

## Biblical Studies Program Spring 2012

### Politics and The Bible

#### Lesson One

##### Basic Principles

- I. The Presuppositions of this Course
  - A. Jesus Christ is the Lord and He is alive
  - B. The Bible is God's infallible and authoritative Word
    1. It is to be studied
    2. And followed by those who have been empowered by the Spirit
  - C. God cares deeply about the actions of every individual that He has created
- II. Some Statistics from the 2008 Presidential Election
  - A. Barack Obama received an enormous outpouring of support from the African-American Christian community
  - B. In addition, 24% of self-described "*white evangelical/born-again Christians*" also voted for the President (30 million white evangelical Christians)
  - C. Therefore, millions of evangelical Christians voted for Barack Obama despite the conflict between his announced views on issues like abortion and same-sex marriage and what the Bible teaches concerning these issues (and what is taught by most leaders of mainstream evangelical churches)
  - D. Clearly, the American church has failed to infuse its people with a sense of mission as it relates to politics
  - E. Also, the church has failed in an even more basic mission of educating its people on the basic political issues of the day
    1. Millions of churchgoing Christians do not bother to vote
    2. In 2008, tens of millions of self-described evangelical Christians voted for a party whose position on key social issues are in direct contradiction to Scripture
    3. These two realities would be impossible for faithful Christians to do if they had studied the issues and recognized their obligations as both citizens of this nation and of the kingdom of God
  - F. Christians ought to know what they believe and why they believe it
  - G. They need to ask themselves...
    1. What issues matter
    2. How candidates ought to be evaluated with regard to those issues
  - H. Christians must understand politics
    1. Politics and the freedom of the church are related
    2. The church's ability to freely spread the good news of Jesus Christ depends on politics
  - I. One key ingredient to being a responsible citizen and a faithful Christian is accurate up-to-date information – uninformed or misinformed people "hurt the conversation" by dealing in bad facts or illogical arguments

- III. Five wrong views about Christians and Government
- A. Government should compel religion (genuine faith cannot be compelled)
    - 1. Matthew 22 - lawful to pay taxes?
    - 2. Jesus taught there is that which is "God's" ... over which Caesar has no control (and vis versa)
    - 3. Civil government and the church have distinct realms
    - 4. Christians must insist on protecting the freedom of all religion
  - B. Exclude religion from government
    - 1. Denies first amendment
    - 2. Since 1971, increasingly radical anti-Christian (anti-religious) laws
    - 3. The Declaration of Independence appeals to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God"
      - a. The law of nature is defined as "a rule of conduct arising out of the natural relations of human beings established by the Creator"<sup>1</sup>
      - b. *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness"*<sup>2</sup>
    - 4. This position is a rejection of Natural Law
      - a. Edmund Burke (1729-1797 [a British (Irish) statesman, author, orator, political theorist and philosopher]) argued that men are more than physical beings
        - (1) Each individual is created as a unique spiritual being with the soul and a conscience and is bound to a transcendent moral order established by Divine Providence
        - (2) "There is but one law for all namely that law which governs all law the law of our Creator the law of humanity justice equity the law of nature and of nations"
      - b. This is the Natural Law which the Founding Fathers adopted as the principle around which civilized American society would be organized
      - c. An individual may benefit from the moral order and unalienable rights around which society functions while rejecting their divine origin
        - (1) But the society cannot organize itself that way - it

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<sup>1</sup>Noah Webster, 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*

<sup>2</sup>Declaration of Independence

- would become unstable and vulnerable to anarchy and tyranny
    - (2) Abandonment of natural law is the adoption of tyranny in one form or another
  - d. Rather than promoting intolerance (as the critics claim), this principle (unalienable rights endowed to us by our Creator) guarantees our rights
    - (1) "...endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights" means that a person is endowed with these rights no matter what his religion or whether he has allegiance to any religion at all
    - (2) It is the Natural Law, which comes from God, that prescribes the inalienability of the most fundamental and eternal human rights
      - (a) Rights that are not conferred on man by man
      - (b) And therefore cannot be denied to man by man
    - (3) It is the divine nature of natural law that makes permanent man's right to "life liberty and the pursuit of happiness"
  - e. The Statist cannot abide the existence of natural law
    - (1) He believes rights are not a condition of man's existence
    - (2) Individual rights only exist to the extent that the state ratifies those rights - rights are rationed by the state
- C. All government is demonic
  - 1. Misunderstanding of Luke 4:6
  - 2. This position is the opposite of what is taught in Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-14
- D. Do evangelism, not politics
  - 1. Just preach the gospel and stay out of the political realm
  - 2. Yet, all Christians are called to do good works
    - a. Eph 2:8-10 -- "...for good works"
    - b. Good works in government -- voting, being informed citizens
      - (1) For example, good marriage laws (biblically sound) help protect (and love) neighbor
      - (2) In the Roman Empire, Christian influenced laws against infanticide, abandonment, abortion
      - (3) William Wilberforce work to outlaw slavery -- eventually passed in 1833
      - (4) American pulpits brought the issue of slavery to the forefront at this time, as well

- c. Campaigning for conservative candidates, who will promote righteous laws and policies, is a good work
  - E. Do politics not evangelism
    - 1. The misconception: "If we can just get the right people elected..."
    - 2. No, only the gospel transforms hearts and societies
    - 3. This position represented by those who embraced the "social gospel" of twentieth-century liberal Protestantism
  - F. Biblical View – Significance Christian influence on government
- IV. Biblical Principles Concerning Government<sup>3</sup>
- A. **Government should punish evil and encourage good**
    - 1. The Old Testament foundation
      - a. Genesis 9:5-6
        - (1) God establishes the obligation to carry out the most severe punishment in retribution for the most horrible crime
        - (2) A principal is established the imposition of lesser penalties for lesser crimes is also valid
        - (3) Genesis 9 is given at the beginning of the reestablishment of human society
      - b. Anarchy is a highly destructors evil (Judges 21:25 – *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*)
      - c. Governments should execute justice and defend the weak
        - (1) Psalm 82:2-4
        - (2) Daniel 4:27
      - d. Government should execute swift punishment as a deterrent to crime (Eccl 8:11)
    - 2. New Testament Teaching
      - a. Romans 13:1-7
        - (1) These verses indicate that government has a role in promoting the common good of a society
        - (2) Government officials serve God
          - (a) Not all that a government official does is good
          - (b) Rulers "do good" when they carry out their responsibilities in a just and fair way following God's principles of government
        - (3) The purpose of civil government is not only to prevent further wrongdoing but also to carry out God's wrath on wrongdoing – bringing actual punishment

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<sup>3</sup>The following points are drawn directly from Wayne Grudem's *Politics According to the Bible*, chapter three.

- b. First Peter 2:13-14
  - c. What about “turning the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39)?
    - (1) Jesus is giving principles for individual personal conduct
    - (2) He is not talking about the responsibilities of civil government
- B. **God is sovereign over all nations and all peoples are accountable to Him**
  - 1. The Old Testament prophets show that God holds unbelieving nations accountable
  - 2. Multiple examples
- C. **Government should serve the people and seek the good of the people not the rulers** (1 Sam 8:3-4 compared to 1 Sam 8:11-17)
  - 1. The more unchecked power government has...
  - 2. The more likely a ruler is to forget this principle
- D. **Citizen should be subject to the government and obey the laws of the government** (Rom 13:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13-14)
  - 1. God does not hold people responsible for obeying the civil government when obedience would mean directly disobeying a command of God himself
  - 2. Tyrannical government is “not really a government at all but a criminal gang masquerading as government and therefore is not entitled to the obedience that governments can claim”<sup>4</sup>
- E. **Governments should safeguard human liberty** (Exod 20:2)
  - 1. Liberty is an essential component of our humanity; therefore, any government that significantly denies peoples liberty exerts a terribly dehumanizing influence on its people
  - 2. Government should protect human liberty and allow people much freedom to decide how to use their time and their resources according to what they think is best
  - 3. In our nation’s founding, **protecting human liberty** was seen as one of **the most important and most basic of all the functions of government**
  - 4. While liberty is to be highly valued it **cannot be an absolute right** in light of the other biblical teachings about the role of government
    - a. Government of necessity sometimes in fringe is on people's liberty to do wrong
    - b. Every incremental increase in government regulation of life is also an incremental removal of some measure of human liberty
  - 5. Greatest loss of liberty by government action is through taxation

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<sup>4</sup>From Wayne Grudem’s *Politics According to the Bible*, page 89.

- F. **Government cannot save people or change the human heart**
1. Yet, as John Adams said, "Our Constitution was made for a moral and righteous people; it is wholly inadequate for the governments of any other."
  2. Government significantly influences people's moral convictions and behavior and is a major factor in determining the moral fabric of a nation
  3. For many (or perhaps most) of the people in this society, if the government passes laws that say something is legal, people will also think it is morally right
  4. The laws and policies of a government have enormous impact on the conduct of people in a society
  5. Government cannot save or fundamentally change human hearts, but we must say as well and affirm that government policy and laws do have a tremendous influence on a nation for good or for evil (Pro 14:34)
- G. **There is a right relationship between Church and State**
1. "The things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21)
  2. Discussed earlier
- H. **The rule of law must apply to the rulers of the nation as well (Deut 17:18-20)**
1. The "rule of law" is violated whenever any person or group in a society has unchecked power and can disobey the law without fear of punishment
  2. Government monopoly of media allows for the cover up of government misconduct
- I. **Nations Should Value Patriotism**
1. Not blind patriotism
  2. Genuine patriotism which always seeks to promote the good of the nation can honestly criticize the government and its leaders when they do things contrary to Biblical moral standards
  3. Benefits: (1) *sense of belonging* (2) *gratitude* (3) *sharing in the achievements of others from our nation* (4) *rejoicing in the good our nation has done* (5) *sense of security* (6) *sense of obligation to serve* (7) *sense of obligation to live by and to transmit to newcomers and succeeding generations a shared sense of moral values and standards*
  4. A Christian view of government encourages and supports genuine patriotism within a nation