

THE UNIQUE AUTHORITY AND REDEMPTIVE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

The uncertainty surrounding this issue has become monumental, to say the least. The goal of this article will be to clarify the existing confusion as much as possible. The first area of concern in need of clarification involves the distinction which exists between the nation of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant, in contrast to the Church under the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, Israel functioned as a theocratic nation under God. No other nation, in all of human history, has occupied such a unique place within the divine plan of redemption (Psalm 147:19-20). Even though the Church has temporarily replaced Israel, as God's current instrument for fulfilling His purposes in our world, the Church is not a geo-political entity. It is the body of Christ, designed to exist within every nation on earth (Acts 1:8); with a unique authority in fulfilling a redemptive responsibility. Its mandate was issued at the very outset of the Church Age by the authority of Christ Himself, in Matthew 28:18-20. As a result, we have the authority to go into all the world and make disciples within every nation on earth, but NOT for the purpose of establishing theocracies. Simply put, the responsibility of the Church collectively, and Christians individually, is evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved. Nothing more, nothing less. We don't have authority for anything more; and it is our responsibility to not become guilty of anything less.

But the thorniest dilemma of all, involves the relationship which should exist between the Church and human government. An initial resolution can be derived from what Jesus states in Matthew 22:21, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." This guideline creates a distinction between the Church and governing authority, requiring the payment of taxes to Caesar, while at the same time, worshipping God and Him alone, exclusively. Prior to His death, when Jesus appears before Pilate, some further light is shed on this matter in John 18:36, when He claims to be the head of a kingdom that is not of this world, providing the rationale for His disciples in not fighting to set Him free. He also states that if His kingdom were of this world, then it would be appropriate for His followers to be engaging for His release; and makes it clear to Pilate that his authority over Christ at that moment in time, has been given to him by God above (John 19:11).

We then see the application of what Jesus not only preached, but practiced, in the life of Peter and his fellow apostles (Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-32). When they are ordered to stop preaching the gospel by the Jewish governing authority known as the Sanhedrin, they refuse, insisting that it was better for them to obey God, rather than men. This would set the practical precedent for the rest of the Church Age; so that refusing to submit to human government, is only allowable for the Christian when a failure to refuse constitutes disobedience to God. This is why Peter could say what he did to the Sanhedrin, but also write what he does in 1 Peter 2:13-17. Further confirmation of this all-important distinction is provided by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. In that context, Paul is seeking to clarify some confusion which he inadvertently created by telling the Corinthians in vv9, "not to associate with immoral people." They took it to mean that they should steer clear of all the unsaved people in Corinth. Paul's intention was the very opposite, as he indicates in vv10-11. But then he makes this incredibly profound statement, which has been so often overlooked by so many, in vv12-13 –

"For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."

Paul is telling all of us, in no uncertain terms, that the Church does NOT have the authority, nor the responsibility, for executing God's judgment upon the unsaved world for "here and now." That authority and responsibility rests with God's ordained instrument for this present time: human government. The Church must keep its own house in order, but leave the matter of maintaining law and order for society at large with the respective governments which exist within every nation on earth. Just as Jesus spent His time on earth in salvation mode, and not in judgment mode (John 3:17); so His Church must do the same.

But is that the case within American Evangelical Christianity today? Of course not! And why not? A group of evangelical pied pipers, for the previous thirty years, have intentionally blurred the distinction between Israel and the Church; while also conflating the authority and responsibility of the Church with that of human government. They have rendered themselves guilty, along with those whom they have led astray, of an unbiblical emphasis on political activism, at the expense of evangelism and discipleship; expressing no desire for repenting of their sin, whatsoever. What else is left to be said to them other than this?

Shame on you! You are a disgrace to the cause of Christ.