

Christians and Government

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Introduction:

Topic: Christians in government vs. the church in government.

Recently I participated in a discussion of this topic over e-mail, and it caused me to dig deeper and to flesh out what the scriptures have to say about the church and Christians being involved in government. I would like to present some of the things that stuck out to me and then break into groups for discussion.

Read Rom. 14:5-6

My goal is that each of us be “fully convinced” as to what we ought to do and that whatever we do or don’t do, that it be “for the Lord”, and not for ignorance, laziness, or legalism.

So take good notes. Everyone is expected to be able to state what they believe and why!

I. What does the Bible say about what happens when the Church gets involved in government?

- Rev. 17:18
 - Rev 17:1-7,15,18; 18:1-8

The Harlot looks like the church:

Rev. 7:15 – The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

Rev. 5:9-10 – And they sang a new song, saying “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

She thinks of herself as the Bride of Christ:

Rev. 18:7b – For she says in her heart, “I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.”

After she is judged, the true Bride of Christ is revealed from heaven:

Rev. 19:7 – “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.”

The church is a host to unclean spirits

Rev 18:2 – And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.”

Matt 13:32 – He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

II. How does the harlot seduce the kings of the earth?

Rev. 17:2 – “...with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.”

The harlot says ‘I’ll give you what you want and you give me what I want’ just like every other harlot. And just like every other harlot, what she offers is a counterfeit look-alike of the real thing.

The kings of the earth want:

Legitimacy: “divine right” to rule. The “endorsement”/”blessing” of the church. They want to be perceived as having a proper relationship under the authority of God and the Harlot has just such a mantle to spread over them.

What the harlot wants:

To see herself as the bride of Christ, doing his work, and bringing righteousness to the people (Rev. 18:7).

Rev. 18:24 – “And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.”

The kings of the earth have only the sword to give her and so she wields it against all who would challenge her claim to be the true church acting by the Holy Spirit, and in order to coerce the people into a display of righteousness.

Rev. 18:4 – I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

Just as 1 John 4:4 warns that the spirit of the Antichrist is already in the world, so also the spirit of the anti-church is already in the world and we are called to come out of her, and to not participate in her sins.

III. What is the proper role of the church in politics?

John 18:36 – Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

In this passage, Jesus has been falsely accused of fomenting a political rebellion and setting himself up as king. Jesus is explaining that His kingdom, as it is, does not have political ends and therefore does not fight with military force to achieve its ends. The Church stands in exactly the same position of the kingdom that Jesus describes. Seeking political power is not within the scope of what He has established (and by His Spirit leads) the Church to be doing. The Church's concerns lie in another "realm": along a completely different axis, and so politics and government are to be kept out of the Church and its affairs entirely.

IV. What is the proper, God-given, role of government?

1 Pet. 2:13-17, Rom. 13:1-7

1. The punishment of evildoers.
2. The praise of those who do right

Romans 12:19; 13:4

God has delegated to man the responsibility of governing, which includes carrying out wrath on evildoers.

Genesis 6:5-8;

Before the flood God dealt with man directly (Cain).

Genesis 9:5-6,11-16

God set down his bow, his weapon of destruction, delegating the responsibility to maintain righteousness to mankind.

(The word “bow” (qesheth) is used throughout the Old Testament, and in every use of the word it refers to a lethal weapon used in war and hunting.

The purpose of government is to preserve men in righteousness, so that God does not need to intervene in judgement.

1 Cor 5:9-13

There are two principles maintained here:

1. The church as a corporate entity does not judge those outside of it, i.e., in the world. Certainly the church identifies evil and good just like John the Baptist identified Herod’s sin as evil but the church does not seek the position of holding those outside to account for evil. That is the prerogative of the Lord who delegated authority to government and who has committed all judgment to the Son. (John 5:22)
2. Christians as individuals are not to consider themselves as being “outside” or “above” the world. We have been left in it for a purpose (John 17:15) and being in the world carries with it responsibilities.

Matt. 25:14-30

We will be held accountable to God for our fruitful utilization of the earthly resources that He has entrusted to us.

- **Money**
- **Abilities (“talents”)**
- **Position: for Americans, this includes the right to vote**

There is an improper way to invest our vote, just as there is an improper way to invest our money: if we regard money as something that belongs to us, we will spend it on ourselves

or according to our wisdom and not the kingdom of God; if we regard our money or our aptitude as belonging to ourselves, we will use it to our own advantage and ends (or not at all), and not for the kingdom of God. This does not mean for an instant that we ought to pretend like we have no money, or no natural abilities: that, too, would be equally irresponsible.

If we regard the position to which we have been appointed: the ultimate rulers of our nation (as voters), as something our own, we will use it to our own ends, or perhaps we will use it outside the guidelines that God has laid down when He delegated power to man for government. (Genesis 9 & Romans 13)

None of those is the proper way to use the good gifts that God has bestowed on us for our spiritual training, and for the blessing of those around us. However, the availability of sinful options does not negate righteousness: just because it is carnal for a Christian to try to gain his own benefit through his "talents", or to use them in a wrong way intending to bring about good (like the harlot), does not mean that there is no way to invest them faithfully for the kingdom of God.

V.Is “heavenly citizenship” in contrast with national citizenship?

Phil 3:17-21

What is Paul’s example?

Acts 16:35-40

Acts 22:22-30 (also Acts 21:39)

We must not plant our hope for the salvation of the world or ourselves in politics. We are not going to save, or even ultimately change, the world through government, but it can be a God-ordained means of hindering evil (Rom 13:1), giving opportunity, for a time, for the gospel to go forth.

Relevant passages:

Rom. 13:1-7

1 Tim. 2:1-4

1 Pet. 2:13-17

Please remember that the discussion should be in the spirit of Romans 14: the goal is to exercise our Christian liberty “unto the Lord” not to judge one whom “God has accepted.”

Questions for discussion:

1. Read 1 Pet. 4:11 and 1 Tim. 5:24. Under what circumstances (if any) should the church corporately endorse a politician or party? Why? May a Christian individual endorse a politician or party? How is this different or not different from the church corporately?
2. Should Christians vote and/or seek political office? Why or why not? Under what authority would they be as rulers?
3. In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30, Luke 19: 12-27), what does it mean for someone to “bury” their talent? What, to you, would “burying” the talent of national citizenship mean?