



Government and the Church

Role and Authority of Government

- Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer...For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Rom 13:1-4, 6

Role and Authority of Government

- Believers must submit to and support government as a God-ordained institution designed to commend good and punish evil.
- The Christian's default position should be one of submission. Exceptions should be just that—exceptional, that is rare, uncommon, and unusual. Christians should be known for their willing submission to legitimate authority as a means of submitting to God.

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- Argument 1: Christians/churches must submit to all government regulations unless there is a clear command/prohibition in Scripture to the contrary.

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- Could government ban formal church membership so that no church can maintain a membership role?
- Could government ban fathers from leading their children in prayer?
- Could government ban public verbal prayer?
- Could government ban sharing the gospel on national holidays?

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- Could government ban the baptism of minors?
- Could government ban fasting?
- Could government require everyone to fly rainbow flags during pride month?
- Could government require everyone to drink one glass of wine each week for heart health?
- Could government require churches to publicly post contact information for local abortion clinics?

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- Mature believers understand that many things we do in obedience to Christ do not rise or fall on explicit commands and/or prohibitions but require looking at broader biblical principles to determine whether we can do things "to the Lord" (Rom 14:6-8), "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3:17), "to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31), etc. We do not simply ask, "did God say I can't do this" or "did God say I must do this" but always ask, "can and/or should I do this in honor of the Lord?"

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- . "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- Better Argument: Christians/churches must submit to every government regulation unless it would mean disobeying God (i.e., cause them to sin.)

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- “The government would never do that”?
- “I may not like it, but I think Christians would need to submit to the government if they issued those regulations”?
- “The government doesn't have that kind of authority”?

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Mk 12:17
- Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Heb 13:17
- Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Eph 6:1

Limits to Gov't Authority?

- Even Better Argument: Christians/churches must submit to every government regulation unless it would mean disobeying God (i.e., cause them to sin) or the government is seeking to regulate something outside its sphere of authority.

Reasonable and Temporary Restrictions?

- Submission to governmental authority does not depend on the commands/prohibitions being reasonable.

Reasonable and Temporary Restrictions?

- Submission to governmental authority does not depend on the commands/prohibitions being temporary.
 - All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man **for thirty days**, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Dan 6:7

Reasonable and Temporary Restrictions?

- Submission to governmental authority does not depend on the commands/prohibitions being both temporary and reasonable.
- Deference to governmental guidelines may depend on their being reasonable or temporary.

Who Decides?

- Individual Soul Liberty
 - One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind....Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Rom 14:5, 10-12

Who Decides?

- Autonomy of the Local Church
 - I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. 1 Tim 3:14b-15

Who Decides?

- "To each of these churches therefore gathered, according to his mind declared in his word, he has given all that power and authority, which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which he has instituted for them to observe; with commands and rules for the due and right exerting, and executing of that power."
Second London Baptist Confession

Who Decides?

- With Christ as its head, the local church has no higher human authority outside of itself that can dictate what it believes or how it must carry out its God-given mission.
- That means local churches must be the final human arbiters as to whether or not a government regulation would lead them to deny biblical truth or interfere with the accomplishing of their God-given mission.

Who Decides?

- Thus, wisdom and discernment need to be carefully exercised, and a variety of factors need to be considered, including:
 - the composition of the church
 - the testimony in the community
 - the legal threat/penalty that may be incurred for not following the regulations (since human governments do not often recognize their biblical limitations)
 - the relative importance of the activity
 - the potential hardship or loss from adjusting the church's ministry, etc.

What If We Disagree?

- People who come to different conclusions as to whether or not to submit to government regulations cannot just accuse the other of sinning.
- While we must not submit to government regulations if it would mean disobeying God, we may choose whether or not to submit to government regulations if they have exceeded their authority.

What If We Disagree?

- There will be some disagreement among godly Christians as to whether or not specific governmental regulations would require disobedience to God and even more disagreement as to whether or not it would be wise to comply with government regulations that have intruded on other spheres

What If We Disagree?

- We should allow different churches to reach their conclusions about the wisdom of following the guidelines (out of deference) without accusing them of rebellion or cowardice.
- Christians should be charitable to, gracious with, and supportive of those who come to different conclusions.