

## **“BIBLICAL GOVERNMENT” SERIES**

### **#2: “Biblical Civil Government”**

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Samuel 8:1-9

*When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.*

*So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."*

*But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do."*

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 13:1b

*“There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”*

**INTRO:**

In the 1 Samuel passage, we see that God allowed civil government at the request of His people Israel. Samuel was aware that it wasn't a good idea, and he pled with God to deny the request, but God in His wisdom decided to let them have their human ruler. They had failed to govern themselves, and the domino effect had started, but they didn't get it. God was going to let them have the opportunity to learn a tragic lesson.

In the Romans 13 passage, Paul is used by God to help us understand the foundational principles of civil government.

This morning I want to talk about “Biblical Civil Government.”

First of all, I want to point out that

***CIVIL GOVERNMENT IS APPROVED AND ORDAINED BY GOD***

If mankind had been faithful and obedient to God, there would have been no need for civil government. In other words, civil government became needed because of the failure of man to honor God as Lord and govern himself accordingly and the failure of the family to teach faithful obedience to God to the next generation.

So God *allowed* civil governments to be established, even though He knew that they would be fraught with all kinds of unwelcome complications, shortcomings, and difficulties, some of which are described in 1 Samuel 8:10 through 18.

Second, note that

***THE AUTHORITY OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT COMES FROM GOD.***

No government is autonomous – no civil government, no self government, no family government, no church government. No government is a law unto itself – not even the state civil government or the federal civil government. **ALL AUTHORITY IS DELEGATED AND LIMITED BY GOD.**

God is the only ultimate authority. Only He has authority over us as individuals. Only He has authority over our families. Only He has authority over the church. Only He has authority over civil government.

The major problem with human government is revealed in 1 Samuel 8:7, where the Lord said to Samuel: ***“...it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king...”*** Later on, in chapter 15, we read of God’s rejection of Saul as king because of his disobedience out of rebelliousness and arrogance. If people were faithful to God, they wouldn’t need civil government, and when civil governments are formed, they consist of sinful people who forget who has given them their power and authority.

Third,

***GOD HAS DETERMINED THE SCOPE AND BOUNDARIES OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT.***

The authority and function of civil government should not extend beyond what God has declared in His Word. What this means is that the state is not to operate in the areas of individual rights and responsibilities, of family rights and responsibilities, of school rights and responsibilities, or of church rights and responsibilities. The Bible reveals no provision for the civil government’s power and authority in these areas.

Charles Hodge has written: “All authority is of God. No man has any rightful power over other men, which is not derived from God. All human power is delegated and ministerial. This is true of parents, of magistrates, and of church officers” (*A Commentary on Romans*, p. 406).

Yet the historical records of the world are filled with rulers who exercised power and authority far beyond that which God delegates.

God had Samuel warn the Israelites about what a human ruler would do (1 Samuel 8:10-18). William Penn had it right when he said: “Men must be governed by God or they will be ruled by tyrants.”

In the previous message I called your attention to the four basic purposes of civil government, according to the Scriptures. Hear them again:

1. Uphold the laws and standards of God; recognize His supreme authority and enforce His laws and standards.
2. Keep order; do not allow unbelievers and lawbreakers to get the upper hand.
3. Maintain peace; insure that citizens are able to live their lives in obedience to God free from fear and harm.
4. Tax only as needed to accomplish the three things above.

But consider the complexity of our civil government today. Not only is it gigantic and stuffed with bureaucrats, but also has its fingers into our individual lives, our families, our schools, and our churches!

And whose fault is it? Harold O. J. Brown puts the blame where it really is:

“Unless we control our appetites, we cannot control our government. We certainly cannot expect it to limit itself, because it senses our appetites far more strongly than it is persuaded by our claims that we are tired of bureaucracy, taxes, and government interference. If the ultimate goal of government is to ‘do everything and change everything,’ really an infinite challenge, then it will require an infinite effort – in fact, infinite taxes, infinite paperwork, and infinite interference: infinite in the sense that there will be no limit to them, no place at which people will say, ‘This is clearly all that we want or need,’ until the limits of exhaustion are reached. *Infinite goals mean infinite controls.* And infinite controls mean zero freedom” (*The Reconstruction of the Republic*, p. 87).

In other words, we have the bureaucratic civil government that we do because too many of us want civil government to do more than God ever intended it to do. We want civil government to “provide.” We want civil government to “fix.” I remember reading a revised version of “The Lord’s Prayer” a number of years ago that started out, “Our Father who art in Washington...” Too many Americans have replaced their faith and dependence upon God with faith and dependence on civil government.

Fourth, note that

***WHEN CITIZENS DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE INTENDED LIMITED FUNCTION OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT, TWO THINGS HAPPEN.***

*First, individuals, families, churches, and schools tend to lay aside their God-ordained responsibilities and to look to human rulers for what they want instead of looking to God to supply their needs. As a result, civil government with its ever-growing bureaucracy will take on the responsibilities reserved for the citizens at the expense of their freedoms.*

Let me cite an example. In the early formative years of this nation, while it was still a group of colonies, the predominate Puritans and Congregationalists schooled their children at home and in church schools. This practice continued after the Revolution, but in due time the influx of people from many different countries, who spoke languages other than English and who had different religious affiliations created a demand that the established churches were not prepared to meet. So the Christian community did not continue to meet the educational need of the times.

As a result, private schools tried to fill the gap, but many who did not have financial means were denied access to education.

Men such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, Robert Coram, and George Washington pushed for public education, based on Christian principles, of course, but for various reasons, the concept never became reality.

Eventually, Horace Mann, a Massachusetts lawyer and Congressman, and a Unitarian, stepped up and advocated mandatory, tax-funded, “religiously neutral” public education. As a result, Massachusetts became the first state to develop a “Board of Education.”

While Horace Mann did a lot of good, humanitarian things, he and Massachusetts, along with Connecticut, set the trend that has produced this country’s present education system. America’s civil governments have stepped in where parents and the church have abdicated their God-

given responsibilities. And as civil government has evolved into a relatively godless entity, our government education systems have followed suit.

*Second, when citizens do not understand the intended limited function of civil government, that government will begin to tyrannize and exploit the people by trying to control their lives with laws that apply to areas in which it was never intended to function or have authority.*

Examples here are plentiful. One glaring example is what is presently being proposed in the name of health care reform, but our civil governments have been exercising control over areas of our personal lives for a long time. They have been collecting taxes to pay for myriads of unconstitutional bureaucracies for years!

Finally, note that

***THERE IS A BIBLICAL FORM OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT.***

In his book, *God and Government, Volume 1*, Gary DeMar has written:

“A brief survey of the Bible and its principles will show that it has directives for all areas of life. Does this, however, include civil government? Is God as concerned about the structure and principles of political systems as He is about families? Or, has God left the area of political systems for man to develop according to the needs of a particular era or to satisfy the desires of a particular people? Or, does the Bible claim ‘neutrality’ in certain areas of life, leaving man to create his own directives? For example, is there a Christian economic system? Or, is the study of economics a neutral enterprise? Does the Bible set forth directives in the area of science? Are there certain creational laws that God has established to order the universe? Is it possible to develop an educational system from Scripture? Can educational facts have any meaning if they are not related to God and His Word? Can one really be ‘educated’ if Christ is not at the center of his life giving meaning to all facts and experiences? Are there commandments that address the issues of business?

“The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is Lord and that His lordship extends over all of society’s institutions, including the family, economics, science, education, and . . . civil government. . . There can be no neutral law system” (p. 69).

So what is the biblical form of civil government? How many forms of civil government can you name? What is our form of civil government here in the U.S.A.? There are seven types of civil government:

1. Anarchy – Essentially, the absence of any civil government; everyone lives by his own rules (Judges 17:6; Deuteronomy 12:8).
2. Autocracy – Absolute rule by a monarch or dictator (1 Samuel 8; 1 Kings 12).
3. Communism – Total control of state and society by a single non-elected authoritarian group or party.
4. Democracy – Government directly by the people with rule by the majority. The U.S. is *not* a democracy.
5. Bureaucracy – Rule or manipulation of a people by non-elected officials and civil servants (1 Kings 12).
6. Constitutional monarchy – Rule by a monarch bound by a constitution or law that is higher than he. This is what Israel had from King Saul to the time of the exile.
7. Constitutional republic – Government through elected representatives bound by a constitution or higher law. This is the type of civil government our forefathers set up.

In Exodus 18 is the biblical model for civil government. Listen to verses 19 through 23:

***Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."***

DeMar's comments on this are:

“Before the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, governing institutions centered around the family (Genesis 14:13; 31:13-52; 34:8-10) and tribes (Exodus 1:1-6). Families and tribes retained governing responsibilities within the immediate family or tribe of which each family was a part. It was not until Moses' appointed term of leadership that the establishment

of rule over a variety of tribes developed. This situation later grew to national proportions.

“At the time of the Exodus, two problems existed for the people of Israel. First, there was no court system to handle judicial matters. God, through the instrument of Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, established an orderly judicial system. Second, a published law was needed so that an unchanging standard of righteousness would be before the people and the rulers at all times. The published law would give the people a standard by which they could evaluate their lives and their leaders. Both these needs were met in Exodus 18-24” (Ibid, p. 74).

Note that this model provided that:

1. The people be taught “the decrees and laws” (18:20);
2. Representatives were to be chosen from the people (18:21);
3. The representatives chosen were to have certain qualifications (18:21);
4. There was to be a division of powers or several levels of jurisdiction (18:21);
5. Their rule was to be “at all times” (18:22);
6. Disputes that could not be handled through the representatives would be judged by Moses (18:22).

Does any of that remind you of the form of civil government our forefathers set up? It certainly should!

## **CONCLUSION:**

I hope you’ll “stay tuned” as next Lord’s Day the message will be “The Christian History of the United States.” Let’s pray...