

The Timeless Voice: The Church's rightful relationship to government

Commentary by Greg Baker

Throughout history there has been a debate over the role of the Church as an institution when it comes to public policy. Does the Church even have a role to play in government?

The United States has largely bought into the motto of "separation of church and state," but what does that practically mean?

According to the Bible, government is an institution established by God with the primary purpose to punish evil and praise those who do good (see Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). Yet how can government determine good and evil without God? Without the voice of the Church rightly proclaiming the truths of Scripture? **To do its job successfully, the government needs the Church to fulfill the proper role of spiritual guide and counselor.**

For government, like the Church, wrestles with difficult issues that impact not just nations and laws and economies, but real people's lives – such as the drug crisis, unplanned pregnancies, poverty, immigration, and so much more. The government carries people's burdens, just as our churches do. Thus the shepherds of government and the shepherds of God's Church have much in common, albeit with different responsibilities. **Both are institutions of God's, and if they work together they can be a blessing to the people.**

The Church, however, has a unique role to play because it holds the Truth, God's Word. The Church holds a larger, eternal perspective on what is truly happening in the culture,

and the Church holds the true solution. As government works to administer justice, it needs guidance from the Church.

It is not the Church's responsibility, however, to create public policy. That role belongs to the government. God calls those who serve in government His "ministers" and assigns His ministers of government – not His ministers of the Church – responsibility to administer justice.

The Church's responsibility is to share what God says about the issues the government is wrestling with. What do the timeless principles of Scripture teach? The Bible speaks to the root of every issue the government faces. The Church must lay out these biblical principles before the nation's "kings" as the government works to administer justice. The Church is the moral compass and advisor to the "king." Without the Church, the "king" will only receive worldly counsel and will never be able to administer true biblical justice.

As the Church lays out these principles, it is the "king's" responsibility to administer these principles in public policy. The Church must check to ensure that public policy includes the full counsel of God. The Church must also be a leader in speaking to the culture, encouraging when "the king" has it right and correcting when "the king" has it wrong.

The Church must speak not only to a few issues, but to all issues. Each individual pastor and local church may not be able to do that, but when you tap into the full global church as an institution, God has gifted congregations in different areas. When the full Church comes together, the full counsel of God can be given to the "king."

As a result, not only will biblical justice be advocated, but the "king" will also see that God cares personally about each individual issue – not just the hot-button topics – the government wrestles with. And then, perhaps, the "king" will also see how personal God is and be drawn into a relationship

with Him.

Beyond just the issues, however, the Church must not forget to offer personal counsel to the “king” as well. King David ruled with justice and righteousness because he walked with the Lord his God. The same is true with our “kings” today. If we are to have true biblical justice, our “kings” must have a relationship with God. The Church must pour into these men and women on a personal, spiritual level. It must share the Gospel with them with a heart to lead them to Christ, plug them into a local church, and see them disciplined.

A new heart lies at the center of true justice. That is the beauty of the Church ministering to the ministers of government. The Church can use the issues today’s “kings” face to point them to the God of Justice and guide them to form a personal relationship with Him. Only the Church can fulfill this unique role of ministering to the “king,” both individually and as a minister of justice.

Most importantly, at the center of this Christian witness, the Church as an institution must be a voice independent of worldly factions and allegiances. The Church’s voice is not to be a voice from this kingdom, but a voice for God’s kingdom. It must not be Republican or Democrat, nor conservative or liberal. No, it must be clear that its allegiance is to another kingdom alone. The Church is the ambassador of God who created the heavens and the earth, and it stands for the same truths it always has. It must never be shaken, and it must never change.

The Church must recognize and adopt the attitude that majority parties come and majority parties go. Presidents come and presidents go. Nations come and nations go, but the Lord remains forever. We are not afraid or impressed by you. We are the Church. We were here before you, and we will be here well after you are gone.

Daniel is an excellent example: He was not only a voice to four different emperors, he was also a voice to two different empires. How is that possible? Because Daniel did not come from the institution of government. He was an outside voice. He came from a completely different kingdom. When the kingdoms of earth changed, Daniel's job continued and did not change. The same is true for the Church in America. If the American government dissolved tomorrow, the Church's responsibility would not change. The Church must simply approach the new king the same way.

This truth is essential to be a proper witness of Christ in the civic arena. The Church has to get this right if it is ever going to get the relationship between Church and state right. The Church must assume its proper role and loyalty – as a moral compass and guide to the institution of government as well as an ambassador of its true king, God alone.

Our nation, as all nations, desperately needs this right relationship between Church and state. Minister of God in the Church, will you arise and take your role in the civic arena? Not as the nation's politicians desire, but as God desires? The "king" needs you. The nation needs you. The kingdom is calling.

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