

## The Christian and Civil Government (7<sup>th</sup>)

(Today we continue looking at the relationship of civil government and the Christian as taught in the Scriptures. Today's study is centered around II Samuel 23:3 and Psalm 82:3-4.)

Our last study was a break from reviewing the scriptural references in the confessions to give an overview of the issues and the difficulties involved in seeking to draw the line of demarcation between that which belongs to Caesar and that which belongs to God. Today we will continue with where we stopped with the fifth session of this subject matter.

Previously, we reviewed I Peter 2:13-17 regarding civil government because it too was supplied in the confessions regarding civil government. Now we will consider II Samuel 23:3 which says, "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." This passage is generally referenced with the second article of the confessions; oddly, it is identified with the first article of the *Cumberland Presbyterian Confession* of August, 2001. Since the *Westminster* confession and the *1689 London Baptist* confession are essentially the same for Article Two, I will quote the first part of the article from the Baptist confession.

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto; in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain justice and peace," [the *Westminster* supplies *piety* prior to justice and peace] "according to the wholesome laws of each kingdom and commonwealth" [the *Westminster* does not include *kingdom*].

As you can see, both Protestants and Baptists affirm that it is lawful for a Christian "to accept and execute the office of a magistrate." Equally, this would extend to the premise that a Christian may lawfully hold any position in civil government. The passage under consideration, affirms that not only a Christian should be "just, ruling in the fear of God," but that this should be the character of anyone who rules over men. Notice that the verse does not say that he should be a believer in the Scriptures or that he ought to be a believer, but that he must be just. In other words, he must rule in a just and equitable way in all situations. Sadly, too often this is not the case. When wicked men without any morals are in authority unjust decisions and actions are the results. Often unrighteous laws are established and imposed on society by unjust rulers. However, even under such situations the Christian is to obey those laws unless it is in violation to the truth of the Bible. Obviously, a Christian or just person cannot execute unjust rulings established by civil government. (This is why those in such positions should never accept gifts, contributions, or assistance by anyone, but that is another subject. See Exodus 23:6-9.) When a Christian who is in leadership position or rules in civil government he cannot support, defend, or advance laws or regulations that are in violation of God's Word. For example, a Christian judge cannot rule in favor of abortion because it is murder. A judge may profess to be a Christian, but a Christian is one who loves Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Jesus further said, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me," John 14:21, 24.

The passage in II Samuel twenty-three says that the ruler is not only to rule justly, but he is to rule "in the fear of God." Obviously, David was speaking in the context of the God of the Old Testament—Jehovah. However, the general understanding of society in unchristian nations is that there is a supreme being that is to be honored and worshiped, and that moral standards of righteousness are to be maintained. Voluminous quotes could be multiplied to support this. John Gill gives some quotes from heathen writers to maintain that God is known of all men. Here are some of them.

Cicero observes, "There is no nation so wild and savage, whose minds are not imbued with the opinion of the gods; many entertain wrong notions of them; but all suppose and own the divine power and nature."

Seneca, "There never was a nation so dissolute, and abandoned, so lawless and immoral, as to believe there is no God."

Plutarch, "If you go over the earth you may find cities without walls, letters, kings, houses, wealth, and money, devoid of theatres and schools; but a city without temples and Gods, and where is no use of prayers, oaths, and oracles, nor sacrifices to obtain good or avert evil, no man ever saw." *Body of Divinity*, "Of the Being of God," p. 1.

As stated before many, many more quotes could be supplied to substantiate this truth. Yes, there are some who profess to believe that there is no God, but the Christian knows that the Scriptures are true when it declares of the whole human race "that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them," Romans 1:19. Furthermore, Romans 2:14-15 affirms that the Gentiles which did not have the law as given by God to Moses "do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscious also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." Therefore, unbelieving rulers can and often do rule justly in the society in which they live seeking to enforce moral standards and execute just penalties for the crimes committed. It is generally accepted by all that murder, theft, and other such like actions are wrong and are to be punished. Also, much could be supplied to show that generally in every nation it is wrong to violate the liberty of conscience especially with regard to religious worship.

However, the text under consideration (II Samuel 23:3), affirms that rulers "over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God," but it does not teach that civil government is to be connected with the congregation of God or to rule within (or over) the New Testament assembly in any way. Even though David spoke of the "everlasting covenant" that God made with him in verse five, this covenant includes more than the New Testament congregation.

Psalms 82:3-4 is also referenced with II Samuel 23:3 by both Baptists and Protestants to exhibit somewhat how rulers are to judge in a just way. These verses say, "Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked." It is evident that civil rulers are to judge the poor and needy on the same scale and standard as the rich and noble. However, one has to read into these verses to infer that they teach that civil magistrates or civil rulers are to establish religious truth or that they have power to call synods or be at present in business of the congregation of God. When God instructed the congregation at Corinth by the writings of Paul to exclude the fornicator in chapter five, it was not suggested that Gallio (the Roman deputy of Achaia, Acts 18:12) be included. In fact, Gallio had no interest in the religion or laws of either the Jews or Christians, Acts 18:14-16. Furthermore, Paul rebuked the congregation at Corinth for going to civil government to settle their differences, I Corinthians 6:1-8. It is a sad day when professing Christians (even husbands and wives) go to civil governments when there is a difference among them instead of being submissive to the ruling of the congregation of God. See also Matthew 18:15-17. Time will not allow us to enlarge on this topic, but it is clear from these passages that there is no hint that civil government is to be in authority or involved in any form in the house of God.

This concludes our study for today. The Lord willing we plan to address the issues of the Christian and civil government and their connection with war.