

Consent of the Governed in a Christian Nation

Hosea 8:4; 1 Samuel 11:15

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In this series of sermons concerning what constitutes a Christian nation, it has not been my intention to downplay the unmistakable role Christianity played in the establishment of the British colonies in North America, and in the original States that formed the United States of America; for without controversy, from the time of the first colonial charter (namely that of Virginia in 1606 which reads, “by the Providence of Almighty God . . . in propagating of [the] Christian Religion to such People”), to the Mayflower Compact of 1620 (which states, “for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith”), to the first State Constitutions after the Declaration of Independence in 1776 (in which only 2 States, namely Virginia and New York, out of the original 13 did not require Christian oaths to hold office), we see the influence of Christianity (at least in name).

In fact, the first Constitution to actually prohibit any form of religious test to hold office was the Federal Constitution of the United States in 1787 (in Article 6, “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States”). And after that action by the federal government, there began a trend and shift by individual States to conform to the Federal Constitution in prohibiting any religious tests (no State now requires a religious test in support of Christianity).

My point is simply this: For all those who believe the Federal Constitution to be a Christian document, why was the effect of the Federal Constitution on the various State Constitutions to begin removing distinctly Christian tests to hold office and to begin removing specific references to Christ, the Trinity, the Old and New Testaments, and to Christianity from their State Constitutions? If the Federal Constitution was the Christian document that many claim it to be, why did it not rather have the effect of retaining the Christian tests to hold office that were already in State Constitutions and make even more explicit the declaration of Christianity at the State level where it did exist?

Yes, Christianity had its influences upon the Colonies and the original States, but after union of the States under the Federal Constitution, the United States as a nation clearly moved away from the explicit and official declarations of Christianity that were in the Colonial Charters and in the original State Constitutions to a pluralistic and polytheistic declaration of official protection of all religions, and the individual States began one by one to follow in that same course as well. Thus, I would have no problem in saying that Christianity indeed had a significant influence in the formation of the Colonies and of the States in their earlier stages of development, but when it came time to form a nation, the official, constitutional recognition of Christianity was intentionally and premeditatedly cast aside and religious pluralism and polytheism was rather adopted.

It would be similar to a child who is raised in a Christian home, who receives Christian baptism and Christian instruction, who regularly attends Christian worship in the family and in the church, but who upon becoming an adult refuses to own Christianity any longer and rather lives a life in which he adheres to no specific religion while recognizing the validity and defending the honor of all religions—thus becoming the friend of every god and religion he comes in contact with for the remainder of his life. Now just because he had that Christian influence in his early development, ought we to declare such a man to be in fact (*de facto*) a Christian man? We may certainly argue that he was bound by covenant (*de jure*) by way of his baptism and his Christian training to own Christ and to live for Christ as a Christian man, but his rejection of Christ and Christianity is even a greater aggravation of sin than one who has never been baptized or raised in a Christian home and

instructed in the Christian religion. So likewise, we may argue that the United States is bound by covenant (*de jure*) by means of the *Solemn League and Covenant* (1643) to be a Christian nation, and that in its early development as Colonies and States it had much exposure to Christianity (in various forms), but when it reached adulthood and became an independent nation, it officially cast off Christianity, and officially recognized the validity and defended the honor of all religions, becoming equally the friend of all gods and religions of the world. Now just as such a man could not be called in fact (*de facto*) a Christian man, so such a nation could not be called in fact (*de facto*) a Christian nation. Dear ones, a Christian nation is one that officially and constitutionally serves the Triune God of the Bible, that officially and constitutionally honors Jesus Christ as the Prince of the kings of the earth, that officially and constitutionally declares the Old and New Testaments to be the supreme law of the land, that officially and constitutionally establishes biblical Christianity (as summarized in faithful Confessions of Faith like the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and faithful Covenants like the *Solemn League and Covenant*) as its national religion, and that officially and constitutionally requires an oath to what has just been stated in order to hold civil office.

As we continue in our study of what is a Christian nation, let us focus our attention for the remainder of our time in this sermon upon the following main points: (1) It Is Not Merely the Consent of the Governed that Makes a Nation a Christian Nation (Hosea 8:4); (2) More Arguments Offered by Those Who Assert that the United States Is a Christian Nation.

I. It Is Not Merely the Consent of the Governed that Makes a Nation a Christian Nation (Hosea 8:4).

A. Dear ones, it is a biblical principle that the civil government that is the lawful ordinance of God and those who rule as the ministers of God for good must do so with the consent of those who are ruled and by way of covenant (or contract) with those who are ruled (through their representatives) as we see in various biblical passages (1 Samuel 11:15; 1 Chronicles 12:38; 2 Chronicles 23:3 etc.).

1. For if one simply assumes the place of power without the consent of the people (through their representatives), such a one is a tyrant who rules by mere force of power (*dunamis*), rather than by lawful authority (*exousia*) as was true in the following instances: Judges 3:8-11 (Othniel delivers Israel from the tyrant Chushan-rishathaim); Judges 3:12-30 (Ehud delivers Israel from the tyrant Eglon); Judges 6-8 (Gideon delivers Israel from the tyranny of the Midianites); Judges 13-16 (Samson delivers Israel from the tyranny of the Philistines). In all of the above cases (and many more), these tyrannical rulers and kingdoms did not have the consent of Israel to govern them, and thus they were tyrants and ruled by tyrannical force rather than by lawful authority as God's ordinance; otherwise, if these rulers and kingdoms had been the lawful ordinance of God, it would have been the duty of Israel to submit to them for conscience sake as God's ministers for their good (as we noted in the previous sermon from Romans 13:1-5) rather than resisting them and throwing off their yoke of tyranny.

2. Thus, let me say it again, it is a biblical principle that those who rule must do so with the consent of and by covenant with those who are ruled. Most national Constitutions today (including the United States Constitution) follow this moral principle (established in both the Law of Nature and the Law of Revelation) to varying degrees. But what about civil governments and civil rulers that have the approval of the people, but do not have the approval of God because they fail to meet the moral qualifications found in God's Moral Law? Are such civil governments the lawful ordinance of God and such civil rulers the ministers of God for good? Let us see by an examination of our text in Hosea 8:4.

B. This Old Testament prophecy was revealed by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to Hosea, whose name means salvation. There is little that is revealed about Hosea himself, but it is clear that he prophesied in the 8th century b.c. during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel and during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and

Hezekiah of Judah. It would appear from his prophecy that most of what was prophesied related to the gross and grievous backsliding of the northern kingdom of Israel (i.e. the ten tribes), though some of what was prophesied also related to apostasy found in the southern kingdom (particularly under Ahaz). This would mean that Hosea's ministry stretched out over a period of perhaps 50 years.

1. The primary thrust of Hosea's message revolved around the solemn covenant that existed between the Lord and His people in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The Lord had graciously brought these kingdoms when they were one unified kingdom into a marital covenant with Himself at Mt. Sinai so that He became a Husband by covenant and they became a wife by covenant. His covenanted wife, however, went after other gods and religions and after the inventions and imaginations of man brought into the worship of Jehovah God, so that various religions were officially tolerated and practiced by His bride and mixed together with the worship to the LORD God to their shame, especially in view of the undeserved love and mercy of the Lord as an ever faithful Husband.

2. Listen to the amazing, undeserving love of the Lord for His covenanted people when after He has threatened judgment to fall upon His bride, He cries out through His prophet in Hosea 11:8, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? [these were cities along with Sodom and Gomorrah which the Lord destroyed by fire and brimstone, Deuteronomy 29:23—GLP] Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Dear ones, here the Lord graciously accommodates Himself to our lowly condition to reveal Himself a loving Father to us who doesn't afflict His people with righteous judgment in order to delight in their misery. To the contrary, He afflicts His people for their good. His very heart as it were churns within Him over what His people must suffer, even when they suffer for their own willful disobedience against Him (as was true of Israel here). Dear ones, the love of Christ for you is inflamed in all your trials and miseries of this life (even when you suffer for the sin you have committed against Him). For our heavenly Husband knows first-hand what it is to suffer for those whom He loves, as He suffered the equivalent of hell's judgment in taking upon Himself the infinite wrath of God for His beloved bride. He is touched, dear ones, with your infirmities. He is a sympathetic High Priest to whom you can come with all your sins, with all your temptations, with all your afflictions, trials and burdens. Cast them all upon Him, for He cares for you and demonstrated that care for you as no mere human being could ever do.

C. As we now consider Hosea 8:4, we find two reasons why the Lord's judgment shall fall upon the northern kingdom of Israel.

1. Considering first the second stated reason mentioned by Israel's faithful Husband in Hosea 8:4, we see that judgment was imminent due to Israel officially tolerating and following false gods and false religions, even using the gold and silver of her prosperity which the Lord graciously heaped upon her during the reign of Jeroboam II to make for herself idols and to pursue these spiritual lovers ("of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off" Hosea 8:4b). Dear ones, whenever we bring worship to the Lord which He has not authorized in His Word (whether uninspired hymns in His worship, musical instruments in His worship, images and crosses in His worship, or entertainment in His worship), or when we bring hearts that are not prepared to worship, hearts that are filled with unconfessed sin, hearts that are self-righteous taking pride in all of our good deeds, or hearts that are drowsy and inattentive in worship, we likewise pollute and trivialize our worship as if we had brought with us gold and silver images into the worship of God. May the Lord mercifully burn all of the dross of our impure worship and cast us upon Christ who will receive our worship as a sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to the Lord through His own perfect mediation.

2. Now considering secondly the first stated reason mentioned by Israel's faithful Husband, we see that judgment was imminent due to Israel setting up kings and princes whom the Lord did not sanction nor recognize as His ministers for good nor as His lawful ordinance ("They have set up kings, but not by me:

they have made princes, and I knew it not” Hosea 8:4b). Here the Lord reveals His holy displeasure and divine disapproval of the line of kings and princes that served in the northern kingdom of Israel from the first king, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, to the last king, Hoshea the son of Elah.

a. Why did the Lord not recognize the civil government of the northern kingdom of Israel as His lawful ordinance or recognize the rulers of Israel as the ministers of God for good? Because Israel’s civil government and rulers had entirely rejected the divinely appointed and royal house of David (which was a type of Christ) that was in Judah (2 Kings 17:20-23), and because Israel’s civil government and rulers had entirely (one and all) rejected the national covenant God made with them at Mt. Sinai (2 Kings 17:15-17).

b. Thus, just as we noted in the previous sermon from Romans 13:1, there are moral qualifications that must be evident if a civil government is to be owned as the lawful ordinance of God and if the rulers are to be acknowledged as the ministers of God for good. It is not simply the civil government that governs or the civil magistrate that rules in God’s appointed providence or by the consent of the people that is God’s lawful ordinance or God’s minister for good. Here in Hosea 8:4, the Lord clearly declares that due to moral disqualifications, He did not own Israel’s civil government to be His lawful ordinance, nor did He acknowledge Israel’s civil rulers to be His ministers for good—even though the civil government and the civil rulers had the consent and approval of those who were governed. For example, Israel’s first king, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, clearly had the consent of the people to govern (“And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel” 1 Kings 12:20). Is it not clear from Hosea 8:4 that it is not merely the civil government that has the consent of the people that is the lawful ordinance of God, or the civil ruler that is elected by the people that is the minister of God for good? For both the approval of God and of the people are necessary for the civil government and civil rulers to be acknowledged as lawful by God and by Christians.

D. Although the civil government may be owned by the people of the United States (or the nation in which you live), and although the civil rulers may be acknowledged by the people of the United States (or the nation in which you live), these questions yet must be answered: Does God Himself recognize the civil government of the United States as His lawful ordinance even though it has officially rejected Him, officially rejected the Lord Jesus Christ as its Mediatorial king, officially rejected Christ’s Word and Law as the supreme law of the land, and officially rejected biblical and covenanted Christianity as the only established national religion? And Does God Himself acknowledge the civil rulers of the United States as His ministers for good even though they officially refuse to own by oath the truths just mentioned and rather legally tolerate and thus promote idolatry, false religion, blasphemy, covenant-breaking, Sabbath-breaking, the murder of 50+ million babies since 1973, and the sexual perversion of same sex unions, pornography, adultery, and no-fault divorces (and the list goes on and on)? Dear ones, if the slaughter of millions of people in Europe by Hitler (who was duly elected by the majority of people in Germany) rendered the civil government of Germany as unlawful (at least by most people’s standards it would seem), and rendered Hitler himself an unlawful magistrate (at least by most people’s standard it would seem), how does the United States and other nations of the world today (along with their complicit civil rulers) escape the same judgment when 50+ million defenseless children have been slaughtered, and hundreds of millions of helpless children have been murdered throughout the nations of the world by abortion with the sanction of civil governments and civil rulers? Dear ones, if the blood of one innocent man, Abel, cried out to the Lord for justice, how loud must be the cry of the blood of the millions of helpless babies who have been murdered while in that place above all places that should be most safe for these defenseless little ones—their mother’s womb? Their cry must be deafening against such ungodly nations. Oh Lord, heal us of all such national crimes. Amen.

II. More Arguments Offered by Those Who Assert that the United States Is a Christian Nation.

A. First, there are Christians who argue that the Supreme Court of the United States in 1892 officially declared the United States to be a Christian nation.

1. The Supreme Court issued a decision in the case of *Holy Trinity Church v. United States* in 1892, which concerned an Act of Congress prohibiting

any person, company, partnership, or corporation ... to assist or encourage the importation or migration of any alien ... under contract or agreement ... to perform labor or service of any kind in the United States.

The issue in the case revolved around whether or not Holy Trinity Church of New York City had violated this law when it contracted with an English minister to become the pastor of its congregation. I'll not go into the specifics of the case, but the Supreme Court found in favor of Holy Trinity Church. The majority opinion of the Court was authored by Justice David Brewer. Justice Brewer writes in the opinion that "beyond all these matters no purpose of action against religion can be imputed to any legislation, state or national, because this is a religious people." In other words, he said that the Federal law cited against Holy Trinity Church was not intended to restrict religious groups from inviting foreigners to be their ministers because the people of the United States are a religious people. Justice Brewer then presents a religious history of America, and states, "These, and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of **unofficial declarations** to the mass of organic utterances that **this is a Christian nation.**" The question is in what sense did Justice Brewer mean that "this is a Christian nation"?

2. It should seem clear from the very outset that the Court was not officially and legally declaring the United States to have been established as a Christian nation or since the founding of the nation to have become officially and legally a Christian nation. Otherwise, the Court would have violated the First Amendment which prohibits the establishment of any religion in the United States. To the contrary, the historical information Justice Brewer lists as indicating that this is a "Christian nation" he specifically labels as "unofficial declarations" rather than "constitutional declarations", or "legal declarations", or "official declarations." Justice Brewer was merely making the historical point that the majority of the *people* themselves in this country have claimed to have been Christian (at least Christian in name)—thus, it seemed to the Court unlikely that the Federal law actually intended to prohibit religious congregations from inviting religious leaders (even Jewish rabbis) from other countries to come to the United States to serve in their congregations.

3. In 1905, Justice Brewer clarified in a book he authored (*The United States: A Christian Nation*) what he did not mean when he wrote in the majority opinion that "this is a Christian nation." He states,

But in what sense can [the United States] be called a Christian nation? Not in the sense that Christianity is the established religion or the people are compelled in any manner to support it. On the contrary, the Constitution specifically provides that 'congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.' Neither is it Christian in the sense that all its citizens are either in fact or in name Christians. On the contrary, all religions have free scope within its borders. Numbers of our people profess other religions, and many reject all

Nor is it Christian in the sense that a profession of Christianity is a condition of holding office or otherwise engaging in public service, or essential to recognition either politically or socially. In fact, the government as a legal organization is independent of all religions.

Therefore, Justice Brewer was simply making a historical observation which is consistent with the fact that the majority of the people in this country have tended to be Christian (not that the civil government is Christian, or that the civil laws are Christian, or that the civil institutions are Christian). In this sense and this sense alone can this nation be said to be Christian—the majority of the people have historically been Christian in name. However, that still does not change at all the fact that this nation is constitutionally and legally founded upon religious pluralism or polytheism.

4. But in that same sense, I would submit that Nazi Germany was also a Christian nation, for the majority of the Germans likewise were Christians (at least in name and in profession). In fact, one of the planks in the platform of the political party of which Hitler was the leader stated:

We demand freedom for all religious confessions in the state, insofar as they do not endanger its existence or conflict with the customs and moral sentiments of the Germanic race. The party as such represents the standpoint of a positive Christianity, without owing itself to a particular confession" (Article 20 of the program of the German Workers' Party, later named the National Socialist German Workers' Party, NSDAP).

I submit that if the United States is a Christian nation because the majority of its people have tended to be Christians by profession, then Nazi Germany was also a Christian nation for the same reason. You see, dear ones, there must be moral qualifications evident in a nation and its rulers in order for that civil government to be the lawful ordinance of God and in order for its civil rulers to be the ministers of God for good.

B. A second argument posed by some vocal Christians states that the Constitution is based upon the Bible (and therefore is a Christian document) because of the frequency in which the founding fathers quote the Bible in their early political writings.

1. It has been claimed by some Christian writers that researchers concluded that 94% of all the citations found in the political writings of the founding fathers were either citations of the Bible, or of authors who based their conclusions on the Bible. These Christian writers conclude that this demonstrates the profound influence the Bible had on the Constitution. These Christian writers consulted Donald Lutz and Charles Hyneman (in a paper published in 1984, "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought," in *The American Political Science Review*, 78 (1984), pp. 189-197) who provide their conclusions as to what sources most influenced the political American mindset of the founding fathers after analyzing some 15,000 works of American political writings between 1760-1805. What were the conclusions drawn by Lutz and Hyneman, specifically in regard to the alleged influence of the Bible on the Constitution?

2. The research obtained from a study of the political literature of the founding fathers pertaining to the Constitution in the years 1787 and 1788 (the very years in which the process of drafting, debating, and ratifying the Constitution occurred) suggests that the Bible had hardly no role at all in the political writings of the founding fathers. According to Mr. Lutz, the sample of the political writings which they obtained of the founding fathers during these two years "comes close to exhausting" their political literature ("The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought," p. 194). If such a great influence was exerted by the Bible upon the Constitution one would expect to find scores of biblical references in these political writings. However, to the contrary, references to Scripture are hardly present at all. According to Lutz, federalist (i.e., pro-Constitution) writers (like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton) never quoted the Bible in their political writings between 1787 and 1788, while anti-federalist writers (who opposed the Constitution like Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams) quoted the Bible only 9% of the time. According to Lutz:

The Bible's prominence disappears, which is not surprising since the debate centered upon specific institutions about which the Bible has little to say. The Anti-Federalists do drag it in with respect to basic principles of government, **but the Federalist's inclination to Enlightenment rationalism is most evident here in their failure to consider the Bible relevant....**The debate surrounding the adoption of the Constitution was fought out mainly in the context of Montesquieu, Blackstone, the English Whigs, and major writers of the Enlightenment ("The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought," pp. 194-195, emphases added).

Did a few of the founding fathers quote the Bible in their political writings as it related to the Constitution? Yes, a few did, but it is clear that the Bible had very little direct impact and influence on the political views that went into drafting, debating, and ratifying the Constitution.

Dear ones, that will simply not be the case when a people are establishing a Christian nation any more than it will be the case that you and I (as Christians) can talk about politics, talk about civil government, talk about civil magistrates, and civil laws without approaching such a discussion of ordinances established by God for His own glory without talking about God's Moral Law as revealed most clearly in the Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture. If we can talk about an ordinance of God without discussing the Word of God, we reveal either our ignorance and indifference, or our resistance to what God Himself reveals about His own lawful ordinance of civil government. May the Spirit of God open the eyes of His people to see the glory of God's lawful ordinance of civil government as He Himself has ordained it in His Holy Word to promote the reformation of true, biblical Christianity in the nations of this world. Amen.

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