**The Church**

*New Life's Ecclesiology*

**Part III:** Church and Her Role in Secular Government

*(The Kingdom of God vs. the Kingdoms of This World*

* Matt. 13:44
* *The kingdom of heaven* is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid: and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
* The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven: the same or different?
* Matt. 19:23-24
* Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I tell you it is hard for a rich man to enter *the kingdom of heaven*. Again, I tell you it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the *kingdom of God.”*
* Mark and Luke used “kingdom of God” where Matthew used “kingdom of heaven” in parallel accounts of the same parables.
* John 18: 34; 36
* Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”… Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But *my kingdom is not from the world.”*
* Some theologians insist that the kingdom of God will not be experienced until we go to heaven (or in the Millennium)
* Rev. 4:2-4
* At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne... Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.
* The place described in this Revelation verse is called “third heaven” by Paul in II Cor. 12
* II Cor. 12:2-4
* I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the *third heaven*—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into *paradise*—...and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter
* God the Father and Jesus the Son may be in their heaven, but the Holy Spirit, the third part of the Trinity, is with us, in us, on earth
* Unlike in the third heaven, the kingdom of God on earth cannot be seen with physical eyes
  + And is not geographical region
  + Rather it is a realm of God’s rule, authority and influence
* Believers who recognize God’s rule, authority and influence are privileged to live as citizens of this heavenly kingdom, even while on earth
* When Christians in history have received Christ and made him Lord, they have not only impacted their families, friends and churches in revival, but also their communities, advancing Jesus' heavenly kingdom on earth
  + The Welsh Revival testimonies
* God the Father and Jesus the Son are in heaven, and their kingdom rules heaven (fully) and the earth (partially in those who have the Holy Spirit and recognize the King and his kingdom’s authority)
* Recall the Lord’s prayer:
* “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
* Jesus’ primary message was the “gospel of the kingdom of God”
  + This gospel's emphasis differs from the "gospel of the grace of God" explained by Paul
* Matt. 4:23
* And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the *gospel of the kingdom* and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.
* When the power of the kingdom of heaven began to be revealed through Jesus, the Pharisees accused Him of using the power of the *kingdom of satan* to cast out demons
  + So familiar were the Pharisees with *evil* having power on earth, and not *good…*
  + And so expecting an earthly kingdom ruled by a militaristic Messiah…
  + That they, like many theologians today, didn’t think there was kingdom of God power available on earth now!
* Matt. 12:24-28
* But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “Only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, does this man drive out demons. ”Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can *his kingdom* stand? … But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the *kingdom of God has come upon you*.
* If satan’s “second heaven” kingdom can affect earth, certainly God’s “third heaven” kingdom can affect it as well
* The Holy Spirit in the believer advances God’s kingdom influence on earth by doing good and pushing back the satanic rule and control here on earth
* I John 3:8b
* For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.
* To what degree are satan’s and God’s kingdoms experienced on earth?
  + To the degree that satan or God are worshipped, honored, and obeyed
  + Kingdoms effectively exist where people follow kings and their laws
* It is bad theology and practice to relegate the kingdom of God’s presence and influence exclusively to third heaven now or a future time
* The earth is not really the believer’s home (we are just passing through)
  + No country on earth is really the Christian believer’s true kingdom
  + Our deepest loyalty and citizenship is with our King in heaven
* Phil. 3:22
* But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ
* As *heavenly citizens,* we advance God’s kingdom on earth by influencing the lives of those around us
* Early persecuted Christians when brought before Roman authorities would often not answer the questions, “What is your name,” and “What country are you from,”
  + But would say “I am a Christian”—identifying with the “new man” in them, and other members of the body of Christ located across the known world
  + And they refused to identify with any country or nation.
* We Christians are ambassadors of God, sent from his heavenly kingdom into earth to represent His interests

* II Cor. 5:20
* Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God.
* As ambassadors for Christ, we represent our “king”—God
* If we were an American ambassador, (say, to Russia)
  + We would represent the interests and people of the U.S. in a foreign country
  + We would show respect to the foreign country
* But we would first and foremost be an American, tasked to support American tourists and expatriates
* We would promote democracy (U.S. kingdom principles) and the well-being of the foreign country’s citizens as much as we are able
* As U.S. ambassadors we may live in another land, but we are American citizens, and we consider the U.S. President to be our “king”
  + Our loyalty is to the U.S.A – not to Russia or China
* As ambassadors of God, we are heavenly citizens
  + Our loyalty is first to God, and second to our earthly nation
  + And we respect our country and try to be helpful to it...
  + As long as our nation’s interests do not go against our King's interest—that is, God's
* Wherever there is a kingdom, there is a *government* over it
* The government of the kingdom of God on earth is the leadership of the church (frighteningly)
* Hence, the importance of developing church leadership according to the principles taught in the New Testament and the pattern set by the New Testament church
  + And attempting to keep Jesus and Holy Spirit as the true leader, not human opinion and philosophy
* The influence of Christianity *done well* on Western (and many Eastern) cultures has been vast
  + It has driven out pagan values and miseries (human sacrifice, infanticide, sanctioned rape for victorious soldiers, oppression of the poor, the disabled, women and children, revenge, cruelty, and war-promotion)
  + Has led to civil law, democracies and republics, a healthy work ethic, human rights, and compassionate treatment of the weak
  + "Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers..."
  + When Christianity has been *done poorly*, it has been corrupted by power (coercion, manipulation, intrigue) and has adapted secular and pagan principles
* Christians are called to influence the jurisdictions around them
  + Self
  + Family
  + Friends
  + Church
  + Workplace
  + Community and its governments (local, state, country, international)
* Christian influence follows *Christ’ example*
  + The Kingdom of God preached by the Word of God, and...
  + The Kingdom of God demonstrated in
    - The fruit of the Spirit
    - The power of the Spirit
* Not by *taking over* jurisdictions (like secular governments) and ruling them
  + But by being a servant to the jurisdictions
  + As we are granted authority and permission to speak into the jurisdiction—be it community, workplace, church, friends or family
* Why should Christians not just take over governments?
  + Because power always corrupts, and absolute power always corrupts absolutely
  + All secular institutions eventually become Babylon (the city and the beast in Revelation)
  + And they will drag Christians to Babylon with them (the harlot riding on the beast in Revelation)
* More broadly, Christians should not use power or manipulation on *anyone* (family, friends, neighbors)
  + This is not the Holy Spirit's way
* “The problem with religion is not religion itself, but religion *fused with secular power*.”

John Locke

* “… whenever men’s consciences have been enslaved by, and their religion forced upon them by, religious-secular powers, the world has been over-run with superstition and held in fetters by tyrannizing civil and ecclesiastical plunderers.”

William Livingston

* Our founders, by our Constitution, decreed that *secular government’s* role should be limited to secular affairs: securing fundamental human rights (the protection of life, liberty and property) through impartial law.
* The founders' intent was that the government should not administer laws demanding adherence to religious rules that apply to salvation, the afterlife, or the supernatural (this includes Christian, Islamic, Hindu concepts)
* *Religious leaders* should manage and debate religious matters and opinions of conscience
  + The state should stay out of the business of prosecuting "thought crimes" that do not significantly impact other citizens
* Similarly, husbands and wives should manage family matters
* Entrepreneurs and business folk should manage business matters
* Secular government should only concern itself with these *other* jurisdictions (family, church, business) when civil laws are broken within them
  + If law is not broken, then the affairs of churches, families, and business are to be viewed as a benefit, and not a harm, to society, and governments should bless them
* If government should leave good religion alone, then religion should also leave good government alone
  + In terms of *not* assuming and exercising the powers that God has entrusted to the state
* Religious (including Christian) influence by debate and petition should be welcomed in government…but not the exercising of power over government
  + Wise government allows families, businesses, and religions to share the task of running the country
  + And not take all the tasks on itself—Cuba, as an example
* This is the way the Holy Spirit works in the believer and the non-believer
  + By persuasion, suggested guidance, urging—never coercion and force
  + Why would Christian influence on government be any different?
* American’s Founding Fathers were God-inspired geniuses in understanding this
* The United States was founded by the Pilgrims with the expressed purpose of spreading the gospel to the world
* Recall that the Pilgrims went to Amsterdam first, but did not find religious freedom even in tolerant Holland
  + So, 102 of them embarked on a 10-week voyage across the Atlantic in a 100 X 25-foot sailing vessel
* Pilgrim John Winthrop wrote:
* "We must consider that we shall be as a 'city upon a hill.' The eyes of all people are upon us."
* "We are entered into covenant with Him for this work...we shall govern you and judge your causes by the rules of God's laws and our own, according to our best skill."
* The challenge to the Pilgrims and to Luther, Zwingli and Calvin: how to establish a country ruled by Christian principles
  + Would heresies (thought and speech crimes—mostly “victimless”) be punishable like criminal actions perpetrated upon true victims): theft, assault, murder?
* How should the church-state punish the dissident and heretic?
  + Exclusion from community (shunning)?
  + Public shaming (the stocks)?
  + Imprisonment, torture and execution?
* Was it ever a good idea to use governmental and state criminal punishments for religious “crimes?”
  + Jesus was accused of Jewish heresy and handed over to the Romans for crucifixion
  + Did not God give us this example of injustice and misuse of religion-state power to teach us how NOT to combine religion and the state
* The Founders valued the importance of religion, but also understood its corruption by power and its history of failure when combined with secular states
* Thomas Jefferson quotes:
* “History furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government.”
* "The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god."
* John Adams quotes:
* “The destiny of America is to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to all men everywhere.”
* “Nothing is more dreaded than the national government meddling with religion.”
* The Founders recognized the horrors of the Inquisition, the European wars of religion and state persecution of the Huguenots, Anabaptists and others religious minorities
  + The Spanish Inquisition (1200 – 1700) more than 32,000 were put to death for heresy (Christians, Jews, Muslims)
  + The Thirty Years War from 1618-1648 between Catholic and Protestant European states resulted in an estimated 5-8 million military and civilian deaths (up to half of Germany died)
* America, in contrast to Europe and most nations of the world, has combined religious vitality with religious diversity and tolerance
  + Religious groups once persecuted for heresy are permitted to worship freely
    - Indeed, Quakers, Catholics, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Southern Baptists have all had men who become Presidents of the United States!
* The Founding Fathers included deists, skeptics, and agnostics
* Many of the founders were Freemasons and into the mystical arts
* Some, but not all, were quite serious Christians
* Denominational attendees of the Continental Congresses and Constitutional Convention included:
  + Anglicans (later Episcopalians)
  + Congregationalists (the Puritan non-conformist church in America)
  + Roman Catholics
  + Methodists
  + Non-conformists (Baptists, Anabaptists, Quakers)
* The non-conformists at the time of the Constitution wanted to keep *the state out of the church* (*more later…)*
* The deists/agnostic Founders wanted to keep *the church out of the state*
  + BUT…what the deists really wanted was to keep the *established churches* and their hierarchical leadership and power out of the state
  + Not Christian *principles and ideals*
* If the Founders were so "anti-Christian," why did they craft laws consistent with most of the 10 commandments, outlawing not just murder and theft, but also:
  + Adultery, co-habitation, sodomy
  + Libel, slander, and perjury
  + "Taking the Lord’s name in vain”
  + “ Blue Laws” – work prohibited on the Sabbath
* Further, Founding Father deist/agnostics supported the Protestant ethics of:
  + Honesty
  + Faithfulness to vows, duties, marriage
  + Hard work
  + Charity
  + Law-keeping
* The so-called “anti-Christian” thinking of founding deists was simply that they *did not trust the organized church when given secular power*
* Until quite recently when cursing, Sabbath work, affairs, homosexuality, perversion, abortion, euthanasia, lying, laziness, and revenge *became fashionable*, even Christian principles opposing these sins, and encouraging the *virtues*, were welcomed in American laws and conduct
* While the deists wanted to keep the chur*ch out of the state,* the non-conformist churches wanted to keep the *state out of the church*
* Why? – 8 of the 13 colonies had a “state” religion endorsed by their constitutions (either Anglican or Congregational)
  + Five states (lead by Roger Williams and Rhode Island) had no state religion
  + Notably, the Rhode Island state constitution was the most used by the Founders in drafting the Constitution
* The non-conformists did not want the state religions (e.g. Catholicism or Anglicanism) dictating what they must believe in their church
  + And perhaps using *state-sanctioned punishment* against their beliefs that differed from the state religion
  + This is why they left Europe
* The most famous example of the nonconformists wanting to keep the state out of the church was Thomas Jefferson’ letter to the Danbury Connecticut Baptists
* Jefferson was a deist/agnostic and a man who cut up his Bible with scissors to remove the miracles of Jesus
  + He fathered children sleeping with one of his slaves
  + Jefferson sided with deists in keeping organized religion out of the state
  + BUT…his letter to the Danbury Baptists reassures them that the Constitution was written to keep the state out of their minority (Baptist) church
* “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government *reach actions only*, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people *(in crafting the First Amendment)* which declared that their legislature should *'make no law respecting an establishment of religion*, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a *wall of separation* between Church and State.”
* The ACLU and other liberal organizations that use the "wall of separation" in Jefferson's letter to keep religion and Christian principles out of government are being disingenuous to quote Jefferson, here...
  + Because Jefferson's "wall of separation" in the letter is intended to keep the state out of the church, not the church out of the state.
* As Christians we should not desire to take over the leadership of government and share secular power
  + We can and should positively influence its ideals and behavior by our petitions and prayers
* If we in 2023 advocate Christian virtue, ideals, and principles in our government today:
  + This is not only *legitimate* in a society with free speech
  + But is consistent with even the deist/agnostic Founding Fathers’ intentions
* Speaking up for Christ and the Faith today in more difficult than in 1776 because of the recent general cultural acceptance of the vices listed above, the murder of the unborn, and the mocking of morality and virtue
* But we Christians are still called to boldly be a "city on a hill" that promotes Christ's teaching
* If the church does not have a role in running the jurisdiction of government, what is our role in society?
* We do what only a Holy Spirit-filled people can do:
  + Save souls
  + Honor and teach the Word of God
  + Created disciples of Jesus
  + Worship the Creator of the Universe
  + Things that the City Council and Walmart cannot do

* Summary:
  + The kingdom of God is here on earth and available to everyone who make Jesus their Lord
  + Christians are citizens of heaven and are God's ambassadors to the nations of this world (including the U.S.)
  + Believers are called to positively influence their families, churches, communities, and nations with the Gospel
  + Christians are not to influence the world by sharing or assuming secular powers granted by God to governments
  + The genius of the Founding Fathers was to recognize the division between the organized church and the state, while encouraging Christian virtues and influence