



Should Government Exclude Religion?

Selected Passages

TO: LEGISLATORS

FROM: RALPH 661-803-7970

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I want to encourage each of you to work on your habit of prioritizing the regular study of God's Word. Likened to sports and an athlete's continual growth and improvement in his or her field of endeavor, we all need spiritual coaches to encourage, prod and challenge us to new heights in Christ. That is why Danielle and I are here. In the short run, one might not notice their spiritual atrophy but when starved of a high-protein diet of the Word of God, over time one is weakened, becoming more susceptible to fatigue, infection, compromise and failure. Sadly there are too many illustrations around here relative to this truth.

Ephesians 6:10-11 commands us to do two things in our Christian life: "Be strong" and "put on." Notice this passage with that in mind: "Be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil... And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." Amen to that! Be proactive in this regard, not passive. Instruct your scheduler to block first-vote-back evenings for in-depth Bible study and fellowship! Habitually start each week strong my friend! I hope you hear the voice of God when I say that nothing that competes for your schedule is more important than this. Continually form, buoy, and mold godly disciplines—consistency—as a way of life.

INTRODUCTION

This week we will examine through the lens of Scripture the second of five wrong views regarding the relationship of Church and State. Last week we studied the first wrong view: Government should *compel* religion. By this we meant the State promoting a theocratic nation. This week we will examine the opposite view which is also scripturally aberrant: Government should *exclude* religion. In that the Reformation did not sufficiently address the

differentiation of Church and State, and whereas such separation in the American experiment in government is not borne from a manifestation of exegetical discovery and conviction, (quite to the contrary the impetus of American separation is based upon a pragmatic reaction to theocratic England) is it any wonder that through the years there has been so much confusion about this subject—compelling or excluding—by both believers and non-believers alike?

I. WRONG VIEW #2: GOVERNMENT SHOULD EXCLUDE RELIGION

This view is widely held by secularists in American society today. The word "secular" means "not controlled by a religious body. Not religious or spiritual in nature." Secularists want religion out of Government altogether. The view is propagated by individuals and organizations such as the ACLU and Americans United for Separation of Church and State. The place for religion according to them is that such should be kept to self, at home; religion should not influence the marketplace, the political process, or the laws of the land.

This ideological understanding is manifested in a myriad of ways, illustrated in part by the following:

- PRAYERS SHOULD NOT ACCOMPANY THE OPENING OF A CITY COUNSEL MEETING
- THE TEN COMMANDMENTS SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM GOVERNMENTAL BUILDINGS
- PRAYERS AT PUBLIC SCHOOL GRADUATION CEREMONIES SHOULD BE BANNED
- THE OVERTHROW OF THE PROHIBITION OF GAY MARRIAGE IS JUSTIFIED ON THE BASIS THAT SUCH VIEWS, BECAUSE THEY ARE BASED IN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, CONSTITUTE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION.
- BIBLE STUDIES SHOULDN'T BE ALLOWEED ON CAMPUSES

MEMBERS WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF FIRST-VOTES-BACK (MONDAY OR TUESDAY NIGHT)

THE CAPITOL FAMILY ROOM

DINNER SERVED

SPOUSES WELCOME



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These and many other illustrations serve to represent an exclusionist understanding of how the institution of the State should relate to the Church.

What's the main problem with this viewpoint? Scripturally speaking, all State authority comes from God in the first place; God mediates His authority through the State. "There is no authority except from God" says Paul in Romans 13:1 as he discusses this very issue. So it stands to reason that a State should not exclude its main sponsor when going about its duties! Add to this simple observation that ultimately and eventually "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall give praise to God" (Romans 14:11; cf. Philippians 2:10, 11). "Every" would seem to include individuals as well as nations (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Psalm 2). Willingly or unwillingly, with joy in submission or pain in rebellion, all will eventually bow! To exclude Him now is not to exclude Him later. So why now?

In addition Psalm 2 cannot be overlooked by any world leader(s) who would think to prohibit the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelations 19:16) from being worshipped in a given nation. Those nations who do forbid Him, risk the premature consequences of Acts 17:26 wherein Paul via the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says regarding nations, "[He] determines their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation." Therefore be warned, governments that exclude God from His due, proceed at their own risk and journey to their own peril. Wise leaders attempt to please Him, not expunge Him.

If that explanation somehow seems insufficient as to why the exclusionist view should be roundly defeated, what follows are seven additional reasons.

A. EXCLUDING RELIGION TEMPTS A NATION TO OBLITERATE THE BASIS OF ITS LAWS

The contents of most societal laws are based upon religious beliefs. For instance, America gets its following laws from the Bible: Stealing is wrong (Exodus 20:15), murder is wrong (Exodus 20:13) and marriage between a man and a woman is right (Exodus 20:17). For our nation to form laws from Scripture regarding thievery, murder or marriage is commendable. But to do so should not be labeled as propagating a religion. That however is

exactly what is happening in America. Such is a ludicrous conclusion. To deem such as "establishing a religion" is to begin to throw out most laws as justices invoke the First Amendment to supposedly say that such laws are equivalent to the "establishment of religion." Such pretext is to invoke the First Amendment in a way that was never intended. It is to practice judicial eisegesis, to exercise the Constitution in a way devoid of context, authorial intent, and interpretive integrity. Such however is deemed a necessary obstacle to be overcome when scaling the mountain called exclusion.

To increasingly reason that every law of the land founded in Scripture should be overthrown because it represents an attempt to establish a religion is to destroy the corpus of American culture. It is to start down a slippery slope. When the Iowa Supreme Court imposed same sex marriage¹ they ruled that even though the majority of Iowans reject same-sex marriages, their convictions were based in religious dogma, and since the Iowa Constitution states, "The general assembly shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion" the opinions of the majority were conveniently deemed unconstitutional. When Christians led the way to abolish slavery, such was not viewed as a quest to establish a religion. Rather, it was and remains a manifestation of religious conviction underlying lawmaking by the State.²

Such reasonableness however seems to be rendered intemperate by zealous secularists who seem intent on unraveling the fabric of society. In that America's laws are intrinsically intertwined historically with the Torah, perhaps the exclusionists should start their own nation.

WAS NOT OUR SUPREME COURT FOUNDED ON THE BEDROCK OF MOUNT SINAI VERSUS THE QUICKSAND OF THE HILL?

Summarily on this point, the presupposition that American law is best served devoid of Scripture is to assert the supremacy of the mind over the will of God. It is to elevate Anthropology above Bibliology. It is to deem superior the finite, and inferior the infinite. It is to deem infallible the fallible and fallible the infallible. Such thinking is to prematurely fell a nation.



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Make no mistake, if the reason for a particular law in a country is based upon a religious teaching, one's upholding of that law is not tantamount to establishing a religion!

B. EXCLUDING RELIGION CHANGES FREEDOM OF RELIGION INTO FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

When Thomas Jefferson penned his famous separation of Church and State letter in 1802, he did so in the context and response to a query from the Baptists in Connecticut. They were concerned that their Congregationalist brothers were attempting to impose their brand of Protestantism on the whole of the State. The Congregationalist you see wanted to become the official religion of the State. Jefferson adroitly pointed out that the First Amendment was intended to keep that from happening: The State is not to officially sanction a religion he said. Clearly Jefferson's letter evidences his belief that the First Amendment was intended to keep the State from endorsing a particular religion. It had nothing to do with excluding the Church from the State. The constitutional idea of freedom of religion means the State is to neither compel nor exclude it. Here are three major hurdles one faces when attempting to change freedom of religion into freedom from religion:

1. One must twist the First Amendment. When attempting to exclude religion from the State one must interpret it contrary to how Jefferson did.
2. One must rewrite the Declaration of Independence. Therein exists not a freedom from religion viewpoint. To the contrary the document speaks about God: God granting unalienable rights, God creating man equally, etc. (as aligns with Gen. 1:26; Psa. 8:5-8). These God-granted attributes, are the very things that government should seek to defend in its citizenry—not exclude! Accordingly, to exclude religion from government is to unravel the main reason America fought for and established its independence in the first place.
3. One must ignore the fact that our government is to not prohibit the free exercise of religion. Such an edict is in contradiction to proponents of

exclusion. Perhaps exclusionists should attempt to rewrite the Constitution versus twisting its perspicuity.

Freedom *from* religion—exclusion—is an untenable position biblically, historically and constitutionally.

C. EXCLUDING RELIGION WRONGLY RESRICTS FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Advocates of exclusion not only run cross-grain to the Constitution's proviso that every citizen has an expressed, explicit right to exercise his or her religion, but that a citizen also has a right to free speech. In a Church-excluded culture a citizen has limited freedom of speech because he or she can no longer speak about religious matters. The end result of exclusion is that one cannot speak of the Bible, pray in public or for that matter hear a sermon in Church or on the radio! Suddenly, believers who are commanded by Scripture to "preach the Word" (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2; cf. Rom. 10:14) are in contempt of the State, impacting even the private practice of religion.

D. EXCLUDING RELIGION WAS NEVER ADOPTED BY THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Exclusion is a "view [that] was never adopted by the American people...but it is being imposed on our nation by the exercise of 'raw judicial power.'"³

E. EXCLUDING RELIGION REMOVES FROM THE GOVERNMENT GOD'S TEACHING ABOUT GOOD AND EVIL

Romans 13:4 states that government is "God's servant for your good." But how is that so if government excludes the Church from proclaiming the good news of salvation (cf. Romans 10:15)? Scripture also says that government is to "punish those who do evil and reward those who do good" (1 Peter 2:14). But how can government accomplish that if it will not allow religious teaching regarding what is good and what if evil?

HOW IS A CITIZEN TO LEARN MORAL STANDARDS IF GOD'S VOICE IS SILENCED BY THE STATE?



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F. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF GOD'S PEOPLE GIVING COUNSEL TO RULERS

The Bible is full of illustrations of God's people interacting with State leaders. Contrary to the exclusionist's viewpoint, this is standard operating procedure throughout all of history. Notice these:

- JOSEPH SERVED PHAROAH IN GENESIS 41:41
- MOSES REBUKED PHAROAH IN EXODUS 10:3
- MORDACAI FOUND FAVOR WITH KING AHASUERAS IN ESTHER 8:1
- JONAH BROUGHT THE KING OF NINEVAH TO REPENTANCE IN JONAH 3:6
- DANIEL COUNSELED KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR IN DANIEL 4:27
- JOHN THE BAPTIST REBUKED HEROD THE TETRIARCH IN LUKE 3:19
- PAUL REASONED WITH GOVERNOR FELIX IN ACTS 24:25
- PAUL WITNESSED TO CAESAR ACCORDING TO ACTS 27:24

The Bible knows nothing of excluding religious leaders from the State.

G. THE SPIRITUAL BASIS FOR THE EXCLUDE RELIGION VIEW

This is an obvious attempt to remove accountability to God. Such should surprise no one. The unregenerate have a natural proclivity to "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18) States John 3:19, "...men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil." To remove moral accountability to God is to invoke the moral disintegration of society.

CONCLUSION

What results when a government excludes Christianity?

A populous becomes largely devoid of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Nations result similar to those in the Middle East where totalitarian rulers are necessary because self-governance is the exception. Therein illustrated is the

cultural outcome of nations wherein God's laws are not written on the hearts of individuals. The converse of Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 10:16 becomes evident:

***I will put my law within them and on their heart
I will write it; and I will be their God, and they
shall be my people.***

Contextually, Jeremiah here speaks of Israel, who had failed under the outward nature of the old Mosaic Covenant. But in spite of her failure God was promising hope in the future: A New Covenant, with a spiritual, divine dynamic, wherein God the Holy Spirit would indwell believers during the Church Age and in the future Millennial Kingdom. We presently live during this New Covenant Age and per the parallel promises of Hebrews 10:6, The Holy Spirit will and does live in the life of the believer—internally enabling the follower of Christ to keep God's law:

***This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws
upon their heart, and on their mind I will write
them.***

Acts 1:8 adds to this truth, "And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you..." States 1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." God empowers believers to live holy lives in society—something every culture needs in order to live peaceably and to prosper.

The exclude-religion from the State view expunges the existence of the Holy Spirit from society, and with His restraint absent, all Hell breaks loose sooner or later.

Next week we will examine the wrong view of:

II. All Government is Evil and Demonic

¹ Varnum v. Brien, 753 N.W. 2nd 862 (Iowa Supreme Court, 2009), 64, n. 29.

² What came into law was the reality of the religious belief that every human being is created in God's image (Gen. 1:26; cf. Psa. 8:6-8); that being the case, no man has a right to rule over another.

³ Grudem, Wayne *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) p 34