

Israel as a Christian Nation Removes False Religion #2

Zechariah 13:4-6; Deuteronomy 17:8-11

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As we have noted in past sermons, perhaps the most significant objection that rallies the most support for state-sponsored religious pluralism and polytheism is that the establishment of biblical Christianity as the official national religion will lead to the persecution of all those who embrace different religious practices, or who embrace no religious practice at all. It is difficult to get beyond the emotional rhetoric of bloodbaths and crusades. However, for those Christians who endeavor to seek out the revealed will of God as it is found in the Bible as their supreme rule for faith and practice, we encourage you to subdue the emotions and lean not upon your own understanding. We encourage you to search the Scriptures with us that we may know the mind of Christ rather than the mind of mere men.

We have sought in this series to clear away all the debris that has been raised in support of religious toleration within a nation. We have sought in this series to demonstrate that it is the civil magistrate's duty (as God's minister for good, according to Romans 13:4) to outwardly suppress evil and evil doers who not only engage in murder (including abortion, etc.) , adultery (including sodomy, fornication, incest, no-fault divorces), and theft, but who also engage in idolatry, heresy, and blasphemy (for such sins are evil in God's sight and if tolerated will destroy a society and lead a nation into the other sins just previously mentioned). Carefully note how often when there is a list of evils catalogued in Scripture that no effort is made by the Holy Spirit to make murder or sexual immorality more heinous than blasphemy, heresy, idolatry, or false religion (Mark 7:20-23 [blasphemy is mentioned]; Romans 1:29-32 [God-haters are mentioned]; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 [idolaters are mentioned]; Galatians 5:19-21 [idolatry, witchcraft, heresies are mentioned]; Philippians 3:2 ["evil workers" are those who lead others astray from the truth of Jesus Christ]). And according to the Holy Spirit, it is "evil doers" or "evil workers" that are to receive God's vengeance from God's minister (the civil magistrate) in Romans 13:4 i.e. those found guilty of the evil of religious crimes as well as those found guilty of the evil of civil crimes (since God makes no distinction between the evil of either religious or civil crimes).

I have divided the sermon this Lord's Day into the following two parts: (1) Biblical Principles of Justice within a Christian Nation Identified; (2) Covenanted Christian Nations in the Future will Suppress Idolatry, False Religion, Heresy, and Blasphemy (Zechariah 13:3-6).

I. Biblical Principles of Justice within a Christian Nation Identified. I would like to briefly summarize biblical principles of justice that the civil magistrate in a covenanted Christian nation should follow as he endeavors to outwardly suppress idolatry, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy. When I use the term, civil magistrate, it should be noted that I refer to the 3 branches of civil government (executive, legislative, and judicial) at all levels of government throughout the nation, states, counties, and cities.

A. We have previously demonstrated in the last two sermons that persecution can only be brought against those who are standing for the truth of Christ ("Blessed are they which are persecuted FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10). Thus, for God's minister (the civil magistrate) to outwardly suppress religious crimes (clearly enunciated in the Moral Law of God) is not persecution, but is rather (according to the God) justice and righteousness.

B. Reformation of religion within a nation must first be realized through the work of the Holy Spirit so that there is a covenanted uniformity in church and state, with one established faithful Christian Church, one established Confession of Faith, and one National Covenant placing all voluntarily in subjection to God, the Gospel, and God's Moral Law (in other words Zechariah 12:10-13:1 must precede Zechariah 13:2-6).

C. Biblical justice is not arbitrary nor subject to the mere whims of man in withholding due process of law from those who are charged with religious crimes in a Christian nation. All who are charged with crimes (whether civil or religious) must be charged, thoroughly investigated and tried, and found guilty upon the testimony of no less than 2 or 3 credible eye-witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; Deuteronomy 19:15). One eye-witness is insufficient to condemn one to death for a crime committed (unless, of course, one voluntarily comes as his own accuser and condemns himself as guilty of a crime).

D. Biblical justice does not condone or excuse a false witness who brings unsubstantiated charges against another person. In fact, whatever the penalty for the alleged crime committed by the one against whom the false charges were brought (whether death, stripes, or fine), that same penalty is to be executed against the false witness himself (Deuteronomy 19:16-21).

E. Although a Christian magistrate cannot tolerate idolatry, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy, (or any civil crime against one's neighbor), he may and should in various cases mete out varying degrees of punishment based upon the following circumstances.

1. Ignorance vs. obstinacy (Luke 12:47-48).
2. One who only leads himself astray vs. one who is in some position of authority and leads others astray (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).
3. A non-member of the Visible Church vs. a member of the Visible Church (Deuteronomy 14:21).
4. A willingness to be instructed and taught vs. an unwillingness to be instructed and taught (Titus 3:10-11).
5. A first and one-time offense vs. a repeated and habitual offense (Romans 16:17 [note the present tense of those who are to be marked and avoided because they continually "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned"]).
6. An offense committed against the helpless and poor vs. an offense committed against the strong and wealthy (Deuteronomy 27:18-19).
7. A heresy that attacks the foundation of the Christian religion or directly attacks the persons of the holy Trinity vs. a heresy that is wood, hay, and stubble built upon the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). The use of the sword by God's minister (the civil magistrate) does not imply that death is automatically required for every religious crime committed. The sword represents the full extent of penalty that may be exercised against those guilty of civil and religious crimes. The sword represents the use of compulsory power delegated by God to the civil magistrate (from death to a fine and everything in between). Thus, it is the duty of the civil magistrate to carefully weigh out these varying circumstances in the exercise of his power if he would exercise justice according to the principles given in God's Word.

F. There is no thought-police in a covenanted Christian nation who go about as a secret police force seeking to squeeze out of the people the private judgments and confessions that people hold in their own consciences. The civil magistrate (as God's minister) is not to force, coerce, or torture a person in order to determine what that person believes. That has been the practice historically within Roman Catholic nations,

but not so among covenanted Protestant nations. The civil magistrate is not to judge that which is private and internal to man, but only that which is made public and is external to man (which 2 or 3 credible witnesses may readily verify and confirm). The civil magistrate is not commissioned by God to change the heart of man; the civil magistrate is commissioned to use his authority to outwardly restrain both civil and religious evil that destroys the fabric of society and ushers upon a nation the righteous judgment of God.

G. Thus, non-Christians within a covenanted Christian nation must not be forced at the end of a gun to engage in a national covenant or a profession of the Christian religion of that nation, but should be taught, instructed, and evangelized. Non-Christians cannot be tolerated to lead others into false religions (as we have already noted), but they cannot be forced by holding a gun to their heads to profess the Christian religion (Deuteronomy 14:21; Nehemiah 13:15-21).

H. There is also a myth perpetrated that the toleration of false religion does not hurt my neighbor (whether he serves 1 god or 20 gods or no god at all). It is contrary to all biblical revelation that only what my neighbor does in **physically** harming or injuring my person, family, or property is destructive to society. For the Bible is exceedingly clear that false religion is not only destructive to the person who embraces it, but is also destructive to the nation as a whole in bringing God's righteous judgment upon that nation (2 Kings 17:14-18 [Israel]; Deuteronomy 18:9-14 [the Canaanite nations]; Isaiah 19 [Egypt]). Listen to Calvin's evaluation of false religion.

It would be indeed better to grant license to thieves and sorcerers and adulterers, than to suffer the blasphemies which the ungodly utter against God, to prevail without any punishment and without any restraint (Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. 15, p. 383; Zechariah 13:3).

For idolatry, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy are treasonous acts against God and will issue in tyrannous acts against the people within a nation and society. And so the Christian civil magistrate (as God's minister for good) within a Christian nation does not suppress idolatry, false religion, heresy and blasphemy because he is the religious father of the nation, but because he is the civil father of the nation who is bound by God to glorify the Lord, to do that which is profitable and beneficial to the well-being of the nation so as to avert the righteous judgment of God which falls upon even Gentile nations for idolatry, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy. The civil magistrate is not the head of the church on earth, nor is he to interfere in the lawful exercise of the Church's rights and privileges under Christ; but he is to submit to Christ and the religion of Christ for the glory of God and for the good of his nation, lest the righteous anger of the Lord be stirred up and He destroy that nation (Psalm 2).

I. And what does the civil magistrate do when there are differences over doctrine, worship, and church government between Christians which have the effect of disturbing the civil peace within the Christian nation? If he is a Christian magistrate within a covenanted Christian nation, he should already have adopted a faithful Confession of Faith (as the *Westminster Confession of Faith*) and National Covenant (as the *Solemn League and Covenant*) that faithfully summarize the teachings of Scripture to which he can appeal for most of those differences that might be raised between Christians. And when a difference arises that is not directly taught in the established Confession of Faith or National Covenant, then he may submit the question to the General Assembly of the established national church in order that the faithful ministers and elders of the national church might biblically wrestle with the difference that has arisen and submit to the magistrate their conclusion in the matter (Deuteronomy 17:8-11). Upon receiving the judgment rendered by Christ's Church, it

is the magistrate's duty to study the decision for himself and to apply that which is biblical to the difference that has arisen among Christians and that has disturbed the civil peace within his nation. For those matters concerning religion that rise to the level of disturbing the civil peace of society, or which hasten God's judgment upon the nation for treason against Christ and tyranny against the people, these are to be judged and enforced by the Christian civil magistrate.

J. This then is a representative summary (not an exhaustive list) of the biblical justice that I submit shall be exercised in a covenanted Christian nation by Christian magistrates who are the civil ministers of God to thee for good. These biblical principles of justice may violate the First Amendment to the Federal Constitution of the United States (because the First Amendment is contrary to biblical justice), but I submit these biblical principles of justice do not violate the First Commandment (nor the Moral Law of God) by which all men (magistrates and citizens alike) and all nations will be judged on that last day.

II. Covenanted Christian Nations in the Future Will Suppress Idolatry, False Religion, Heresy, and Blasphemy (Zechariah 13:3-6).

A. As we continue considering our text from Zechariah 13, you will recall that this is a prophecy concerning the future conversion of the nation of Israel to Christ (identified in Zechariah 12:10 and Zechariah 13:1 as the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem). The fulfillment of this prophecy looks into the New Covenant age of Jesus Christ when the Lord will grant to the nation of Israel the spirit of grace to turn in faith to Christ, when (according to Zechariah 12:10) they will look upon Him whom they have pierced and shall mourn for Him as one mourns over the death of one's only son. As the Christian nation of Israel (as an example of all the Christian nations of the world at that time) brings forth the fruits of her repentance, the Lord declares that He will cut off from the land (no doubt through the Christian civil magistrates in Israel) false religion ("idols") and their false prophets who had deceived the people (Zechariah 13:2). Now we move on in the text to consider Zechariah 13:3-6.

B. In the verses that follow in Zechariah 13:3-6, the Lord gives a couple hypothetical cases to illustrate the fruit and zeal that will be manifested in the Christian nation of Israel (as an example of all Christian nations) when Christ turns her to Himself in faith and repentance. The right of God as Governor, the right of Christ as Mediator, the right of God's Moral Law and God's revealed religion will be upheld and maintained in that blessed age.

1. In the first illustration, a false prophet who speaks lies "in the name of the LORD" is realized to be such by his own parents. Will those Christian parents tolerate his heresy and errors which he speaks in the name of the Lord in leading others away from the truth and righteousness of Christ due to the intimacy of their relationship with their son and the parental love they have for their son? Will Christian parents in that time of millennial reformation try to hide and conceal the obstinacy and rebellion of their son who has rejected their loving corrections and warnings? Listen to the means that God will use to restrain and cause false prophets to pass out of the Christian land of Israel from our text in Zechariah 13:3.

a. Dear ones, this text is not teaching that Christian parents will immediately kill their son with their own hands without due process of law. But it is teaching and prophesying that the love of parents for Christ and His commandments will be greater than their love for their own child and that they will turn their son over to the civil magistrate (God's minister of justice) that the righteous judgment of God might be administered in that case (in accordance with God's law in Numbers 35:30 [note: "put to death by the mouth of witnesses"]; Deuteronomy 13:6-11).

b. Dear parents, it is not showing love to your children to protect them from discipline and correction when they sin or err from the truth (even when they are young). In fact, the Holy Spirit says through Solomon, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24). It is usually most difficult to take a stand for the truth with those to whom we are closest, but that is the very place where our faith in Christ and love for Christ are tried and tested. Who do we love more? Christ or that family member? Remember, dear ones, the sobering words of the Lord, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). And that love for Jesus Christ is supremely evident here in our text when Christian parents will not allow their beloved children to speak lies in the name of the Lord so as to lead others away from Christ and His truth. And if this is the faithful response of the Christian father within a Christian family who loves the Lord Jesus Christ more than he loves his own flesh and blood, then it is also the faithful response of the Christian father within a Christian nation.

c. The words of Calvin strike at the very heart of the matter when he says,

The Lord then would have all the godly to burn with so much zeal in the defence of lawful worship and true religion, that no connection, no relationship, nor any other consideration, connected with the flesh, should avail to prevent them from bringing to punishment their neighbors, when they see that God’s worship is profaned, and that sound doctrine is corrupted. . . . for they [the godly—GLP] would prefer the glory of God to flesh and blood, they would prefer to all earthly attachments that worship which ought to be more precious to us than life itself (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. 15, p. 383; Zechariah 13:3).

d. And contrary to the wicked principles of state-sponsored religious toleration within this nation, which constitutionally protect (and therefore promote) every form of false religion imaginable, give careful consideration to the words of the same faithful minister of Jesus Christ (John Calvin) as he so clearly describes the heinousness of false religion that in effect puts lies into the mouth of God Himself.

[F]or if we rightly consider what it is to speak falsehood in the name of Jehovah, it will certainly appear to us to be more detestable than either to kill an innocent man, or to destroy a guest with poison, or to lay violent hands on one’s own father, or to plunder a stranger. Whatever crimes then can be thought of, they do not come up to this, that is, when God himself is involved in such a dishonor, as to be made an abettor of falsehood. What indeed can more particularly belong to God than his own truth? And it is his will also to be worshipped by us according to this distinction: God is truth. Now to corrupt pure doctrine—is it not the same thing, as though one substituted the devil in the place of God? Or sought to transform God, so that there should be no difference between him and the devil? Hence the greatest of all crimes, as I have already said, does not come up to this horrible and monstrous wickedness (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. 15, p. 385; Zechariah 13:3).

e. Dear ones, if we love our children, we will not set a stumbling block before them in leading them into sin and error. But we will also not tolerate manifest rebellion against Christ and His truth within our families (Joshua 24:15, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”).

2. In the second illustration, a false prophet is so despised by the general population within the Christian nation of Israel (as a representative example of all Christian nations at that time of millennial

blessing) that he will seek to conceal his role in idolatry and false religion. Rather than being free to teach his false religion from the house tops (as is the case in the United States which has established religious pluralism as its national religion in its pantheon of protected religions), false prophets “in that day” will hide and conceal themselves due to the outward restraint by Christian magistrates and due to the zeal of the Christian people within the Christian nation of Israel (as the representative example for all Christian nations).

a. Note, first, from this second illustration that false prophets will not “in that day” be tolerated within Christian nations (like Israel), but rather will be “ashamed” to prophesy any longer, no doubt due to the reformation of religion promoted by church and state and due to the outward restraint and condemnation of false religion and false prophets by church, state, and society in general (Zechariah 13:4).

b. Note, secondly, that the false prophet will seek to hide the fact that he is a false prophet in promoting a false religion, and will rather declare to those who are suspicious of him that he has been engaged in some lawful calling from his youth; and so he couldn’t be a false prophet (Zechariah 13:5).

c. Note, thirdly, that the false prophet will finally be cornered and revealed by self-inflicted wounds and mutilations on his hands that identify him with a false religion in “the house of my friends” (literally “the house of my lovers” Zechariah 13:6). These “lovers” are not Christian friends and family members, for the form of this Hebrew word is used 16 other times in the Old Testament, and in every other instance it refers to ungodly lovers, or spiritual adulterers who have embraced a false religion (e.g. Jeremiah 22:20,22; Jeremiah 30:14; Lamentations 1:19; Ezekiel 16:33,36,37; Ezekiel 23:5,19,22; Hosea 2:5,7,10,12,13).

Thus, this passage clearly prophesies as one of the blessings that shall come in the New Covenant age of Christ that the nations (like Israel) that will be converted to the Lord will also (with God’s approval and blessing) purge the land of false religion and false prophets who have misled the nations that have so long tolerated and protected their so-called right to promote their false religion. And since God is directly responsible for this purge of false religion and false prophets from the Christian nation of Israel (as we see from our text), it cannot be considered a wicked persecution (without condemning God Himself). This prophecy does not indicate that this is a bad thing that will happen, or that this will be persecuting those who mislead others into a false religion, or that it will be depriving people of their inalienable civil rights who practice false religion according to the dictates of their conscience. No, this will be the glory of Christ’s reign over the nations from His throne in heaven when worldwide reformation comes in the day of God’s great power. And dear ones, if it is morally right, good, and just at that future time for such a reformation in church and state to come by God’s grace, it cannot be wrong to teach it, preach it, and earnestly pray for it now. Reformation is future, yes. But reformation is now, dear ones. For reformation begins with the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in confessing your sin and depravity, in realizing that it is only through Jesus Christ that you can become a new creation. Reformation is certain within the nations of the world, and Jesus Christ will usher in that reformation as He draws sinners (even civil magistrates) in all of the nations to Himself by the preaching of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus invites you as well right now with that same powerful gospel that will reform the whole world in the future, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” Matthew 11:28.

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