

GOD, GOSPEL & GOVERNMENT

-By Rasik Ranchord

Balancing and prioritizing our responsibilities to God & Government – A Biblical Basis for a 2-D Engagement

The **NZ Parliament** commences its daily affairs in the House with the following prayer: “Almighty God, we give thanks for the blessings which have been bestowed on us; Laying aside all personal interests we acknowledge the Queen and pray for guidance in our deliberations that we may conduct the affairs of this House with wisdom, justice, mercy and humility for the welfare and peace of New Zealand. Amen.”

What is the relationship between God and Government?

- **What Jesus Taught**

Let us begin by considering the question posed by Jewish Leaders to Jesus, regarding whether they should pay taxes to Caesar or not. In a remarkable example of a word of wisdom Jesus declared “**Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s** (Mk12:13-17); the Jews cast the questions as an “**either/or**” situation, but Jesus gave a “**both-and**” response. In other words **God and Government are not alternatives but complementary**. Unfortunately many Christian Leaders and congregations have taken an either/or position on this issue. Preach the Gospel but don’t engage in anything political. This mindset has had serious repercussions; we have left the public square largely “unsalted” and ‘unenlightened’.

In my pamphlet “**Should Christians engage in Politics**” I deal with how we **historically** arrived at this position, then the **reversal** of this trend and finally to **what degree** should the church as a **corporate entity** and Christians as **individuals** should engage in the political arena. **Bad theology has diminished our influence in the most powerful decision-making body in the country, namely Parliament**. One of the major functions of parliament is to pass legislation and statutes enacted affect every man, woman and child

in the nation. When **Hamans** rule **bad laws** are enacted; when **Mordecais** rule **good laws** are enacted (see Book of Esther).

- **What the Apostle Paul Taught**

Paul, the **apostle to the Gentiles**, in one of his great epistles, Romans deals with the Gospel in chapters 1 to 8 and then in chapter 13 he gives us the longest (though still brief) teaching on Government in the Bible. He enunciates some key principles:

- a) God is the **ultimate** source of all authority. All authority is **derived** from him (v1,2)
- b) God has **delegated a measure** of authority to human governments (v2) and they are **accountable** to him.
- c) Governments are designated “**God’s Servants**” 3 times (v4,4,6). Paul uses the same Greek word for servants that he uses elsewhere for Christian workers.
- d) The **purpose** of Government is to:
 - i. **promote** the common good and (v3,4)
 - ii. to **restrain** evil and **punish** evil-doers (v3,4)
- e) **A Christian’s civic duties include**
 - I. **submitting** to governing authorities (v1)
 - II. paying **taxes** (v7)
 - III. showing **respect** (v7)
 - IV. giving **honour** (v7) and also
 - V. **praying** (1Tim 2:1-2)
 - VI. **voting** (Rom 13 extrapolation – see my pamphlet ‘Should Christians be engaged in Politics’ for further detail.
 - VII. for some, **servicing** as a politicians or working in the Public Sector eg **O.T. Joseph, Daniel. N.T. Erastus**, (Rom16:24); Manaen (Acts 13:1).

Note once again, the balance: the gospel **and** government.

- **What The Apostle Peter Taught**

The **apostle to the Jews** writes in his first epistle “**Submit** yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority whether to emperor as supreme authority or governors who are sent by him to **punish** those who do wrong and to **commend** those who do right..... show proper **respect** to everyone, **love** the family of believers, **fear** God, **honour** the emperor (1Pet 2:13-17).” He also speaks of **salvation** (1 Pet 1:5,9,10).

The **founder of the church and his two great apostles all taught the same things: we have responsibilities both to God and Government.** We must also bear in mind that during this period of history Rome was not a democracy but a totalitarian regime and its rulers were **not** Christians yet Paul calls them God’s servants (Rom 13:4,6). The following table summarises their teaching:

	Government	Gospel
Jesus	Mk 12: 13-17; Jn 19:1-11	Matt 24:14
Paul	Rom 13	Rom Chps 1-8
Peter	1 Pet 2:13-17	1 Pet 1:5-11

God does **not** give governments a **carte blanche** (blank cheque) to do whatever they please. Whether they realise it or not, God will hold them **accountable.** The **institution** of government is ordained by God, it does not however follow that God necessarily endorses the **incumbents** or their **policies** hence Peter could say when the Jewish rulers forbade them to preach the gospel, “**we must obey God rather than human beings** (Acts 5:29).” God only has **absolute authority** over us; the powers of every delegated authority are **circumscribed (limited).** The Government derives its authority **from God** and are ultimately accountable **to God.**

After his humiliation a chastened Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges “His (God’s) dominion is an eternal dominion, his kingdom endures from generation to generation...**He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and peoples of the earth.** No one can hold back his hand or say to

him “what have you done?” (Dan 4:34-35). Furthermore Daniel stated “He (God).....**deposes** kings and God **raises up others** (Dan 2:21).”

Christ is the Lord of the **individual** (Rom 10:9). Christ is the Head of the **Church** (Eph 1:22.) Christ is the **King of Kings** and the **Lord of Lords!** (Rev 19:16). God has made **dual provision** for humankind. The Gospel of God and Government. Each fulfils a different purpose as the following table shows.

Government	Gospel
Ordained by God	Originates in God
God’s servants	God’s servants
Law written in statute books in ink	Law written on hearts by the Spirit
Promote good /restrains evil	Salvation
External	Internal
Coercion	Voluntary
Kingdoms of Man lasts until Christ comes again	Kingdom of God Lasts forever

In Regard to Salvation

Law and the Gospel of Grace are contrasted “for by the works of the Law no person will be justified (Gal 2: 15,16). The Law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). The Law cannot save us. It can set the standard. It can only pronounce us guilty and punish us for our wrong doing. It is only through the gospel that we can be saved.

In Regard to Society

Law and the Gospel are complementary. The Law is essential. The Law restrains evil in society by external means but only the gospel transforms us inside out and **enhances** all our relationships: to **God** (Rom 12:1-2); **one another** (v9-16); **enemies** (v17-21); and **Government** (Rom 13). The Gospel makes us **conscientious law-abiding** citizens. The dual provision will continue until Christ returns when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and Christ (Rev 11:15; Dan chapter 2).

The sceptre of his kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness and of his kingdom there is no end (Heb 1:8; Isa 9:6-7).

(a) The Church and Government

• The Teaching Ministry

The church should **not** endorse any one political party. If it does, it will **politicise** the church. In any church its members may support various parties and the church must respect a member's right to choose. The church should educate its members regarding their civic responsibilities as Paul did in Rom 13. Our function as a church (a corporate entity) is to be **educative but non-directive**. Our policy should be **"we teach you decide"**.

Unbalanced teaching has diminished our influence in society.

Consider the following **examples**:

- The **false dichotomy between** sacred and secular
- Presenting Gospel Ministry and Government as **alternatives**
- **Confusing** consecration with isolation

(We cannot expand on this due to space constraints).

• The Prophetic Ministry

The church is God's mouth-piece. It cannot be beholden to any one political party. It must commend what is right and criticise what is wrong according to God's word regardless of who is in power. There is the **gift** of prophecy (1 Cor 12); there is the **office** of a prophet (Eph 4:11); There is the **prophetic ministry** of the church that addresses the **moral and spiritual condition of a nation** (see any book of the Old Testament prophets).

• The Priestly Ministry

We are urged to make prayers and intercessions for all those in authority (1 Tim 2:1-2). This is our priestly ministry. Paul gives it a **priority**. He says, "first of all...." How many churches pray regularly for politicians and **others in authority outside the church?** We need to be informed so as to **pray intelligently and our prayers should be specific**, not vague generalities.

(b) Christians and Government.

We have **dual citizenship** both in **heaven** (Phil 3:20) and on **earth** (eg Acts 22:25). Our duties as individual Christians have been listed early in this pamphlet (see also **"Should Christians be Engaged in Politics"**).

Conclusion

As citizens of **two kingdoms** both of man and God, we have God-given responsibilities to both. We must avoid **two extremes**.

- a) **Politicising our faith** by confusing the kingdom of man with the kingdom of God and
- b) **Privatising our faith** by making it a personal matter between God and us only.

We are called to be the salt of the **earth** and the light of the **world** (Matt 5:13-16). We must engage in **all 7 sectors of society** namely

1. Family
2. Church
3. Government
4. Business
5. Law
6. Entertainment
7. Media

We are to be **in** the world but **not** of it and our ministry is to be both **within the church** and **out in the world** (Jn 17:14-19).

A Balanced Biblical Position in a Nutshell

- not **alternatives** (not 'either/or')
- but **complementary** ('both-and')
- also **priority** (**First** God; **Second** Government)

Other Resources by Rasik Ranchord:

Pamphlets: *-Should Christians be engaged in Politics?*
-Vote Smart 2020;

Textbook: *Dare to be a Disciple (266 pages)*

Available from: www.rasikranchord.com
www.prayeratparliament.org.nz



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