan. 6:10). In addition, when Herod the king had commanded the wise men to return and tell him where the

newborn king of the Jews was to be found, they were warned by an angel not to obey this command, so they disobeyed King Herod and "departed to their own country by another way" (see Matt. 2:8, 12).

Q: Is it ever right to seek to overthrow a government, or declare independence from it? (see below)

2. Try to influence government to make laws consistent with Biblical standards

OT examples: Gen 41:40 (Joseph); Dan. 4:27; Neh. 1:11;

Esther: Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." (Est 4:16)

Mordecai: For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people. (Est 10:3)

But 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 29:7 ESV)

New Testament:

But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reprovved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done,<sup>20</sup> added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. (Luk 3:19-20 ESV);

And as he [Paul] reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you." (Acts 24:25 ESV)

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.<sup>15</sup> They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Rom 2:14 ESV)

a. This certainly includes praying for government, esp. that it would follow God's moral principles

1 Tim. 2:1-4; also Matt. 6:10 "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"

b. God holds all societies and cultures responsible for obeying his moral standards

Gen. 6-9; Gen. 19;

Deut. 9.5 (Canaanites), Isa. 13-23 (many nations named),

Ezk. 25-32, Daniel (to Babylon), Amos 1-2,

Obadiah (to Edom), Jonah (to Nineveh),

Nahum (to Nineveh), Habakkuk 2, Zeph. 2

c. Therefore it is right to try to influence government to make laws that conform to the moral standards of the Bible (not "our" standards but God's standards) - as we can best understand them (people will sometimes understand them differently – discussion is OK!)

d. But governments should not (and cannot fairly) enforce laws concerning attitudes of heart (cannot force people to love neighbor as self, etc.) (but may try to persuade)

or laws that are excessively intrusive into people's private lives

e. And government should not make laws enforcing religion! (or prohibiting religion)

("religion" here = doctrinal beliefs, worship activities, participation in a church)

Matt. 22:21: Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

→ some things are "Caesar's" and some things are "God's"

see also: Lk. 9:52-55; 12:13-14; Jn. 18:36

But: (I think it is right, and should be legal, for government to promote religion and morality generally - I disagree with part 2 of 1971 "Lemon test" from US Supreme Court)

f. The government should not rule the church or infringe on the church's right to govern itself (as in state churches in Europe, such as Church of England)

Matt. 22:21; John 18:36

g. The church should not rule the government or try to use government to compel beliefs in one religion or another

(1) because genuine religious commitment must be free, not compelled

→ note how Jesus approaches people, and how Bible often appeals to people to make their own choices:

Gen. 2:17; Josh. 24:15; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 22:17, etc.

(2) but government may rightly encourage or enable religious activity in general

- (a) not hinder: examples: zoning laws (Evanston, Ill. case); named bricks in memorial wall at Columbine High School; graduation speakers.
  - (b) encourage or enable: military chaplains, prison chaplains
  - (c) encourage or enable: tax deductions for church contributions, tax-free property for churches (because the population generally thinks it is a good thing for society to have churches: policy applies to all religions generally)
- (3) What about "faith-based programs"?
- (a) Examples: drug rehab programs; homeless shelters, job training programs; prison ministries, or privately-run prisons
  - (b) Arguments against:
    - it is promoting a certain religion
    - government \$ means government control and dependence on government
  - (c) Arguments for:
    - Government says: we have a need
    - Christian business says: we can meet that need.
      - if: hauling mail, cleaning courthouse: OK
      - if: drug rehab program, prison ministry, homeless shelter: why not?
    - voluntary, so not compelling anyone to participate or believe
    - such government aid is open to any religious or non-religious group, so not establishing any certain religion (Rom. Cath., Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, evangelical groups, etc., would all be eligible)
    - everybody benefits (society, person helped, Christian business/ ministry)
    - not a violation of First Amendment as original authors understood it
- h. Most disputes come where there is a conflict over whether something belongs to "Caesar's realm" or "God's realm" (ancient church: bowing down to Caesar; today: JW's and blood transfusions; some Native American religions and drug use; some Islamic beliefs). Some activities by their nature have elements of both.

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