

GOD'S TWO KINGDOMS

Part One

God's Earthly Kingdom

A Study By

Gary Ray Branscome

The LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king. // The kingdom of God does not come in a way that is seen...for, the kingdom of God is within you. (Isaiah 33:22, Luke 17:20-21)

Unlike other nations, Israel was to be **one nation under God**. God was to be the head of both church and state. In short, the nation of Israel was to be God's kingdom on earth! In contrast, God's heavenly kingdom, the kingdom that we all become citizens of through faith in Christ, is not a kingdom that can be seen. It cannot be seen because no one can look into someone else's heart and, therefore, no one can see who is a citizen of that kingdom, and who is not (Luke 17:20-21).

God's government, the government that He provided for the nation of Israel, was divided into two realms, one political, the other religious. The political realm was an instrument of God's wrath; in the sense that He worked through it to judge His people, enforce His Law and punish crime. In contrast, the priesthood was an instrument of God's mercy; in that God used it to show His people their sins, teach them the necessity of repentance, and give them His promise of mercy. In the third chapter of Galatians, the Apostle Paul tells us that God's grace never came through keeping the Law or sacrificing animals. Instead it came through believing God's promise of forgiveness (Gal. 3:17). Under God's plan of government the political and the religious realms worked together as a schoolmaster to bring His people to repentance and faith in His promise of forgiveness (Gal. 3:24).

By requiring animal sacrifice, God taught the people that forgiveness is not cheap. And, because He instituted those sacrifices as a type of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, He counted faith in the promise of forgiveness that He had connected with that sacrifice as faith in Christ (Luke 11:50-51, Gal. 3:17, 24). David trusted in that promise, saying, "I have placed my faith in your grace [mercy]; my heart will rejoice in your salvation" (Psalm 13:5). And, that promise of grace (mercy) is why God said, "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). The actual sacrifices were just a means of giving people God's promise of mercy and forgiveness.

Having said that, I want to make it clear that in ancient Israel church and state were separate; not separate in the modern sense – which would separate sacred from secular – but separate in the way God wants them to be separate. Yes, there was an official priesthood, which, by calling God’s people to repentance while giving them His promise of forgiveness, carried out the same function that the church does today. But, it was not a tax supported “state church”. It is true that the people were to give a tithe. But, that was not a tax, because they were not forced to pay it, and they were not punished by the government if it was not paid (Malachi 3:8). By providing for the church to be supported independently of the state God made it impossible for the government to control the church by threatening to cut off its funds. At the same time, by making the priesthood hereditary He made it difficult for rulers to place their cronies in control. That kept the state from controlling the church. Furthermore, even though priests were to function as judges by not giving the priests the authority to raise armies, arrest criminals, punish crime, or make laws He kept the church from controlling the state. That is Biblical separation of church and state!

In contrast: By redefining the Second Amendment phrase, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion” to mean, “separation of church and state,” American courts have placed that phrase in opposition to the words, “or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”. Having done that, the courts are using the Second Amendment to deny American Christians the “free exercise” of their religious beliefs. That is why, atheist teachers and professors are free to attack Christian religious beliefs in the classroom, but Christian teachers and professors are not free to expose and refute those attacks. If Americans really had religious freedom, a Christian congressman could stand up in Congress and say, “I want to introduce this bill to stop abortion, because abortion is contrary to what the Bible teaches;” and everyone would say, “Put it to a vote, he has just as much right to his opinion as anyone else”. Now, if that statement seems shocking to you, it just goes to show how much of our freedom has been taken away.

The courts are using their twisted interpretation of the Second Amendment to create a secular state, and that is totally contrary to the will of God. In the name of religious neutrality atheism is being made the state religion. In contrast, the Bible says, “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow,” (Philippians 2:10). God not only wants those who rule His people to be subject to the Ten Commandments, He wants them to take His Word seriously (Deuteronomy 17:15-20). Moreover, He wants the laws of the land to condemn and punish political corruption, bribe taking, and the abuse of power by rulers (Deuteronomy 16:18-20). And, making rulers subject to the law in that way is what sets a republic apart from all other forms of government.

God has assigned the job of education to parents and to the church (Deuteronomy 6:7, Leviticus 10:11). For that reason, government control of education violates the Biblical principle of separation of church and state. Every dictatorship wants to control education, and state control of education is being used to indoctrinate our children in the doctrines of atheist religion. That is why keeping government from controlling education is an important safeguard to freedom that needs to be restored.

That being said, I want to stress the fact that God never intended for the power of government to be used in a vain attempt to make men righteous (Romans 3:20). On the contrary, the Bible only authorizes government to punish criminal behavior, not wrong thoughts, words, or even hate speech. While the Bible condemns hate, and actual hate speech is satanic, you can see how our government has twisted things around so that condemning sin – which is part of the free exercise of our religious beliefs – is now called hate speech. Likewise, even though cruelty to animals is wrong, and should be condemned by the church, governments who punish people for alleged cruelty to animals are abusing their authority and violating the Biblical separation of church and state. Animals exist for the benefit of man, and God has not given them any rights. In fact, we are even free to kill and eat them (Acts 11:5-9). In short, in the name of religious neutrality our government is being turned against God's Word and our freedoms are being taken away. [The only legitimate laws regulating how many animals can be killed will not be designed to protect animals, but to protect a God given resource from greedy men who would hunt animals to extinction.]

Some final thoughts that I want to share have to do with circumcision and with laws regarding cleanliness, or restricting what foods were to be eaten. Laws having to do with food or cleanliness had nothing to do with the priesthood, or with the government. Although they clearly had some practical value, those rules created a cultural barrier between the children of Israel and their neighbors. For example, how could Jews mix with non-Jews if they could not even eat the same foods? I am not saying that mixing did not happen, I am just saying that those rules made it less likely to happen. And, that is why those laws were later abolished once they were no longer needed and cultural barriers to the spread of the Gospel needed to be removed (Colossians 2:16).

Although circumcision was given to Abraham as a seal of the righteousness that he already had through faith, God wanted that seal of His covenant given to Abraham's infant male descendants (Romans 4:11, Genesis 17:11-14). Then, once the state of Israel was established, the system of government that God instituted

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Part Two

God's People Under Worldly Government

A Study By

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The elders of Israel... came to Samuel at Ramah, And said... appoint a king to judge us like all the other nations... And the LORD said to Samuel, Listen to the voice of the people... for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them. (1Samuel 8:4-7).

In part one I explained that unlike other nations, Israel was to be God's kingdom on earth. His Law was to be the highest authority in the land, an authority that every ruler was to obey. In short, God was to be the head of both church and state. Furthermore, even though the Law allowed the people to have a king, if they did place a king in authority he was to make a copy of God's Law, and be subject to that Law (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). That fact makes it clear that when the people came to Samuel, asking for a king, they were not asking for the kind of king that the Law of Moses provided for, but a king "like all the other nations" had. That is, a king who was above the Law, a king who was lord and master over the people, a king who could make the people his slaves (1Samuel 8:11-18). In other words, a king who was a law unto himself, a king who followed a double standard exempting himself from the laws he imposed on the people.

Because the people had rejected God as their king (1Sam. 8:7), during the period of the kings they did not have the government that God had given them, but a government that differed little from the governments of other nations. Nevertheless, they still had the Word of God, the priesthood was there to instruct the people, and God was ultimately still in control, just as He is in control of all nations (Psalm 103:19). Some people think of this control as God's third kingdom, a kingdom of His power by which He rules over those nations that reject Him.

Before the time of Samuel the Law of Moses provided a constitution for Israel. The fact that rulers were to be servants of the people, who were themselves subject to the Ten Commandments, was a source of freedom. The commandment, "Thou shall not kill" gave the people the right to life. And, because involuntary

servitude is a way of stealing a person's labor, the commandment, "Thou shall not steal" gave them the right to liberty and property. That constitution forbade rulers to take bribes and pervert justice. Yet that is exactly what the sons of both Eli and Samuel did (Deuteronomy 16:18-19). And, because the law was not enforced, because the sons of Eli and Samuel were not punished, the people lost confidence in their constitution, and like many people today, assumed that a ruler with more Godlike power would be more Godlike (1Samuel 8:3-4). Yet nothing could be further from the truth. That is why Samuel (at God's behest) warned the people saying (in part), "He will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive groves, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your grain, and of your vineyards, and give it to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your best young men, and your donkeys, and make them do his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks: and you will be his slaves" (1Samuel 8:9 -17).

Because Samuel's warning was ignored, God's people were ruled by a succession of kings, who, with few exceptions, committed one crime after another. Saul attempted to murder David, and because a priest helped David Saul had eighty-five priests along with all of the women and children in the city of Nob murdered (1Samuel 22:5-19). He also put many of the Gibeonites to death for no reason (2Samuel 21:1-3). David seduced Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah. Solomon married many wives, contrary to the Law of Moses, and allowed those wives to promote idolatry.

Baasha acquired the throne of Israel by murdering Nadab, and as soon as he came to power killed all the descendants of King Jeroboam (1Kings 25-29). Because Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, his wife Jezebel had Naboth falsely accused and put to death (1Kings 21:1-25). Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, having seized power after the death of her husband and son, had all of David's male heirs except one put to death (2Kings 11:1-2). Menahem, having come to power by assassination, sacked the town of Tirzah and ripped open all of the pregnant women, simply because the town would not open its gates to him (2Kings 15:13-16). King Manasseh promoted idolatry, burned his son as an offering, and filled Jerusalem with the innocent blood of those he slaughtered (2Kings 21:1-17).

What I have said is only a sampling of all the wickedness done by those who ruled Israel during that time; rulers who ignored the Ten Commandments. Many of those kings committed murder while promoting immorality and idolatry, and most Americans think that could never happen today. But, it is happening right before our eyes. And, it will happen in any nation that does not require its rulers to obey the Ten Commandments. Just as rulers then promoted idolatry, our government

pays teachers and professors to promote the idolatry of evolution, [the idea that nature is our creator]. Just as rulers then committed murder, our government licenses doctors to murder babies by abortion. Just as rulers then promoted immorality, our government pays teachers to promote immorality in the name of sex-education, while passing laws aimed at forcing the people to accept immorality and sexual perversion. At the same time, our churches have drifted so far from God's will that many churchgoers see nothing wrong with our government doing those things, think that is the way God wants it, defend the antichristian separation of God from government, and assume that requiring rulers to follow the Ten Commandments (like the Bible says) would result in tyranny (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

American law has its roots in English law, and English law is rooted in the Ten Commandments. Going back to the origin of English law, we find that King Alfred (Alfred the Great, 849-899 AD), who ruled the West Saxons from 871 to 899 AD (and was fairly well educated for his day) set in place the laws that are the foundation of English and American law. Those laws included the Ten Commandments along with other portions of the Book of Exodus. Moreover, Blackstone's "Commentaries on the Laws of England" remained the standard textbook for American law students for over a century after American independence, and would still be used if secular judges had not found a way to circumvent its moral influence on our law.

Commenting on the fact that the Ten Commandments form the very basis of Western law, lawyer and columnist David Limbaugh once said. "We should be aware that other Biblical laws were also foundational to our system of jurisprudence. In the Book of Exodus following the Ten Commandments are further laws, sometimes collectively referred to as the Book of the Covenant. As a lawyer I was fascinated to discover just how much of our law - torts, contracts, property and criminal law - is obviously traceable to this section of scripture." (From his newspaper column, used with permission.)

[Note: King Alfred saw divine law as a source of first principles, and human law as a reflection of divine law. ("From Alfred to Henry III", by Christopher Brooke, page 45)]

The Origin of Congregational Worship

Because of widespread wickedness during the reign of King Manasseh, God's prophets warned of a coming judgment, saying, "Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah that both the ears of whoever hears of it will tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the

house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down” (2Kings 21:12-13). However, a few years prior to the fulfillment of that prophesy Judah experienced a return to God under King Josiah (2Kings 22-23). And because of that revival, the Jews who were carried captive into Babylon found the immorality and idolatry of that city repugnant. Therefore, instead of being assimilated into the culture of Babylon they formed communities of their own, and inside those communities set apart places where they could gather for worship. Jews could go to those places to pray at any time. The men would often gather there at the end of the day to discuss questions of how God’s Law should be applied to various situations that they had encountered during the day. And they would regularly come together on the Sabbath for joint prayer and worship.

Some of the older men of the community (elders) would be chosen to oversee these community gathering places, and when they were chosen they were ordained as a ceremonial way of publicly investing them with responsibility (Titus 1:5). These lay elders formed a council. They were responsible to the men of the congregation, and each year one of them was chosen to preside at their meetings. It was the job of those elders to see that the building was taken care of, lead the Sabbath worship, and during the week teach the boys how to read, instruct them in the laws and culture of Israel, and have them memorize long portions of Scripture. For that reason, those synagogues were said to have a threefold purpose: 1- a house of fellowship, 2- a house of worship, and 3- a house of learning. As time went on the elders who had actually lived in Israel began to die off, so the congregations began to hire professional teachers (rabbis) who had been trained in the laws and traditions of Israel. Those teachers taught the boys during the week, and led worship on the Sabbath. And, even though a rabbi who held that position was an elder of the congregation, because he was hired by the lay elders of the congregation he was answerable to them. And, because being paid by the congregation invested him with responsibility, he was not ordained.

The elders of the congregation were referred to as the elders, pastors, overseers, or rulers of the congregation (Acts 18:8). However, the fact that they were called rulers did not mean that they could boss the others around any more than giving the head of the local garden club the title “president” means that he can raise an army. Their word for ruler took its meaning from the context in which it was used. And, in the synagogue the elders were answerable to the men of the congregation, not lords over them (1Peter 5:3). Moreover, each synagogue and community of God’s people was a part of the nation of Israel as a whole, and thus a part of God’s earthly kingdom.

GOD'S TWO KINGDOMS

Part Three God's Heavenly Kingdom

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At the time of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. // The kingdom of God does not come in a way that is seen: Nor will people say, look here! or look there! for the kingdom of God is within you. (Daniel 2:44, Luke 17:20-21)

Israel was to be **one nation under God**, a nation in which the Word of God was the highest authority. However, time after time that nation turned away from God. And, at the time of Samuel they clamored for a king "*like all the other nations*" had. Under those kings things went from bad to worse until the nation was carried into captivity. After seventy years of captivity many returned to Israel, and by the time of Christ the people were expecting the Messiah, foretold by the prophet Daniel, to set up a kingdom that would "never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44 and 9:24-27). Now, that is exactly what happened. However, the kingdom that Christ set up was not an earthly kingdom that conquers by weapons and armies, but a kingdom that cannot be seen (Luke 17:20-21, 2Corinthians 10:4); a kingdom that is referred to over sixty times in the New Testament. [If you have Bible software, search for the phrase "kingdom of God".]

Even though there were many believers in Israel before Christ began His ministry, because the religious leaders were teaching false doctrine God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus by calling the people to repentance and faith in the coming Messiah (John 1:27, 29, Mark 1:3-4). We become citizens of God's heavenly kingdom through repentance and faith (John 3:3-5). That is what Jesus was talking about when He told Nicodemus that he needed to be born of water and the Spirit. The word "water" was a reference to the baptism of repentance, the emphasis being on repentance (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3, Acts 2:38). The word "Spirit" alluded to the fact that it is the Spirit alone who brings us to faith in Christ (1Corinthians 12:3, Romans 10:17). So I repeat, we are born again into God's heavenly kingdom through repentance and faith in Christ.

"Now after John had been put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time has come, and the

kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15). Notice that Jesus did not say that His kingdom would be established at a future time, but that, “The time has come, and the kingdom of God is at hand”. All believers, all of us, are citizens of that kingdom through faith in Christ. As citizens of God’s kingdom, we are his ambassadors (2Corinthians 5:20). And, as His representatives, all that we do should be done to His glory (1Corinthians 10:31). However, working for His glory does not just mean doing church work. On the contrary, we should work for God’s glory wherever God has placed us. If you are a laborer, do an honest job, one that makes your employer glad that you are a Christian. If you are a businessman, conduct your business in a way that honors Christ. And, if God has placed you in government, use your position to honor Him, in the same way Joseph, Daniel and Esther did.

Before going further, I want to make it clear that the kingdom of God is not the same thing as the visible church. Visible church organizations and congregations are a part of God’s earthly kingdom. While only believers are citizens of God’s heavenly kingdom, earthly churches can and often do include some who have never really placed their faith in Christ. Since we cannot look into anyone’s heart in order to see if they really have faith, we cannot see who is actually a citizen of God’s heavenly kingdom and who is not. For that reason, God’s heavenly kingdom is sometimes called the invisible church (Luke 17:20). However, even though a person can become a citizen of God’s heavenly kingdom through faith in Christ without being the member of any church organization, God does not want it to stay that way. For that reason, God instituted baptism as a way of joining every new believer to His earthly kingdom. No one can baptize himself (at least it would not be valid if he did). So we must all be baptized by someone who is already the member of a visible Christian church, and baptism joins us to that church.

God’s heavenly kingdom did not first come into existence on the day of Pentecost, but on that day power from God was poured out for the purpose of world evangelism (Luke 16:16, Mark 9:1). That power is the power by which people are brought to faith in Christ, and on that day “about three thousand souls” who believed were added to the congregation through baptism (Acts 2:41). These first believers were almost exclusively Jews. Following the Babylonian captivity Jews had moved into countries all around the Mediterranean. They had established synagogues in those countries, and many Jews who had grown up in those countries wanted to return to Israel before their death so they could be buried in the land of their ancestors. The Book of Acts tells us that on the day of Pentecost, “there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven, living in Jerusalem,” (Acts 2:5). And, when the Spirit began to speak through the Apostles, those devout Jews each heard what was being said in the language of the country in which they

had been born and raised (Acts 2:8). Many of those Jewish believers may have taken the good news of forgiveness in Christ back to the communities in which they had been raised. As the Apostle Paul traveled from country to country he preached in synagogues that were already established in those countries (Acts 17:1-2 and 10-11). The Epistle of James was addressed “to the twelve tribes that are scattered among the nations,” (James 1:1). And, we know from the introduction to the Epistle of James, and a reference to Christ in that Epistle, that he was writing to Jews who believed that Christ was the Messiah (James 1:1 and 2:1). According to some estimates, as many as one third of the residents of Jerusalem may have been Christian by the time the Romans destroyed the city. And, we know that those Christians escaped the horrors of that destruction by fleeing the city, as Christ had warned them to do (Luke 21:20-21).

While those Jewish believers no longer had any need to offer animal sacrifices – since those sacrifices were only intended to point forward to Christ – they continued to worship in the temple and follow laws of diet and cleanliness that gentile believers were not required to follow (Acts 2:46 Acts 3:1, Acts 15:1-20, Acts 22:17, Acts 21:24-27, Galatians 2:1-14). And, when they formed congregations of their own (the first Christian congregations) those congregations were patterned after the synagogues they had grown up in. In each congregation (as in the synagogue) some of the older men (elders) were chosen to oversee the affairs of the congregation. Those elders were answerable to the men of the congregation, and if the elders hired a paid teacher (Rabbi) he was answerable to those elders, and to the men of the congregation (Ephesians 4:11). Nevertheless, by the end of the first century subtle changes were morphing this congregational system of church government into an episcopal system. I believe the change took place like this. Originally all of the elders of a congregation were referred to as overseers (bishops), and each year those elders would choose one of their number to preside at their meetings. The first change resulted in the elder chosen to preside being chosen to that office for life, instead of just for one year. Then the title of bishop (overseer) came to be reserved for the presiding elder alone. Then, as congregations grew, because the people needed a place of worship that was in walking distance of their homes, alternative meeting places (satellite congregations) were set up. And, the elder (priest) who led worship in each of those satellite congregations was answerable to the bishop of the home congregation. [The word “priest” was derived from the Greek word for elder, which is “presbuteros”. If you pronounce that word with a long “e”, you will see the relationship of the two words.]

Just as the first Christian congregations were organized like the synagogues of the time, their worship services followed a formal liturgy similar to what was

followed in the synagogue. Prayers would be read or recited by the congregation; psalms would be sung or chanted, portions of Scripture would be read or recited with explanations, and the people would be instructed in God's Word (Luke 4:15-20). Changes were made, but those changes consisted of what prayers would be prayed, what psalms would be sung, and so forth not in the basic format. And, one of the first changes was the use of the Lord's Prayer. Some people make a big deal of the fact that Christ gave that prayer as a lesson on how to pray. However, they fail to see that the way that lesson was taught to the people was by having them use it in worship. In fact, the use of plural words in that prayer, "**Our** Father," "forgive **us**," "trespass against **us**," "lead **us**," "deliver **us**" all tell us that prayer was intended to be recited by a group. That is also supported by Jesus' words, "When you pray, say," (Luke 11:1-4).

Another change that took place, at least by the end of the first century, was the replacement of the Shema with the Apostle's Creed. The Shema (which is central to Jewish worship, and has been called the Jewish creed) consists of that portion of Scripture that begins with the words, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Apostle's Creed was adopted because of a heresy that denied that Christ had a physical body — that heresy portrayed Christ as a phantom person who only appeared to suffer and only appeared to die, and it is denounced in 1John 4:2-3 and 2John seven. In affirming Christ's humanity that Creed summarizes six of the seven historical events relating to our salvation. Creation, Christ's virgin birth, His suffering and death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His future return. Only the fall of Adam is omitted. And the historical events relating to Christ are the ones that need to be known in order to find Christ in the Old Testament.

God's Plan for World Conquest

The Prophet Daniel not only prophesied that God would "set up" a kingdom that would "never be destroyed," he also said that kingdom would, "break in pieces and consume all" the other kingdoms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2:44). And, that prophesy was fulfilled when those countries became Christian. God conquered those countries, but not by the weapons of this world. They were conquered by the power of God; as it is written, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

While God's people should never want war, delight in war, or try to use war to spread the Christian faith the Bible plainly tells us that we are involved in a war. Not a war "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). And, the weapons of that warfare are not the bloody

weapons of this world, but the weapons of the Spirit. The helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; the shield of faith and the breastplate of righteousness; all bound around by truth and rooted in the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:14-17, 2Corinthians 10:4).

When God was ready to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt, He did not tell them to take up arms, rebel or place their faith in their own efforts. On the contrary, He wanted the world to know that they were not delivered from bondage by earthly power and might, but by His Spirit. And the same was true when He was ready to conquer Greece and Rome. Yes, His people did suffer casualties. They were wounded, killed, taken captive, and tortured just like they would have been if they were involved in an earthly war. The only difference is that they did not fight back. And, because they did not fight back God gave them the victory.

There are people who brag that they are willing to suffer hardship and even death for their country. Well God has asked some of His people to suffer and die to further His kingdom. But, He expects them to do it without fighting back. And, when He gives His people the victory, the entire country becomes Christian, just as the entire Roman Empire became Christian.

When a government makes Christianity the official religion, God's people have a situation very similar to that which existed in ancient Israel under the kings. If that government uses its power to protect Christians, that is the will of God (1Peter 2:13-15). However, in that situation remember that the visible church is part of God's earthly kingdom, not His heavenly kingdom. His heavenly kingdom is present, just as it was present in the seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal, at the time of Elijah (1Kings 19:18). And, God wants those who trust in Him (His heavenly kingdom) to work inside both church and state, like a hand in a glove, to see that His will is done. Just like the "sons of the prophets" led by Samuel, believers need to reach out to those who have never understood the Gospel or placed their faith in Christ. And where that situation exists, if earthly rulers promote idolatry, then in the eyes of God it is no different than when the kings in ancient Israel promoted idolatry. If earthly rulers suppress idolatry, then it is no different in the eyes of God than when kings in ancient Israel suppressed idolatry. If earthly rulers do evil or promote evil, believers should condemn that evil. And, if church leaders are corrupt, or pawns of the state, believers should condemn that corruption like the prophets of old. Nevertheless, in all things they should act with prayer and wisdom.

Conclusion

In the past, whenever a nation made Christianity its official religion, either the state sought to create a tax-supported establishment of religion that it could control, or religious leaders sought to wield political power and use it against any who would question their authority. Neither situation is what God wants. God intended for governments to be an instrument of His wrath; in the sense that He works through the justice system to condemn and punish criminal behavior (1Peter 2:14). In contrast, the visible church is an instrument of God's mercy, in that God uses it to call the nation to repentance while giving them His promise of forgiveness in Christ (Luke 24:45-47).

Before the Reformation, the situation had gotten so bad in England that God's Word was kept from the people, and men were burned at the stake for merely possessing an English translation of the Bible. By fifteen nineteen it was so bad that men were being burned at the stake for no other reason than that their children could recite the Lord's Prayer in English. Moreover, antichristian clergymen were at the forefront of that persecution. However, after the Reformation, millions of people who had grown up in the Church of England or the state churches of other European countries immigrated to America where they established thousands of congregations that preached God's Word. So there is no simple one-size-fits-all rule that can be given regarding church and state. God wants them separate in the sense that one does not control the other. However, He does not want the state to be secular, and He certainly does not want it to deny believers the free exercise of their religion in the name of keeping church and state separate. Instead, those who are citizens of God's heavenly kingdom through faith in Christ need to be at work both inside and outside of the system as a salt or leavening agent, not only to spread the good news of forgiveness in Christ, but also to condemn the "spiritual wickedness in high places" that wars against God (Ephesians 6:12)