



Church and State

You might think that since the State nailed the Founder of the religion to a cross, Christians would deplore government. Surely its murder of the Son of God renders it a thoroughly evil institution, the stronghold of Satan himself, let alone the martyrs it has made since. And that's to say nothing of the Biblical commands it breaks: "Thou shalt not steal," not even if, thinking thyself clever, thou re-namest it "taxation"; "Thou shalt not kill," no matter who giveth thee a uniform and medals and assureth thee it's patriotic; "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor," even if thou workest for the FBI.

But no. Sadly, Christians aren't any smarter than the rest of the herd, despite other Biblical commands to study, learn wisdom, and mature. Instead of calling government on its wickedness, they collaborate with it. Many openly ask God's blessing on it rather than its victims as it lies, steals, and murders.

I sat through another in a long line of such petitions at church earlier this year. Though the pastoral prayer was a short one, it was devoted almost entirely to the State. Astoundingly, the preacher beseeched the Almighty for "unity" during the elections, still some months off at that point. He didn't clarify who was to unite with what, but none of the choices were good. If he meant the electorate as a whole, why should those millions cast their lot together, given that government pits them against one another with its favored and disfavored groups? His request becomes not only illogical but profoundly offensive if he's speaking of the Church: should we who profess Christ unite with the State as it aborts unborn children, murders people in war, and lies profoundly, repeatedly, constantly - all while kidnapping and caging those who defy it?

As if this weren't enough, the pastor also asked God to bless politicians as they "lead us into the future." But only the Lord ought to be leading Christians anywhere, especially into the unfathomable future.

This particular church's bulletin includes quotes, whether from Scripture or secular sources, that pertain to the sermon's theme. Ironically, one of that week's came from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I wonder if he ever prayed for unity with the Nazis or asked God's watchcare over them as they led Germans to a horrific future.

To the Church's eternal shame, the pastor's prayer was usual rather than unique. Anyone who attends services regularly has no doubt squirmed through similar statism. [Romans 13](#) with its "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities" is a perennial favorite of the modern American clergy — but when





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was the last time you listened to an exposition on [Judges 9](#) and its comparison of government to a worthless thorn-bush? Many churches elevate “patriotism,” by which they mean “nationalism,” to holy status: they prominently display the American flag, often near the Communion table as though it’s part of the sacrament, and they may even steal time from worshipping Christ to pledge allegiance that belongs to Him alone to the “flag and the Republic for which it stands.”

But the Bible that some churches still claim to honor condemns the State. Repeatedly and vehemently. Sometimes that condemnation is as obvious as [Judges 9](#) or [I Samuel 8](#)’s list of government’s evils, from the wealth it steals to its corruption and the poverty it causes.

Other passages are subtler. The minor prophets excoriate government, often without identifying it by name. [A passage from Habakkuk](#) is typical: “Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin!” Then there are the myriad verses that prohibit murder, theft, and lying – all so endemic to the State that no government has ever survived without them. Peter even implies that believers cannot affiliate with government when [he says](#) Christians shouldn’t be “murderers, thieves, evildoers or busybodies in other men’s matters.” And the Golden Rule rules out coercion: no man wants others to compel him, so he may not compel them.

Indeed, the Bible as a whole commands us to deal with others as God does with us: in love. But the State knows nothing of love. It is force and force alone, actual or threatened. Love requires freedom; it cannot co-exist with compulsion. Ergo, we must choose whether we’ll walk Christ’s path of love or goose-step to the State’s coercion – especially today, as the American government openly tortures men and strangles liberty.

So why doesn’t the Bible plainly forbid government? Why isn’t there an Eleventh Commandment, “Thou shalt not rule thy neighbor”? Indeed, rather than banning government, some passages seem to condone the State. The Lord interests Himself in Israel’s government to the point that [He directs Samuel in choosing King Saul’s successor](#). He assures us that rulers exercise power, however tyrannical, with His permission ([Prov. 8:15](#), [Prov. 21:1](#), [Dan. 2:21](#)). And the New Testament urges us to pray “[for all that are in authority](#)” – a command that pastors who uphold the State always and immediately cite.

Intriguingly, we find the same ambiguity with regard to another great evil: chattel slavery. The Bible not only condemns the cruelty and violence that slavery necessitates, it also orders “[be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted](#),” treating others as we wish to be treated. I haven’t met the man who yearns for another to enslave him, so God apparently created us to live free of both personal and political slavery. And yet again, some Scripture seems to condone slavery. The Mosaic law contained provisions for [life-long slavery](#); both [Paul](#) and [Peter](#) exhort enslaved Christians to serve their masters faithfully – and Peter says that applies even when masters are abusive; [Paul’s letter to Philemon](#) never tells him to liberate Onesimus.

Still, I doubt those Christians who endlessly recite [Romans 13](#) to excuse their statism are about to rush out and buy slaves. They flutter in horror at chattel slavery while idolizing political slavery.

Why?

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