

The Church and Politics

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My heartfelt thanks to the elders, deacons, preacher and members of the 39th Street congregation for the invitation to participate in this year's lectureship program. My hope and prayer is, and will be, that only good may come from this wonderful effort!

Christians understand a fundamental principle; namely, that God expects us to be a force in this world. We are to preach the truth, defend the truth, and live the truth (Matthew 28:19-20; Philippians 1:17; Titus 2:11-12). This trio of responsibilities (enjoined on every Christian) goes far beyond the church building where the saints meet. This influence is to be felt in the home, neighborhood, community and nation (Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 2:15).

The purpose of this particular lecture is to address the church's (collectively and individually) responsibility toward the political system of our country. I am certainly aware of the debate among Christians and non-Christians alike over the issue of separation of church and state. Since this is the "heart" for many, it would seem appropriate to study what the laws of men say regarding separation of church and state, then what the law of Christ teaches.

Separation of Church and State and the Laws of Men

Under what is commonly referred to as the Bill of Rights, we have the First Amendment which reads: "**Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the rights of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances**". Religiously speaking, there are three clauses, three prohibitions: 1) "An establishment of religion". 2) "The free exercise thereof". 3) "The freedom of speech". The essence of these three clauses guarantees that religion can be practiced free from government interference. The controversy occurs when one clause is played against the other. For instance, those who argue against any type of religious activity in school, argue that it violates the "establishment" clause (meaning that Government must remain neutral, neither endorsing nor favoring one religion above another). Those who argue for religious activity in school, base their argument upon the "free exercise thereof" or "freedom of speech" clauses.

In eighteen cases before the Supreme Court, prior to August 18, 2000, eleven have been ruled as in violation of the "establishment" clause. A partial list would include: Bible reading, prayers in classrooms, commencement or football games, balanced treatment of evolution and creationism in the classroom, and the posting of the Ten Commandments in the schools. The court ruled that these violated the first amendment, insofar as they were viewed as advancing religion.

In seven other cases, the Supreme Court held government accommodation of religious activities. A partial list would include: Non-curricular religious activities would be afforded the same access to public facilities as those engaged in any other type of non-curricular activities. A student religious publication may enjoy the same freedom of speech as every other student

publications. After school use of school facilities by religious groups cannot be discriminated against because they are religious. Government can sponsor patriotic ceremonies; for instance, the Pledge of Allegiance and saluting the flag, but they cannot make it mandatory.

Justice Stewart held a different view on prayer and Bible reading in school. His comments following the decision of the High Court on *Abington School District v. Schempp* in 1963 are at the very least thought provoking. *“A compulsory state education system so structures a child’s life that if religious exercises are held to be impermissible activities in schools, religion is placed at an artificial and state-created disadvantage. Viewed in this light, permission of such exercises for those who want them is necessary if the schools are to be neutral in matters of religion. And a refusal to permit religious exercises thus is seen, not as a realization of state neutrality, but rather as the establishment of a religion of secularism, or at least, as government support of the beliefs of those who think that religious exercises should be conducted only in private”* Id. at 313 (CRS Report for Congress – Prayer and Religion in the Public Schools: What Is, and Is Not, Permitted. By David M. Ackerman Legislative Attorney, American Law Division. Special thanks to the offices of United States Senator Mike DeWine for providing the CRS Report for Congress).

Separation of Church and State and the Law of Christ

May I first make a needful observation? Namely, that government is a part of the law of Christ; therefore, it seems strange to me that brethren would argue that Christians are not permitted to participate fully in that which the law of Christ authorizes. Can Christians pray for those in positions of authority (1 Timothy 2:1-3), but not use their voice in the election of those authorities? Can Christians give of their means to financially support the government (Matthew 23:17-21; Romans 13:6) but not use their voice to determine how the money is spent? Can Christians obey the government (Romans 13:1-2), (with certain restriction, of course-- Acts 5:29) and not use their voice to help enact laws that are just and fair? Can Christians cry for a moral nation (Proverbs 14:34) and not use their voice on moral issues? Can Christians seek (even demand) protection from evil and wicked men but deny that a Christian can be a part of that protection? Is there one law of Christ or two? Surely, every faithful member recognizes that there is one law of Christ, and every accountable soul is amenable to that law (Matthew 28:18; Luke 19:14-27; John 12:48; Acts 17:30-31; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

There is a separation of church and state (government) inasmuch as each functions in a different realm of responsibility. The government’s role of protecting society (Romans 13:3-4) is vastly different from the church’s role of trying to save society (Mark 16:15-16). However, every person ought to recognize that both (church and government) are ordained of God (Ephesians 3:10-11; Romans 13:1-2). That being true, and it is, Christians simply cannot be indifferent toward a government that God in His infinite wisdom has placed on this earth.

I wish that it were a simple matter of encouraging Christians to be involved in shaping the political landscape of our country, but far too often, when financial and moral issues collide, otherwise thoughtful brethren let money dictate their choice. Beloved, when money causes us

to turn our back on what's right, we had better do some fast soul searching. No child of God can play the ostrich when evil runs for office.

Can any one of us put our conscience to sleep and vote for those who advocate the taking of the unborn or partial born child? ***"In Rama was there a voice heard, Lamentation, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for the children"*** (Matthew 28:18). Brethren, I wonder how many tears have been shed for the millions of babies that have been put to death since that black of day in 1973. I know how God views the shedding of innocent blood. He hates it (Proverbs 6:17).

Those who advocate the taking of innocent life march with a slogan; namely, "A women has a right to do what she wants with her own body". I agree. If a woman does not want a child, avoid pregnancy. However, if you do become pregnant the child is not your body. If the child were her body we would never see another abortion in this country, for no women would willingly submit to the cruel and inhumane treatment done to the body of a child in putting him or her to death. That the child is not the mother's body is clearly seen in the fact that the blood type and even the gender may differ from the mother. In other words, the child is a distinct and unique individual and entitled to the right to live.

Brethren, if enough of us raise our voices and elect those who hold that life is sacred, that law can be reversed. Do we dare do anything less than use our influence for what is right?

Can morality take a back seat when politicians advance the homosexual lifestyle? And make no mistake about it; some politicians and some celebrities are working fervently to change the image of homosexuals from what they do, to an alternate lifestyle, and even in some cases as the preferred lifestyle.

For the eleven years my family and I have been in Springfield, The Springfield News-Sun has carried Ann Landers. When she died, I had hoped that a more conservative personality would replace her. To my regret, Dear Abby took her place, and in no time at all the column carried the same old deception; namely, that homosexuals do not choose their lifestyle. They are born that way! Well, Dear Abby may not hold homosexuals accountable, but God does.

1. God considers homosexuality an abomination (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).
2. Homosexuality is unnatural and vile (Romans 1:24-28).
3. Unrepented of, homosexuals will be lost forever (Jude 7).

Beloved, can we vote for those who advance the homosexual lifestyle knowing how God views that perverted way of life? Surely each of us knows better than that!

In conclusion, we have seen that the Government and the church have different responsibilities, but that they are both ordained of God, and answerable to Him. We have, because of God's infinite wisdom, a wonderful opportunity to help shape the direction our country is traveling. Let's be a voice for that which is good, right and pure. If in the process of

standing for that which is good, we suffer some financial difficulty, brethren that is all right, because we have some wonderful promise from God. ***“I have been young, and now am I old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread”*** (Psalms 37:25). ***“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all things shall be added unto you”*** (Matthew 6:33).