

No Biblical Warrant to Tolerate False Religion

Luke 9:51-56; James 4:12

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Many Christians would seek to scripturally defend a political view of religious pluralism and religious toleration (as propounded in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution) on the basis of a distinction between the Old Testament (which they allege promotes a typological Jewish theocracy that has now been abolished since the advent of Christ) and a distinction between the New Testament (which they allege promotes a free exercise of religion within each nation in which the conscience of each person determines the religion he/she will profess and practice or not profess and practice). The appeal to various New Testament passages that allegedly warrant such a distinction between the principles of civil government in the Old Testament and between the principles of civil government in the New Testament will occupy our attention over the next few sermons (beginning with today's text from Luke 9:51-56). Does the Old Testament teach that Israel alone was required by God to establish the one true religion revealed in Scripture? Does the New Testament teach that now in the Gospel age civil government should promote a free exercise of all religions? Before considering our text this Lord's Day, let me make the following preliminary remarks in regard to these questions.

First, I submit that just as the Moral Law of God (as summarized in the Ten Commandments—all 10 of the Ten Commandments) bound Israel to obedience, so the same Moral Law of God (as summarized in the Ten Commandments—all 10 of the Ten Commandments) bound the Gentile nations in the Old Testament age and likewise the Gentile nations in the New Testament age. Consider that Gentile nations in the Old Testament were likewise bound to obey God's Moral Law and both Tables of God's Moral Law as summarized in the Ten Commandments (Leviticus 18:24-28—the nations of Canaan; Deuteronomy 12:29-31—the nations of Canaan; Romans 3:19—the Moral Law causes "all the world" to become guilty before God; Matthew 25:31ff—all nations will be judged by Christ on the last day).

Second, I submit that just as Israel as a nation was required by God's Moral Law to worship and serve Jehovah alone and to destroy all idolatry (as required in the First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."), so is every Gentile nation likewise bound to do (Deuteronomy 12:29-31—the nations of Canaan; Deuteronomy 29:16-17—Egypt and the nations of Canaan; Deuteronomy 18:9-12—the nations of Canaan; Jeremiah 46:25—the nation of Egypt; Jeremiah 51:17-18—the nation of Babylon). And where the revelation of Scripture is graciously given to any nation (Jewish or Gentile alike), that nation is specifically bound to kiss the Son, serve and establish the true religion of the Bible alone, whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament (Psalm 2:10-12—all rulers of nations in the New Testament age are commanded to serve Jehovah with fear and to kiss the Son). Just because civil government is immediately established by God as Creator rather than immediately established by Christ as Mediator (as is the church) is no reason why the Moral Law of God binds the church to obedience any more than it binds nations (and their civil governments) to obedience. For the family and marriage (like civil government) is immediately established by God as Creator rather than immediately established by Christ as Mediator, and families are clearly bound by the Moral Law of God to worship the Triune God of the Bible ("Pour out thy fury upon the heathen [*ha goyim* in Hebrew or "the nations"—GLP] that know not thee, and upon the families [i.e. the families of those nations—GLP] that call not on thy name" Jeremiah 10:25). Why would God judge either nations or families, unless both nations and families had broken God's Moral Law which they are bound to obey?

Third, I submit that any political theory or any civil government that alleges the liberty of each man's

conscience to be the foundation of the religious toleration of all religions (the false religion along with the true religion, or no religion at all) has blasphemed and rejected the God revealed in Scripture, who is the King of nations (Jeremiah 10:7) and Christ, who is the Prince of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5) who alone is to be worshipped by the nations of this world. For in exalting each man's conscience over the Moral Law of God (as summarized in the Ten Commandments), so that each person has a legal right to practice a false religion contrary to God's Moral Law, that nation has made man the supreme lawgiver contrary to the Word of God which states emphatically that there is only one Lawgiver, namely the Triune God of the Bible ("There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy" James 4:12), for God alone is lord of the conscience. How can any civil government grant a "right" to anyone within its jurisdiction to reject the Moral Law of God which alone grants us both our rights and duties before God and man? How can such a nation call itself a Christian nation that legally promotes disobeying what God has established in His Law, and consider it their right to do so? Such a so-called liberty to worship any god you choose is not liberty at all, but is rather bondage according to God in His Word. For true liberty is a grace from God to obey God's Moral Law, "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25); whereas a so-called liberty to worship any god you choose is a servitude and slavery to sin ("Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Romans 6:16). Moreover, such a civil government likewise blasphemes God and Christ because in legally and constitutionally tolerating and promoting all false religion, it in effect declares that it, as a civil government, is not the ordinance of God established by God (contrary to Romans 13:1) and that its civil rulers are not the ministers of God (contrary to Romans 13:4). Thus, such a civil government that refuses to rule as the ordinance of God (and its magistrates to rule as the ministers of God) blasphemously turns the ordinance of God into a civil government that is merely "of the people, by the people, and for the people" (Lincoln's Gettysburg Address) which I submit is also blasphemous, for it plays off of the holy benediction that belongs to God alone ("For OF him [not OF the people—GLP], and THROUGH him [not THROUGH or BY the people—GLP], and TO him [not TO or FOR the people—GLP], are all things [and I add among the "all things" even civil government and the rights and duties of all people to worship the Triune God alone as revealed in Scripture—GLP], to whom be glory for ever. Amen" Romans 11:36).

Dear ones, there is no neutrality here in regard to a nation's established religion—a nation is either officially and constitutionally with Christ and legally kisses, serves, and worships Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords, or that nation is against Christ ("He that is not with me is against me" Matthew 12:30). A nation can no more be a Christian nation if it officially tolerates every form of religion (false or true, or no religion at all) than a family can be a Christian family if it officially tolerates every form of religion (false or true, or no religion at all). A Christian family is one that is graciously brought into covenant with the Triune God of the Bible and officially declares itself to be the Lord's family and endeavors by God's grace to live according to God's Moral Law (as in the words of Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" Joshua 24:15). So likewise a nation is a Christian nation when it is graciously brought into covenant with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit revealed in Holy Scripture and officially establishes by law through its national representatives that it is a Christian nation and endeavors by God's grace to live according to God's Moral Law, and requires all representatives before assuming authority to solemnly swear in essence the same Christian oath ("as for me and my nation, we will serve the LORD").

The main points to be addressed in the remainder of this sermon are these: (1) Luke 9:51-56 Does Not Provide Warrant For The Official Toleration Of False Religion; (2) More Arguments Offered By Those Who Assert That The United States Is A Christian Nation.

I. Luke 9:51-56 Does Not Provide Warrant For The Official Toleration Of False Religion.

A. As we consider this portion of God's Word, the Lord Jesus has been ministering in the Northern Province of Galilee, and in expectation of His death, resurrection, and ascension, He begins His journey back to Jerusalem which lay in the Southern Province of Judea. However, between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south lay the Province of Samaria where dwelt the Samaritans rather than the Jews.

1. Samaria in the Old Testament became the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (the 10 tribes) that rebelled against the house of David and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (consisting of 2 tribes). Jeroboam was made king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and soon afterwards he set up his own counterfeit religion (with its own priesthood, its own worship, its own feast days, and the 2 golden calves), a counterfeit religion to that of the true religion of the Lord in the temple of Jerusalem. It would appear that even after the city of Samaria fell to the Assyrians (in 722 b.c.), there yet remained distinct religions in Samaria that were mixed and corrupted with the idolatry and inventions of men, even down to the time of Christ (as we see was the case when the Samaritan woman at the well said to Christ, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye [i.e. the Jews—GLP] say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" John 4:20).

2. Before moving on in our text, let me pause to note that here we see the firm resolve of the Lord to accomplish full redemption for all those whom He had loved and elected from all eternity in the Covenant of Redemption ("And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" Luke 9:51). Dear ones, our Savior was fully aware of the anguish and pain that He must suffer (the beatings with fists and clubs, the crown of thorns beaten into His skull with a rod, the loss of blood from being whipped with a scourge that had metal attached to its leather thongs and that literally ripped away the flesh from the body, the tortuous death by crucifixion in being nailed to the cross, and most of all the agony Christ suffered as in some mysterious way He endured the infinite wrath of a holy God to such a degree that He cried out, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me" Matthew 27:46). But, dear ones, nothing would deter the Friend of sinners from moving on the road that leads to the cross; nothing would stop Him from proceeding to Jerusalem. Why? Because of the everlasting and infinite love where with He loved you, His beloved people. You, individually by name (and not some mere nameless, faceless group of people), were written upon His heart and in the palm of His hand. And so He continued to Jerusalem for the joy that was laid up before Him in fully accomplishing redemption for His elect, knowing the worst about us and knowing you or I may be the chief of sinners. Now that He has finished that journey to Jerusalem and has accomplished redemption through His obedience and suffering in your place, will He not much more having ascended to the right of God in glory save you, sanctify you, love you, provide for you, intercede for you, and hear every groan and cry for help? Nothing (absolutely nothing you face in life or death), dear ones, can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

3. Here we see in our text that Jesus sends messengers ahead of Him to a certain unnamed Samaritan village to make preparation for Him and His disciples as the day draws to a close (Luke 9:52). But the village (perhaps through its representatives) will not receive the Lord Jesus. Why? The text states clearly, "Because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:53). They would not receive the Lord into their city not so much because of who Christ declared Himself to be (namely, the Messiah), but according to the text, their reason for not receiving Him would seem to be due to the bitter rivalry that existed between the Samaritans and the Jews (dating back to the time of Jeroboam and the division of the united kingdom into two separate kingdoms). Sadly, these Samaritans could not see beyond their own bitter history and rivalry with the Jews even when the Son of God, God's Messiah, the Friend and Savior of sinners, desired to spend some time in their village. Dear ones, what bitterness and resentment from the past do you cling to that keeps the Lord from coming into your families or into your lives to commune with you? Nothing will more quickly quench the Spirit of God than a bitter heart over how others have treated us, abused us, or how God has supposedly failed us. Rivalry likewise has no place in the Kingdom of Christ; for we are to rejoice in (not envy)

the graces and gifts of others. Dear ones, has the Lord gone His way to another village or another family and by-passed yours for the spirit of bitterness or rivalry that is in your heart?

B. We come now to the response of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They rightly take offense at the unwillingness of this village to receive Christ and His disciples, but James and John also turn in vengeance to Christ asking whether He would want them to call down fire from heaven to consume the village as did Elijah with those sent by king Ahaziah of Israel to take him captive (and perhaps slay him) in 2 Kings 1 (“Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?” Luke 9:54). What motivated James and John was not a holy zeal for the honor of the Lord or for the true religion, but rather a vindictive wrath against those resentful Samaritans who would not receive them, and a vain glory to show off their miraculous power in performing some mighty miracle, imitating Elijah of old. For the Lord Jesus immediately rebukes them with these words, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” (Luke 9:55). In other words, “James and John, miracles are not for your personal vengeance or for your personal glory and honor among men.” Dear ones, that spirit of getting even with sinners was not the reason for Christ’s coming into the world, but rather to give sinners what they did not deserve or could not merit—the free gift of forgiveness, righteousness, and everlasting life (“For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Luke 9:56). Although Christ will sit as Judge on that last day and will show forth His righteous judgment against all those who have rejected Him and His revelation, He came the first time to seek and to save that which was lost.

C. Those who would use this passage to promote their view of official religious toleration interpret the text to teach that the principles of Christ and Christianity are such that in this age of the Gospel, all religions are to be officially tolerated even as Christ tolerated here the Samaritan religion; and no restraint or punishment ought to be exercised against false religion as James and John sought to bring against the Samaritans of this village that rejected Christ.

D. In response to this misguided and erroneous interpretation of the passage before us, let me affirm that Christ does not here advocate the official toleration of all religions (whether true or false, or no religion at all).

1. First of all, James and John did not want the Samaritans consumed because of their false religion per se, or even because the Samaritans specifically rejected Christ as Messiah per se, but rather because the Samaritans had demonstrated inhospitality against Christ and His disciples as Jews who were headed for Jerusalem. The only reason given in the text for the unwillingness of the Samaritans in this village to show their hospitality to Christ and His disciples was that Christ’s “face was as though he would go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:53), which raised in the minds of these Samaritans the bitter rivalry that existed between Jews and Samaritans. Thus, any interpretation of this text that would make Christ’s rebuke of James and John to involve their intolerance of a false religion is clearly reading into the text what is not stated, and moreover, reading into the text what is contrary to what is stated. The Lord did not rebuke James and John because of a religiously intolerant spirit, but rather for a vindictive spirit that was offended by the inhospitality of the Samaritans and by a vain spirit that sought to show-off their miraculous power like that of Elijah (just as James and John wanted to sit in the seats of honor on the right and left hand of Christ, Mark 10:35-37).

2. James and John were not civil magistrates or acting as civil magistrates even if we should grant (for the sake of argument) that they were rebuked by Christ for their religious intolerance. James and John were ordained ministers of Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14). So if James and John were rebuked by Christ for their religious intolerance (as alleged by some Christians), then we would be forced to conclude that Jesus here strictly forbids religious intolerance by His ministers of the Gospel. Thus, all false religions, false teachers, and false teaching should be tolerated and treated with respect by ministers of the Gospel even though they

lead millions of people to hell and like wolves in sheep's clothing deceive and delude the masses. But such religious toleration is clearly contrary to the words of Christ (John 4:22; Revelation 2:15) and contrary to the words of Paul who condemns the idolatry of the Athenians (Acts 17).

3. The lawful civil magistrate is according to Paul "the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4). If serving and worshipping another god and leading others to do the same is not an evil that is contrary to the Moral Law of God (the First Commandment), then what is it? Why were Gentile nations punished by the Lord for their idolatry if it only applies to Israel? What ground does one have to assert that it is the magistrate's duty to restrain and punish murderers (a violation of the Sixth Commandment), but not to restrain and punish obstinate idolaters and heretics who lead others to hell (contrary to the First Commandment)? The Moral Law of God is one, just as the Lawgiver is one. Do some say that disobedience to an earthly governor and his law deserves punishment by the magistrate, but disobedience, blasphemy, idolatry, heresy against the Governor among the nations, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, deserves no punishment by civil government which God Himself instituted for His own glory or by the civil magistrate who ought to be the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil? It is certainly true that Scripture does not call the magistrate to convert the infidel or the idolater to Christianity by means of torture or a threatened execution. But the Scripture does call the magistrate to restrain evil (violations of both Table of the Moral Law) that if left unrestrained will bring God's wrath and judgment upon the whole nation; and Scripture does call the magistrate to punish flagrant transgressors of God's Moral Law (both Tables of God's Moral Law) as God's avenger of justice for the good of the people and for the glory of God.

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

A. **The Declaration of Independence (1776).** It is promoted by many Christians that The Declaration of Independence is distinctly a Christian document and demonstrates that the United States was founded as a Christian nation.

1. It is true that there are references in The Declaration of Independence to "the laws of nature and of nature's God"; we also find these words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights"; and finally at the end of the document are these words, "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence." However, it should be noted this Declaration was clearly written so as to avoid any specific reference to Jesus Christ or Christianity.

2. In fact, the very words of The Declaration of Independence make it clear that it is not a Christian document. For the Declaration refers for its warrant to separate from British rule and to form a separate nation "the laws of nature and of nature's God." But dear ones, it is not the laws of nature that reveal the Trinity, Christ, or the Christian religion, but rather the revelation of Scripture in the Old and New Testaments. The Declaration of Independence omits any reference to biblical revelation which alone reveals Christ and Christianity. The Declaration only speaks of the God of nature, not the Triune God of the Old and New Testaments. The Declaration of Independence thus addresses, if you will, a natural religion that reveals itself in "self-evident truths" to the natural reason of men, but does not address at all the Christian religion revealed only in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. All these statements found in The Declaration of Independence would be freely embraced by Jews, Muslims, Deists, Freemasons, or professing Christians (whether Unitarian or Trinitarian). Thus, the framers of The Declaration of Independence were not attempting to produce a distinctly Christian document declaring the new nation that was in process of being formed to be a Christian nation, but rather an inclusive document that only addressed a natural religion that many varied religions and religious persuasions could stand behind. This is also the assessment of even recent Christian historians. For examples, C. Greg Singer argues that The Declaration of Independence, due to its emphasis on

natural religion rather than the Christian religion, had an “essentially anti-Christian character” (*A Theological Interpretation of American History*, p. 40). Likewise Christian historians, Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George M. Marsden, state: “Here then is the ‘historical error’: It is historically inaccurate and anachronistic to confuse, and virtually to equate, the thinking of the Declaration of Independence with a biblical world view, or with Reformation thinking, or with the idea of a Christian nation. The Declaration of Independence . . . is based on an appeal to ‘self-evident’ truths or ‘laws of nature and nature’s god.’ The reference to God is vague and subordinated to natural laws that everyone should know through common sense. The Bible is not mentioned or alluded to” (*The Search For Christian America*, pp. 130,131).

B. The Articles of Confederation (ratified in 1781). This was the first constitution of the United States and it mentions in it the phrase, “the Great Governor of the World”, which is so general that once again Jews, Muslims, Deists, Freemasons, or professing Christians (whether Unitarian or Trinitarian) could embrace it with full conviction coming from each one’s religious view. This is again a reference to what may be known by way of natural religion. But what is also obvious is the omission of the Triune God of the Bible, of Scripture as the supreme law of the land, or of biblical Christianity as the only true religion. The phrase “in the year of our Lord” is mentioned as well, but as we noted in a previous sermon, this was not a declaration of the Christian faith, but was rather a legal declaration of the Gregorian calendar that was used in the United States (see sermon #2 in this series for extended remarks).

C. The Treaty of Paris (1783). In the treaty that was settled between the United States and Great Britain, bringing an end to the War for Independence, the treaty begins, “In the name of the most holy and undivided Trinity.” Surely it would seem that this statement officially declares the belief of the United States in the Triune God of the Bible. However, it should also be remembered the contradictory statement made in the Treaty of Tripoli (1797) which was signed by President John Adams, “As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity, of Mussulmen [i.e. Muslims—GLP]” (Article 11). Which is it? Founded as a Christian nation or not founded as a Christian nation? These, I submit, are the very duplicitous and religiously pluralistic statements that we find in various historical documents. How can the United States declare its belief in the Triune God of the Bible to the British (in The Treaty of Paris in 1783) and yet deny that it was founded in any sense upon the Christian religion (in The Treaty of Tripoli in 1797)? Both being treaties with other nations, is it possible that the United States officially states whatever is religiously convenient, depending upon the religious convictions of that nation with whom the treaty is made? It is also noteworthy that both Benjamin Franklin and John Adams signed The Treaty of Paris (1783), and yet neither believed in the doctrine of the Trinity. Franklin declares that he was a “thorough Deist” in his *Autobiography* (p. 71). Deists denied the Trinity and the Deity of Christ. Adams likewise denied the Trinity and the Deity of Christ, for in his letter (of March 28, 1816) penned to his son, he writes,

We Unitarians, one of whom I have had the Honour to be, for more than sixty Years, do not indulge our Malignity in profane Cursing and Swearing, against you Calvinists; one of whom I know not how long you have been. . . . We Unitarians do not delight in thinking that Plato and Cicero, Tacitus, Quintilian, Plynny and even Diderot, are sweltering under the scalding drops of divine Vengeance, for all Eternity (John Adams to John Quincy Adams, March 28, 1816, Adams Papers (microfilm), reel 430, Library of Congress).

And yet both of these men were two of the four representatives of the United States that signed the Treaty of Paris. How is this possible? Only if religious pluralism (not Christianity) is the national religion of the United States, so that it can shift back and forth between religions when it is convenient to do so.

D. **The Northwest Ordinance (1787)**. This document was believed to have been one of the most significant achievements of the Congress of the Confederation, for it put the world on notice not only that the land north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi (which came to include the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin) would not only be settled but that it would eventually become part of the United States. Article 3 states,

Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.

Here once again there is a reference to “religion” but that is all. There is no mention of the Triune God, Christ, Scripture, or biblical Christianity. It fits quite well the established national religion of the United States: Religious Pluralism, or Polytheism.

Dear ones, Christ states that those who are Christians are those who are not ashamed to confess Him before men (Matthew 10:32). What do we say about a nation that is ashamed to confess unequivocally that it is a Christian nation before the nations of the world? It likewise manifests that it is not officially a Christian nation. May we not practice our faith before men in such a contradictory manner, professing Christ when it is merely convenient and advantageous to do so. God grant the United States and the nations of this world the grace to repent of the heinous sin of religious pluralism, to turn in faith to Christ alone, and to declare to the world that it is unashamedly a Christian nation alone.

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