

CHRISTIANS & GOVERNMENT

Our Biblical and Civil Responsibility

Pastor George Stahnke, 10/20/2002,

1. GOD ESTABLISHED AUTHORITY

Romans 13:1-7 (NASB) Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ²Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ³For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ⁴for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. ⁵Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. ⁷Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Titus 3:1 (TMNT) Remind the people to respect the government and be law-abiding, always ready to lend a helping hand.

2. THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT

1 Peter 2:13-14 (NASB) Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Psalms 82:3-4 (NASB) Vindicate the weak and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and destitute. ⁴Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver *them* out of the hand of the wicked.

Isaiah 1:17 (NLT) Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows.

- To execute justice: Punish evildoers and reward those that do good.
- To establish order for the good of society.
- To protect and defend the people.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Pre-Amble

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.

"Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are a gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever."

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— Thomas Jefferson, 1781, third U.S. president and principal author of the Declaration of Independence.

"Politics and law are not a path to grace and faith. But are not grace and faith a path to right politics and right law?"

— Harold Berman, professor emeritus, Harvard University Law School.

3. LEADERS THAT HONOR GOD

2 Samuel 23:3-4 (NLT) The God of Israel spoke. The Rock of Israel said to me: 'The person who rules righteously, who rules in the fear of God, ⁴he is like the light of the morning, like the sunrise bursting forth in a cloudless sky, like the refreshing rains that bring tender grass from the earth.'

Proverbs 8:13-16 (NASB) "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate. ¹⁴"Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. ¹⁵"By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. ¹⁶"By me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly.

"Let me live according to those holy rules which Thou hast this day prescribed in Thy holy word . . . Direct me to the true object, Jesus Christ the way, the truth and the life. Bless, O Lord, all the people of this land."

— George Washington, 1752. Cited in W. Herbert Burk, ed., Washington's Papers (Norristown, Penn.: published for the benefit of the Washington Memorial Chapel, 1907), pp. 87-95).

"I've lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth — that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the house they labor in vain who build it.' I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."

— Benjamin Franklin, 1787. Cited in Gallard Hart and James Brown Scott, ed., The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 Which Framed the Constitution of the United States, reported by James Madison (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 81.

"We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being."

— Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas (Zorach V. Clauson, 343 U.S. 306 at 313 (1952).)

4. CHARACTER & MORALITY MATTER

"Moral habits...cannot safely be trusted on any other foundation than religious principle, nor any government be secure which is not supported by moral habits."

—Daniel Webster, 1820. Cited in The Works of Daniel Webster (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1853), p. 44.

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports . . . It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government...Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with its virtue?"

— George Washington, Farewell Address, 1796. Cited in Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, vol. 1, pp. 1212-13.

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5. OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO GOVERNMENT

Because it is God who establishes government, we must honor those who serve in office.

- We should pray for those who serve.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NIV) I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

- We should pay what we owe.

Mark 12:13-17 (NASB) Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. ¹⁴They came and said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? ¹⁵“Shall we pay or shall we not pay?” But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.” ¹⁶They brought *one*. And He said* to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” And they said to Him, “Caesar’s.” ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were amazed at Him.

- We should live in obedience.

1 Peter 2:13-17 (NASB) Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. ¹⁶Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bond slaves of God. ¹⁷Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

6. WE OBEY BUT NOT BLINDLY

- Paul used his citizenship to object to injustice.

Acts 16:35-39 (NIV) When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” ³⁶The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.” ³⁷But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.” ³⁸The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.

Acts 22:23-29 (NIV) As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” ²⁶When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.” ²⁷The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes, I am,” he answered. ²⁸Then the commander said, “I had to pay a big price for my citizenship.” “But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied. ²⁹Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

- There are times when Christians should disobey civil authorities when their mandates contradict the laws of God.

Acts 5:27-29 (NIV) Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your

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teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

7. WE SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN AND INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT.

"What, then, is the biblical basis for social concern? Why should Christians get involved? In the end there are only two possible attitudes which Christians can adopt towards the world: Escape and Engagement... 'Escape' means turning our backs on the world in rejection, washing our hands of it...and steeling our hearts against its agonized cries for help. In contrast, 'engagement' means turning our faces towards the world in compassion, getting our hands dirty, sore and worn in its service, and feeling deep within us the stirring of the love of which cannot be contained. . . . If we truly love our neighbors, and because of their worth desire to serve them, we shall be concerned for their total welfare, the well-being of their soul, their body and their community. And our concern will lead to practical programs."

— John R. W. Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1995), pp. 14, 19.

- The example of Joseph:

Genesis 41:14, 28-44 (NIV) So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. . . . ²⁸"It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, ³⁰but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. ³²The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. ³³"And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. ³⁶This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."³⁷The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. ³⁸So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"³⁹Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."⁴¹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt."⁴²Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.⁴⁴Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt."

- The example of Daniel:

Exiled from his homeland Daniel was pressed into the king's service. Working with those who did not believe in his God, he earned a place of respect and influenced four pagan kings.

Daniel 2:48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.

Daniel 6:3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

Daniel 6:28 So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

(2 Chron. 36:22-Ezra 1:11; Ezra 3:7; Ezra 4:3; Ezra 5:13-14; Ezra 5:17; Ezra 6:3; Isaiah 41:2-3; Isaiah 44:28-45:4; Isaiah 45:13; Isaiah 46:11; Isaiah 48:14-15)

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8. WE ARE CALLED TO BE SALT & LIGHT.

Matthew 5:13-16 (NASB) “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵“nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- Write letters to editors, office holders, etc.
- Join organizations, movements and campaigns you can support as a Christian.
- Run for public office or support Christians with whom you can agree on pertinent issues who do run for office.

"Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty...of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers."

— John Jay, 1816, the first chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, previously governor of New York. Cited in Henry P. Johnston, ed., *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1893, vol. 4), p. 393.

9. YOUR VOTE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The power of a single vote can be substantial. Consider, for example, that by only one vote per precinct:

- Averill Harriman was elected governor of New York in 1954.
- George McGovern was elected to the U.S. Senate from South Dakota in 1960.
- John Warner was elected to the U.S. Senate from Virginia in 1978.

Here are other examples of the power of a vote:

- Woodrow Wilson won California by less than one vote per precinct, giving him the electoral votes necessary to become president in 1916.
- Harry Truman carried California and Ohio by one vote per precinct in 1948, giving him the winning margin.
- A Texas Democratic party convention chose Lyndon Johnson in a contested Senate election by just one vote in 1948, launching his political career.
- In 1960, John F. Kennedy won the presidency by an average of only one-half vote per precinct.