



Government and the Believer

July 4, 2004

By Rev. David Koch

Before I get into God's word today, let me urge you to call or write about the marriage amendment act that will be voted on soon. There is information about this in the bulletin. Maybe you don't think as a Christian you should do that. Well this morning we are going to explore what God's word has to say about the role of the government and the role of the believer.

Introduction:

Proverbs 14:34

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

We understand from reading scripture that we are to directly impact that world in which we live. We are in the world but not of it.

The founding fathers of America believed this. Many of those men in early government not only prayed and sought God for wisdom in the decisions they made, but they ran for office, got involved and served the other people around them.

On this Independence Day, we thank God for the grace He has lavished on this country. We thank God for the sacrifices that have been made to secure our freedoms. As we look at our nation, it is easy to detect the sin which erodes the spiritual and moral fiber of America. Sin disgusts God and brings disgrace to us. We can also see threads of righteousness that will exalt this nation and bring glory to God.

Here is a short litany of national sins that are detestable according to God's word. The sin of aborting our unborn children, the sin of homosexuality, the sin of turning to false gods that people who come here freely bring with them, the sin of seeking answers in the occult, the sin of unmarried people cohabiting together, and I could go on and on. There is the righteous side where we are involved in a war against terrorism and its evils. We are fighting to liberate people who have been dominated by regimes that are evil at heart. If we as the followers of Christ, don't speak out about such things, who will?

What should be our response to the state? What should be our role toward government as Christians? The Bible gives clear direction as to what our role as the church should be.

I want to direct your attention to Romans chapter 13 this morning. It has a lot to say about government and the church and the function the church should have in society and on the government.

Understand the conditions in Paul's time when he wrote this were very different from ours. Historically, Rome was ruled by an elite group that was not a democracy like we enjoy, nor a monarchy, but an oligarchy, which is a small

elite group of persons who had authority to make laws and rule the entire community. The Caesars got to power by killing the people who got in their way. In those times, the vast majority of people went along with things, or else. In Rome there was a unique group of people, the Jewish people. The Romans respected the Jews because they were industrious people. They gave the Jews a break on the taxes they had to pay because the Jews had a temple tax they paid. They were freed from many of the Romans religious obligations and rights and they were free to worship Jehovah God.

At first the Christians in Rome were looked at by the Romans as a somewhat extreme Jewish sect. The Romans were not interested in Jewish or Christian theology, and as long as they didn't cause too much trouble, they were OK with that.

As time went on Christians put some distance between their beliefs and the beliefs of the Jews. Jews began to resent and resist Christian teaching and Christians became ostracized from the Jews.

As a result the Christians lost the protection of the Jewish people and became exposed. They lost the privileges they had and were out on a limb so to speak. This became a very dangerous situation for them. They were misunderstood by Jews and Romans. It was a tough place to be. Even though their political situation was very different from ours today here in America, Paul wrote to them with specific instructions as to how they were to respond. I believe that we can apply these truths to our own lives in responding to the government under which we live.

We see two dominate themes – the role of the State and the responsibilities of the believer.

1 Tim. 2:1-4

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

I. THE ROLE OF THE STATE or GOVERNMENT

There are elements that the government has to deal with to provide order where there is disorder. For that to happen there has to be some kind of muscle. In Romans 13, God has ordained societal government to do two things:

- 1. Reward those who do the right things**
- 2. Punish those who do wrong**

In Romans 13, verse 3 & 4, we see that government has the authority to reward righteousness and those who do good, and it also has the authority to punish those who do wrong. When government punishes those who do wrong it isn't just upholding the laws, it is bringing that person under the wrath of God.

The judgment and wrath of God are not just stored up for eternity. We can incur that here and now by

breaking laws of legitimate government and doing what is wrong.

Authority and structure have to be in place if we are going to live and survive. Christians who understand this concept have a high view of the state.

If Christians respect Government authority as given by God they also will pray for those in authority. They realize those in authority are there to create an orderly environment which allows people freedom to discover, know, worship and serve the living God. That is what government is supposed to be doing and why it is ordained by God. That is why we respect it. If society is going to survive, it needs God's authority delegated through divinely ordained structures.

II. THE ROLE OF THE BELIEVER

God created individuals as well as society. We are to honor and respect government because it is appointed by God.

Romans 13:1

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Three ways we need to respond properly to government

1. **SUBMIT TO AUTHORITY** - Everyone must submit him or herself. A submissive attitude is the appropriate attitude of a Christian to the societal structure that God has ordained as government.

Two reasons for this are because of fear and respect.

We have fear because of the consequences of breaking the law. We also respect those who God has put in place. Because of these two factors, we respond properly.

2. **HAVE A COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE** – (Romans 13:6-7)

Our attitude should not be complaining or trying to break the system, but one of glad and willing cooperation. Remember the situation these Christians were living was very different and more difficult than anything we know here!

3. **HAVE A PRAYERFUL ATTITUDE** – (I Tim 2)

We are instructed to pray for everyone including kings and those in authority over us. Why should we do that? So they will govern in a way that men and women will be free to worship and live and serve God.

It is much easier to be skeptical, critical, and cynical than to pray for those in authority over us.

One of the great needs in the church today is to repent of prayerlessness for those in authority over us.

Here is the big question. What is the correct relationship of the church to the state?

- Should the church dominate the state?
- Should the state dominate the church?
- Should the church and state have mutually exclusive roles?
- Should the church and state have mutually influential roles?

Should the church dominate the state?

One of the darkest times in history for the church was during a period of 300 years around the 13th century. The Pope wrote a letter in which he said it was right and proper for the church to put heretics to death. It was permissible to bring them to recant through torture.

This time was a time when the church dominated the state. The inquisition was an attempt to impose belief and behavior on people, and you cannot force people to believe in what they do not believe and practice what they do not want to practice.

When the church tries to dominate the state it does not achieve its desired end.

Should the state dominate the church?

There have been attempts by totalitarianism from the right and left to dominate the church. The situation in this scenario never gives people the liberty and freedom as a matter of conscience to worship and serve God the way I Tim 2 advocates.

Should the state and church have mutually exclusive roles?

Should there be a wall of separation between them, over which neither should pass?

There are strong advocates for this among both Christians and secularists today. Some Christians say that the task of the church is to deal with spiritual issues only and the church has no business participating in civic affairs. There are secularists who would agree and say that the church should leave civic things up to the politicians.

The larger government becomes, the more it imposes on private life. The more the church does its job, the more it affects the moral stance of individuals. The moral stance of individuals should affect their political affiliations. It is unrealistic that church and state would have exclusive roles.

Should the church and state should have mutually influential roles?

The church should be persuasive on government as far as the things that really matter are concerned.

Here are some specifics that we as a church should be speaking out to government about.

- Resisting evil
- Promoting human welfare
- Providing freedom

The Bible speaks to these issues relentlessly, forcibly and constantly. How do we do that?

1. Clearly enunciate Biblical principles.

2. Limit social action to causes with clear Biblical mandate.

3. Make sure our speech and attitude are in line with the fruit of the Spirit

Conclusion:

We have a God given responsibilities as God's people.

1. We need to clearly enunciate Biblical principles about evil, human welfare, and freedom.
2. We should be praying for our president, for our senators, and congressmen and women, for our governor, and mayor.
3. We should be voting. That is a way to enunciate Biblical principles to those in authority over us. If you haven't registered to vote, you need to do so, and then you need to look at where the candidates stand on Biblical issues.

We should be letting those who represent us in government know how we stand on issues. On Monday, July 12, we are being asked to call our senators and let them know how we stand on the issue of MARRIAGE between one man and one woman (Marriage Amendment Act). Look in the bulletin and you will see how our senators plan to vote on this issue.