



SESSION 1 — A Biblical Theology of Government **- Pastor Keith -**

Our goal in this session is to trace a biblical theology of government, considering the whole of Scriptural teaching on this topic. This is a daunting task, given the “meager and scattered references” to “political administration and civil jurisprudence.”¹ Furthermore, “Even when the information is explicit, all too often it reflects the theological, social, and political ideal, without necessarily coinciding with actual historical practice. (This is doubly problematic for those who would make practical application of these principles in our day and time, because much of the legislation was intended for Israel as a theocratic nation.)”² So, we have our work cut out for us, but there should at least be enough for us to sink our teeth into in this session.

The *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* defines and describes “government” this way:

Administration of life in an organized society as well as the body of officials that presides over the process. Human beings discovered at an early stage in their history that a social situation in which “everyone did as he saw fit” (Judg. 21:25) proved to be an unstable, disorganized, and frequently even a dangerous one, in which unenlightened self-interest took precedence over the concerns of other citizens.

Consequently, what has been called a “theory of social contract” came into being. This meant that people agreed to live together as free citizens, and behave in such a manner that the interests of others were not harmed in the process. As a result, the various behavioral rules that were developed over a period of time came to be recognized as mechanisms designed for the common good.”³

While this definition helpfully explains the need for government against the human tendency toward anarchy,⁴ it errantly gives too much credit to human involvement. Rather than merely being an evolved social structure, government was an institution designed and authorized by God for the organization of people groups. Yet, despite its noble purpose and divine inauguration, government continues to be a problem.

A 1970s graffiti summarizes how many people feel about their particular government: “Don’t bother to vote—the government always get in!” Any coffee shop discussion about politics reveals many unique opinions, predispositions, and emotions at play. Unfortunately, those conversations are usually directed, more by the recent opinion column than by biblical theology; our perspective on government is usually affected, more by our friends’ Facebook posts and Tweets than by scriptural passages; and our response to authorities is usually in keeping, more with our own political preferences than the will of God.

Indeed, social media is a doorway into people’s practical theology, and when one considers the political remarks posted online, at least two conclusions can be drawn: (1) many people believe their quality of and fulfillment in life is being adversely affected by our government; and (2) many believers need to biblically rethink how they ought to live as citizens under their government.

In a passage on citizenship (Ecclesiastes 8:1-17), Solomon explains that the “wise” person “knows the interpretation of a thing” (v. 1). Only a wise person can healthily navigate this energized landscape and please God. The phrase, “interpretation of a thing” reminds us of one such “wise person,” Daniel, who feared God in his government interactions and was blessed because of it. Likewise, even today, under any kind of government, the wise citizen can find himself cheerful and fulfilled (v. 1b). In this session, we’ll seek to equip ourselves with such wisdom.

GOVERNMENT AS ESTABLISHED BY GOD: ITS PURPOSE

In addition to the family and the church, government is one of three institutions created and governed by God. The family was created in Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:18-24 in order to fill and govern the earth with image bearers who would enjoy companionship one with another. The church was established in Acts 2 (cf. Matthew 16:18) to make disciples

of all nations (cf. Matthew 28:18-20) and be the body of Christ on earth. What, then, is the purpose of government? Why did God institute it?

1. Its origin

- *Genesis 9:6* — God requires capital punishment for murderers, in response to the violent wickedness that had filled the earth (cf. *Genesis 6:5, 11-13*—the Flood is actually the record of the first enactment of divine capital punishment). The application of this punishment was regulated and broadened in the Mosaic Law for the Israelite theocracy.
- *Genesis 10:5, 10, 19-20, 30-31, 32* — We discover the first usage of governmental language: “clans,” “lands,” “nations,” “kingdom,” and “territory.”
- *Romans 13:4* — The authority for dispensing capital punishment resides in government, not in individuals (cf. *Romans 12:19*).
- While not as clearly described as the inauguration of the family (*Genesis 2:24*) and the church (*Matthew 16:18; Acts 2*), God seems to have instituted government after the Flood and through the dispersion after the Tower of Babel.

2. Its orientation

Government’s orientation to its Creator and Authorizer can be explained using three phrases. We’ll consider the first two together.

- a. **“under God”** (e.g., the Pledge of Allegiance recognizes this)
- b. **“from God”**

Fundamentally, a government’s orientation should be one of submission, for it has been created and authorized by Another. This is taught in many ways throughout Scripture.

- **First**, there are passages explicitly stating God’s authority over human government.
 - *John 19:10-11* — The Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, threatened Jesus, saying

“You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”

- *Romans 13:1* — “There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”
- **Then**, there are several passages that describe this delegated authority.
 - *1 Peter 2:14* — Peter describes “governors” “as sent by [God].”
 - *Psalms 67:4* — “You judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.”
 - *Proverbs 21:1* — “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”
- **Next**, there are those passages that explicitly attribute to God both the establishment and decline of governments.
 - *Daniel 2:21* — “[God] removes kings and sets up kings.” *Romans 9:14-24* explains that God does so simply according to His will and good pleasure and for His own glory, illustrating that with Pharaoh—“for this very purpose I have raised you up” (v. 17; cf. *Revelation 17:17*).
 - *Daniel 4:17, 25, 32* — “The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” (cf. v. 35)
 - *Daniel 4:3, 34* — Daniel contrasts the transience of human kingdoms with the permanence of God’s: “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.”

- **Finally**, there are numerous passages that describe God’s judgment on the nations (cf. Exodus 7-12; Psalm 2; Joel 3; Isaiah 13-27; Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 17-20). God will hold civil authorities accountable for their leadership (cf. Isaiah 14:4-6, 11; Daniel 4).

“The Scriptures present all of life, including governmental, political, and judicial institutions, from a unique perspective, i.e., that God is the sovereign creator of the universe and that man stands in a privileged relationship with God.”⁵ Fundamentally, then, government is invested with authority, not “from a ‘social compact,’ or from ‘the consent of the governed,’ or even from ‘the will of the majority.’”⁶ Rulers are enthroned or dethroned by God (using us as means).

c. **“for God”**

This aspect of a government’s orientation naturally flows from the first two—because human government is “under God” and “from God,” it clearly ought to serve “for God.” This is very different than suggesting that government rules “as God” (the deification of the state) or “in place of God” (the substitution of the state), for not only does the Bible teach otherwise, but those very ideas have actually contributed to the brokenness and bitterness of government in many cultures.

Nonetheless, government does rule “for God.” “Governing authorities...have been instituted by God” according to Romans 13:1; verse 4 calls the civic ruler “God’s servant,” and verse 6 considers governors to be “ministers of God.” “The state, then, may be considered an expression of God’s common grace extended to all mankind. Hence, to resist the governing authorities is tantamount to resisting God (Rom. 13:2).”⁷

Scripture nowhere suggests that God designates a particular form of civil government. And yet, throughout the Old Testament, one form dominates—the Israel theocracy (Gk. “God rules”), in which God directly ruled through His revelation and representatives, the priests. One scholar

explains, “Theocracy...is the underlying tenet of biblical thinking about government.”⁸

And yet, theocracy initially failed, for the Jewish nation over which God was ruling via the Old Covenant constantly rebelled against Him in the hardness of their heart (as do all humans and nations). Only through the New Covenant, in which God forgives sin and transforms hearts (cf. Jeremiah 31-33), can the rule of God be rightly enjoyed.

Currently, however, that rule is only spiritual and a physical and political theocracy is not happening on earth, as it is in heaven (cf. Matthew 6:10; John 18:36; Philippians 3:20). One theologian puts it this way, “While the ideal state was theocratic, it could not be realized until the kingdom of God was consummated.”⁹ In the meantime then, the same writer suggests that “the governing authorities [have] to be accepted as a divine surrogate.”¹⁰

Therefore, civil government has a very different kind of authority than it did in the Israelite theocracy, and yet in its surrogacy, it is still oriented in a position of rule “for God” and should be responded to accordingly (cf. Ecclesiastes 8:4). Romans 13:2 makes this clear: “Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”

Additionally, because earthly rulers govern “for God” they are responsible for leading as He prescribes in His Word with humility (Isaiah 13:11), mercy and compassion (Isaiah 14:4-6, 11; Daniel 4), justice and order (Isaiah 10:1-2; Jeremiah 22:13-17; Ezekiel 34:12-22), truthfulness (Amos 2:4), and righteousness (Proverbs 14:34; Jonah 1:2). And when they do not, he will hold them accountable.

3. **Its objectives**

Romans 13:3-6 and 1 Peter 2:14, in particular, suggest two overarching functions of the state.

a. (-) Administration of justice

- Romans 13:3-5 — *“For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience”* (italics added for emphasis).
- **Means** — Government is “responsible for restraining evil by punishing crime and violence.”¹¹ This necessitate an authoritative and absolute standard of morality of right and wrong. When such a standard is abandoned, justice is abrogated. MacArthur writes,

Robert Culver is correct in saying,

Where theistic religion grows weak, [the concept of justice] will weaken. Crimes then are defined as antisocial activity, which in turn is then merely what the majority says it is. Then punishments seem to be the result of the majorities ganging up on the minority. This in turn seems inconsistent with democratic feelings. The result is a decline in uniform application of penalties for crime, resultant miscarriage of justice, trampling on the rights of law-abiding people, together with an increase in what ought to be called crime. (Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government [Chicago: Moody Press, 1974], pp. 78–79)

Standards based on majority opinion are, by definition, subject to the changes and whims of the individuals who comprise the majority. What

is considered a crime one day may be seen as satisfactory behavior the next, and vice versa.

The founding fathers of the United States were well aware of that danger, and the furthest thing from their minds was establishing a system of government that did not recognize God’s Word as the basis of good civil law, not to mention a government that would exclude Him altogether. Whenever the principles of government are detached from God and are not seen as a reflection of His divine mind, justice suffers to the extent that He is disregarded.”¹²

- **Motive** — “The justice meted out [by human government] upon evil reflects to a greater or lesser degree the righteous judgment of God, the Judge of all the earth.”¹³ Again, MacArthur explains the importance of this motive and the need for Christians to impress it upon our governing officials.

It is important for Christians to remind their leaders that civil responsibilities are a divine trust, granted and superintended by God. We should remind them of, and remember ourselves, the many declarations in the Psalms of God’s sovereign rule over the affairs of men. [cf. Psalm 92:8; 93:1-2] ... Christians need to affirm before the world that God is the ultimate and only Sovereign. We should respectfully remind our human leaders that the Lord “chastens the nations” (Ps. 94:10), and that “He is coming to judge the earth; [that] He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity” (Ps. 98:9). As His people, we should “tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Ps. 96:3–5).¹⁴

- **Manner** — Therefore, with the motive in mind that they should be reflecting the justice of God, rulers “must take appropriate measures that fairness, firmness, and mercy be exhibited. Only in this way will retribution function for the defense and encouragement of good people as well as for the punishment of criminals.”¹⁵

b. (+) Promotion of the general welfare

- Romans 13:3b-4a, 6 — “Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? *Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good.* ... For because of this you also pay taxes, for the *authorities are ministers of God*, attending to this very thing.” If “righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34), then government should necessarily promote righteousness and repress sin.
- **Systemized care for its people**
 - The Old Testament prophets urged kings to care for the afflicted and needy, for the orphan and the widow, and even for the refugee and stranger (Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14; Jeremiahs 22:16; Ezekiel 34:16).
 - This is what taxes are supposed to accomplish. Furthermore, “consideration should be given to maintaining programs of public health and education, to encouraging philanthropic activities, and to protecting the disadvantaged from abuses by the wealthy and powerful sectors of society.”¹⁶
- **Public recognition of the good and right**
 - 1 Peter 2:14 — “Governors [are] sent by him to punish those who do evil and to *praise those who do good.*” (cf. Romans 13:3b)

- Clearly, “government is responsible for promoting moral standards in the community and nation.”¹⁷ Again, however, this presupposes an absolute standard (cf. Isaiah 5:20), which when abandoned will threaten this very function of the state.

GOVERNMENT AS BROKEN BY MAN: ITS PROBLEMS

Government both reflects and affects its citizens—that is, broken individuals and families lead to broken governments, and visa versa. Therefore, governments and nations can easily spiral into deeper and deeper brokenness.

1. Cause: arrogance from power (cf. Daniel 4; Acts 12:20-23)

a. Rejection of divine authority (Genesis 11:1-9; Psalm 2:1-3)

Since the Tower of Babel, governments have led the way in overthrowing the authority of God (Genesis 11:1-9). Therefore, Babylon has become the prototype of rebellious human government.

b. Reception of humanism (Psalm 14, 53)

Secular government then adopts a humanistic worldview that essentially worships man as divine, investing him with inherent worth and idolizing his freedom.

2. Effect: abuse of power

a. Idolatry of the state

This is discovered either in some form of emperor worship (e.g., Caesar) or (in our context) “statism,” “proposing the state as the answer to inequities it cannot possibly resolve, and marginalizing or subverting the family in the process.”¹⁸

b. Oppression by the state (dictator)

History is filled with the horrific carnage of such leaders.

c. Injustice/unrighteousness through the state

Governments often do what Isaiah 5:20 condemns, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”

3. Unseen dynamic: spiritual warfare

Daniel 10:13, 21 and 12:1 depict a strategic focus of Satan upon world governments, which he seeks to commandeer for his rebellious purposes. We shouldn’t be surprised, for he is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), who is active on all levels (Ephesians 6:10-20; 1 Peter 5:8). Government’s arrogance from power and abuse of power is ultimately energized by him (cf. Isaiah 14:3-4, 12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-19). This is why prayer is such an important part of our responsibility as citizens (2 Corinthians 10:4).

GOVERNMENT AS ENGAGED BY CHRISTIANS: ITS PLACE

Key Texts — Matthew 22:16-22; John 18:36; Philippians 2:11; 3:20; John 19:11; Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-5; Titus 3:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-17

Throughout the New Testament (and really the whole of Scripture), God’s Word focuses its exhortation on the citizen’s response to government rather than on a government’s responsibility to its citizens. In other words, Christ is more concerned with how a citizen responds, than with how a government rules. Therefore, even when a government is ruling wickedly, God’s Word still has something to say to the oppressed and disheartened Christian. In a word, God commands submission (Romans 13:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

Commenting on Romans 13:6, MacArthur writes,

Having been the most zealous of Pharisees (Phil. 3:5–6), Paul (then known as Saul) doubtless had chafed fiercely under the despised Roman rule and resented every denarius he was forced to pay for its support. But now that he was submissive to Christ as His Lord, he knew that he must also be submissive to the institution of government, which his Lord had ordained. His point in the present text, therefore, is that, because their authority is from God, all civil

servants—from the least to the greatest, from the best to the worst—also are servants of God. Despite the fact that the great majority of civil leaders would reject the idea that they are devoting themselves to God’s service, Paul makes clear that they nevertheless represent a divine institution as well as a human mission.¹⁹

Such submission is lived out in several practical ways.

1. We should honor our rulers (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17).

Romans 13:7 says, “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.” Peter adds, “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (1 Peter 2:17; cf. Proverbs 24:21). Since government officials have been given authority by God, “whatever the character of a ruler in NT times, whether high priest or king, procurator or emperor, the authority vested in him was to be honored and respected.”²⁰ This we owe even to Caesar (Matthew 22:21).

2. We should not fear our rulers (Ecclesiastes 8:5-17).

While Proverbs 24:21 commands us to “fear...the king” (Proverbs 24:21), Peter’s paraphrase of that verse in 1 Peter 2:17 explains that “fear” means “honor.” There are at least three senses of fear that should be avoided in our relationship with earthly rulers.

First, we do not need to fear our rulers in the sense of trust. Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to trust them; but we are commanded to obey them and trust God. The order of Peter’s statement in 1 Peter 2:17 is helpful — first “fear God,” and then “honor the emperor.”

Second, we should not fear in the sense of worship. Philippians 3:20 reminds us that “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. Philippians 2:10-11). If we’re not careful, a pledge of allegiance to our earthly homeland can turn into a misplaced trust and even an idolatrous loyalty.²¹ No human ruler or earthly country, not even the greatest, can provide salvation and fulfillment. They are incapable of doing so, and our faith should never be planted there. As Christians, we’re not from around here, and we only put our confidence in and render our worship to the King of Kings.

Third, we should not fear in the sense of being afraid. When government is ungodly and hostile, God is still in absolute control, not merely allowing, but ordaining and orchestrating all things. Such rebellion is not only known to God, but is also planned and used by God to accomplish His purposes. Additionally, God promises His presence and power to His citizens while they are pilgrimaging here (Matthew 28:18-20). Yes, a broken government may actually be a terror to those who are good and godly, and yet we must “not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather [we must] fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28; cf. Luke 12:4-5).

3. We should pray for our rulers (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Paul states this expressly in 1 Timothy 2:1-4, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Notice a few observations. First, Paul’s use of several terms for prayer (including “thanksgiving”) suggests the regularity and intentionality with which we ought to pray for our rulers. Second, no ruler ought to be left unprayed for. Third, the Lord motivates us toward such prayer by stating that our prayers may lead to safety and security throughout our days. Fourth, praying for our rulers honors the heart of God. Fifth, we should specifically pray for the salvation of our rulers and for their understanding of truth.

To this point, MacArthur writes,

Near the end of the first century, no doubt thinking of the severe persecution by the emperor Nero, and more recently by Domitian, Clement of Rome (possibly the fellow worker Paul mentions in Philippians 4:3) prayed the following prayer:

“Guide our steps to walk in holiness and righteousness and singleness of heart, and to do those things that are good and acceptable in Thy sight, and in the sight of our rulers. Yes, Lord, cause Thy face to shine upon us in peace for our good, that we

may be sheltered by Thy mighty hand and delivered from every sin by Thine outstretched arm. Deliver us from those who hate us wrongfully. Give concord and peace to us and to all who dwell on earth, as Thou didst to our fathers, when they called on Thee in faith and truth with holiness, while we render obedience to Thine almighty and most excellent name, and to our earthly rulers and governors.

Thou, O Lord and Master, hast given them the power of sovereignty through Thine excellent and unspeakable might, that we, knowing the glory and honour which Thou hast given them, may submit ourselves to them, in nothing resisting Thy will. Grant them therefore, O Lord, health, peace, concord and stability, that they may without failure administer the government which Thou hast committed to them. For Thou, O heavenly Master, King of the ages, dost give to the sons of men glory and honour and power over all things that are in the earth. Do Thou, O Lord, direct their counsel according to what is good and acceptable in Thy sight, that they, administering in peace and gentleness with godliness the power which Thou hast committed to them, may obtain Thy favour.” (1 Clement ix.2–ixi.2. Cited in F. F. Bruce, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans [London: Tyndale Press, 1967], p. 235)

Justin Martyr, the second-century theologian and church Father, wrote to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius, “Everywhere we [Christians], more readily than all men, endeavour to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by [Jesus]... Whence to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that with your kingly power you be found to possess also sound judgment” (“The First Apology of Justin,” chapter 27 in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed.. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1973, p. 168).

During a time when Rome was especially hostile toward Christians, a later church Father, Tertullian, wrote, “Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous

people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish (“Apology,” chapter 30 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, p. 42*).

*Such respect for human government was the norm in the early church long before the Roman Empire was “Christianized.”*²²

Sadly, it is often not the norm today.

4. We should obey the laws (Romans 13:2-5; 1 Peter 2:15).

Our normal activity towards our government should be that of obedience. Obedience to God is evidenced through obedience to our authorities—parental (Ephesians 6:1), ecclesiastical (Hebrews 13:17), and political (Romans 13:2-5). The purpose of government is to approve good and punish wrongdoing (Romans 13:2-5); therefore, we should “do good” (1 Peter 2:15). Paul puts it bluntly in Titus 3:1, “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work.” Solomon suggests that we should obey our rulers for two reasons (Ecclesiastes 8:1-4): because of God’s will (v. 2) and because of the government’s wrath (v. 3). He also expressly prohibits rebellion against government (Proverbs 24:21-22).

Nonetheless, there will be times when to obey government would be to disobey God. After all, ultimately “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20), and we are those who bow the knee and “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10-11), not Caesar. Therefore, when expected or commanded to obey Caesar by disobeying God’s Word, we thoughtfully, carefully, and graciously abandon the normative principle of obeying our rulers and practice civil disobedience. Yes, “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The difficulty of civil disobedience is in discerning when a government has gone too far and in choosing the appropriate nature of opposition.

5. We should pay our taxes (Matthew 22:16-22; Romans 13:6-7).

As part of our obedience, Jesus affirmed that we should “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Matthew 22:21), and Paul commands, “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed” (Romans 13:7). The reason for this “seems to be that

those who enjoy the benefits of the general protection and welfare of the state should share in the costs of maintaining that state.”²³

6. We may participate in civic service (Matthew 5:13-16).

That participating in government service is permissible is clear from two bodies of evidence: (1) the several public servants who trusted Christ in the New Testament and were never called upon to renounce their position (e.g., the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, the Philippians jailor); (2) the several Old Testament believers who held positions of authority (e.g., Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, Mordecai in Persia).

Matthew 5:13-16 encourages us to be “salt” and “light” as we represent the King during our pilgrimage here. Like “salt,” we can have a *preserving* influence on our society, protecting it from God’s judgment through our faithful presence here (cf. Genesis 18:22-33; Joseph and Daniel). In order to have such an effect, though, we must be *purifying* like salt. If we are pure, we may be preserving.

While these considerations may be applied broadly, Joseph and Daniel in particular illustrate what being salt looks like in civic service. Both men lived purely and thus served to preserve their society from God’s judgment. In our unique American context, we can be salt in a directly political way by voting (though I don’t believe this is biblically required, especially when conflicted in one’s conscience about how/if to vote), volunteering as a public servant, or running for an elected position. Furthermore, like Namaan’s servant girl, we can do profound good to our government officials, even when mistreated by them (cf. 2 Kings 5:1-3).

Finally, we should also add that Paul teaches us that utilizing the full rights of our earthly citizenship is acceptable, especially when used in the advance of the gospel (Acts 16:35-40; 22:22-29). Furthermore, many passages encourage us to cultivate discernment (Ecclesiastes 8:5-7), perspective (Ecclesiastes 8:8-14), and wisdom (Proverbs 14:35) in our interactions with government.

GOVERNMENT AS RESTORED BY CHRIST: ITS PROMISE

Isaiah 9:2-7 records a beautiful prophecy of Christ restoring government by taking it upon Himself.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

As He will with all things, Christ will restore and reconcile the whole world to Himself (Colossians 1:20) in its proper place (Philippians 2:9-11). This is the solution to broken governments.

Specifically, Jesus is restoring government through several activities.

1. He has defeated the god of this world (Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Peter 3:22).

In His death and resurrection, Jesus destroyed the one who strategically wields governments as an important weapon in his cosmic war against God. The gospel is the message of Satan's defeat—prophesied in the garden, accomplished at the cross and empty tomb, and finally fulfilled as recorded in Revelation. Colossians 2:15 records that Jesus "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [his cross]." Ephesians 1:20-22 pictures Christ now as "seated...at [the Father's] right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come...[with] all things under his feet." 1 Peter 3:22 adds that "angels, authorities,

and powers [have] been subjected to him." Satan can use governments only so far and so long—even now his influence is checked by God's creative ownership of him, God's authoritative rule over him, and God's powerful deliverance from him.

Through the proclamation and reception of the gospel, Jesus is currently destroying Satanic strongholds. Governments might be powerful, but they cannot compete with the power of the gospel. No, the gospel is able to take a political pawn of Satan and convert him into a messenger of God (Daniel 4). It is able to quietly invade a region ruled by a government that opposes God and turn it "upside down" (Acts 17:1-6). It is able to empower oppressed citizens to joyfully persevere in loyalty to Jesus, while incomprehensively and powerfully loving their enemies and blessing those who curse them (Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 6:27-36; 12:11-12). And it dares to proclaim a message of mercy and judgment to the very nation that is oppressing it (Acts 17:26-31). Yes, indeed, Jesus has defeated the god of this world and the ruler of this world's governments.

2. He is ruling over His people (1 Peter 2:9-12).

At our salvation, God "deliver[s] us from the domain of darkness and transfer[s] us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). He removes us from this world-system and transplants our citizenship out of this broken world into His indissoluble kingdom (Philippians 3:20). Yes, from every nation on earth, Jesus is creating a new nation for Himself. Peter writes, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Yet, this new nation is not yet physical or geographical, for Christ is presently only ruling in our hearts. Our spiritual, eternal, and ultimate citizenship is in heaven, but our physical, temporal, and immediate citizenship is on earth in our particular country. We are dual citizens, and our new King has instructions for us on how to handle that. In the verses immediately following, Peter reveals that counsel (1 Peter 2:11-17). Christ does not encourage violent overthrow, but rather submissive service. Rather than contributing

to the brokenness within earthly nations, Christ alone can empower us to bring a measure of healing. As He rules His people through His own example and through the Scriptures, Jesus proves His ability to restore broken government.

3. He will judge the nations (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 18).

Matthew 25:31-46 describe God's judgment on the nations, and Revelation 18 depicts His overthrow of Babylon, the very prototype of ungodly government. At that time, the Lord will also vindicate His people who were mistreated by national governments (cf. Revelation 6:9-10; 11:17-18; 15:2-4).

4. He will establish His kingdom (Psalm 2; Revelation 19:11-21:5).

Psalm 2 warns earth's rulers about the judgment of God and the final establishment of His kingdom:

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him (vv. 4-12).

Revelation 19:11-21:5 records the final establishment of His millennial and then eternal kingdom. Then—only then, but really then—will government be fixed and will we finally have the perfect Ruler that we long for!

ENDNOTE

¹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 2: E-J, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 536.

² Ibid.

³ Walter A. Elwell and Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996).

⁴ In his August 23, 2016 episode on "The Briefing," Albert Mohler comments on a recent anarchist convention in Russia and provides the following humorous quote from a story covering the event (albertmohler.com/2016/08/23/briefing-08-23-16/): "Uniting anarchists is a tough challenge in Russia, where they are facing headwinds. The Kremlin, with its well documented authoritarian streak, has met their cause with increasing hostility. *Beyond that, of course, is their own penchant for disorder and disagreement*" (italics added for emphasis).

⁵ Bromiley, 536.

⁶ Ibid., 545.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 434.

⁹ Walter A. Elwell and Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bromiley, 545.

¹² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

¹³ Bromiley, 545.

¹⁴ MacArthur.

¹⁵ Bromiley, 545.

¹⁶ Ibid., 546.

¹⁷ Ibid., 545.

¹⁸ Albert Mohler, "The Injustice of Helpful Parents—Yet More Insanity," albertmohler.com/2012/12/06/the-injustice-of-helpful-parents-yet-more-insanity/. Cf. albertmohler.com/2012/12/06/the-briefing-12-06-12/

¹⁹ MacArthur.

²⁰ Ibid., 545.

²¹ "We are citizens of heaven before we are earthly patriots, which means that there are bound to be conflicts between the way Christ our King calls us to live and the ways our beloved homeland expects us to live from time to time. ... Our love for God is primary. Only the value of our King, God, Jesus can bring a right ordering of the value of our earthly loves. Only our heavenly Father, our heavenly patriotism, can order our earthly patriotism" (John Piper, "Should Christians Be Patriotic?" desiringgod.org/interviews/should-christians-be-patriotic).

²² Ibid.

²³ Bromiley, 546.