



Tuesday 17th November – Christians and Government

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor. (1 Peter 2:13–17)

Tonight we're going to think about Government: what its purpose is, what we can expect of it, and what attitude we are to have to it.

1. Where does Government gain its authority?

Remember last week: two views of government.

Where do these come from?

The children of Rousseau

The problems with Social Contract government

What about the minority?

Who says this is how power works?

What defines justice?

Who limits power?

You end up with gods after all...

Genesis 1:1

Isaiah 46:8-11

Daniel 4:28-35

Romans 13:1-7

Governments are established by God, and only have authority because he has given it to them.

Authority is delegated downwards by God, not upwards by us.

Government is therefore established by God for the purposes for which he has established it.

2. What is the purpose of Government?

That requires us to consider some other questions first.

a) What is the purpose of all creation?

Psalm 148

Genesis 2:3

Revelation 4:11

The glory of God in the praises of his creation – especially of mankind, his image

b) How is God fulfilling this purpose?

Psalm 2

Redemption in the Son

Despite the raging of kings and rulers – and through them kissing him

So God has set up authorities to

Propagate human life, knowledge, value & love in this age - **Family**

Preserve order, justice & righteousness in this age - **State**

Proclaim and **Prepare** for the life of the age to come - **Church**

So the purpose of Government is to **Preserve order to enable the church to grow and flourish.**

3. How should governments behave?

Government:

- Has a legitimate authority over us – given by God
- This is true *however, in human terms, it came to have that power.* (though there are difficult cases here)
- Is a blessing – a huge blessing. Part of God’s common grace towards mankind.
 - Its aim is to preserve peace and uphold justice, by enforcing God’s laws (note this is quite different to what most people think it is Government’s job to do...)
- has a duty to frame laws which uphold God’s laws
- Is a blessing *to the Church*
 - Because the flourishing of the church is its central purpose
 - Has a duty to bless and support the church
- Is at its best when it understand what it’s for, and deliberately aims to do it.
- Is still good, and we still owe it our submission, even when it doesn’t.
- Can never be neutral with respect to the Church.
 - Because the claims of the church are too absolute, and too much in conflict with those of the state
- Has God-given limits: only to act within the bounds God has given it.
 - Its goal is *service*, not *power*
 - Its service is *preservation of peace and justice* not *glory and power for itself*
 - Particularly it is not to trespass on the authority God has given to the *Family* and the *Church*

4. How should Christians act towards the government?

We are citizens both of the earthly and the heavenly city.

While this Heavenly City, therefore, is on pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages. She takes no account of any difference in customs, laws, and institutions, by which earthly peace is achieved and preserved – not that she annuls or abolishes any of those, rather, she maintains and follows them (for... whose institutions have one single aim – earthly peace), provided that no hindrance is presented thereby to the religion which teaches that the one supreme and true God is to be worshipped. Thus even the Heavenly City in her pilgrimage here on earth makes use of the earthly peace and defends [it] ... so far as may be permitted without detriment to true religion and piety.

... so long as the two cities are intermingled we also make use of the peace of Babylon – although the people of God is by faith set free from Babylon, so that in the meantime they are only pilgrims in the midst of her. That is why the Apostle [Paul] instructs the church to pray for kings of that city and those in high positions...

- Augustine of Hippo, 'City of God' 19.17 & 19.26

So Christians, and the Church, are to

- Thank God for our government
- Have a higher view of government than anyone else
 - Because we always hold God higher than government
- Honour and respect those who are over us
- Pray for our government – Queen, Prime Minister, all in high positions
- Take great care to obey government, for God's sake
 - The only exceptions are when government exceeds its authority, when we *may* disobey it, and when government commands sin, when we *must* disobey it
 - This includes paying our taxes!
- Participate appropriately in government: voting, serving, ruling
- Fulfil our duty to proclaim to government what it is, what its duties are, and what God's laws are which it should uphold
 - This is not a different thing from proclaiming the gospel – Jesus Christ is Lord!

... when the civil magistrate [i.e. government] trespasses the limits of his authority, it is incumbent upon the church to expose and condemn such a violation of his authority. When laws are proposed or enacted which are contrary to the law of God, it is the duty of the church to oppose them and expose their iniquity.

- John Murray, 'The Relation of Church and State'

- Suffer persecution by unjust governments with patience
- See the church as a parallel authority to government, not under it
- Look to government to *preserve*, and only to Christ to *save*