

It Is Written

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The Separation of Church and State

By Andy Sochar

There is an ongoing debate in our society about the “separation of church and state.” Though the phrase is not used in any of this country’s founding documents, many understand it to be a fundamental principle upon which this nation was built. However, the debate springs from the differences people have in interpreting this phrase. As Christians, our concern should not be which position is the “conservative” or “liberal” position. Our concern should be what the Scriptures teach. So in this article, we will examine what the word of God says on this topic.

The Church and the State Must Be Separate

The church and the state are two distinct entities. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). As Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he prophesied that the kingdom of God – the church (cf. Matthew 16:18-19) – would “crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever” (Daniel 2:44). When Jesus established His church, He never intended for it to be allied with or attached to any human government.

The State Is to Be God’s Minister

Though the Lord’s church is to be separate from the state, the Scriptures are clear that civil government is to be “a minister of God” (Romans 13:4). God has ordained a role for government – to punish evildoers and praise those who do right (Romans 13:3-4) and to provide and maintain an environment in which its citizens are free to live “tranquil and quiet [lives] in all godliness and dignity” (I Timothy 2:2). Many governments ignore or reject their divinely-given role, or they attempt to usurp the authority that belongs to God alone. But the fact that they have been given work to do as God’s minister is plainly taught in His word.

Christians Must Be Godly in All Things

Some who say they are advocating the separation of church and state are actually arguing for the separation of morality from public life. The church has been given work to do by God – evangelism and edification (I Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 4:16). However, in their individual lives, Christians must “let [their] light shine before men in such a way that they may see [their] good works” (Matthew 5:16). This means that God’s people will pray, discuss the Scriptures, promote and practice morality, condemn and avoid immorality, share the gospel, and stand for their faith in all that they do. A Christian does not automatically stop doing these things and letting his light shine when he enters a school, government building, place of business, or any other place where unbelievers may be present.

Righteousness Exalts a Nation

The wise man said, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). The righteousness that exalts a nation is not legislated by the government and imposed upon an unwilling populace. Rather, the righteousness that exalts a nation is the result of individuals in that society choosing to practice the righteousness of God. Churches, in sounding forth the word (I Thessalonians 1:8), will be promoting this righteousness since the righteousness of God is

revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16-17). In doing this, the church will proclaim righteousness, even on issues such as abortion and homosexuality. This does not mean that the church is getting involved in politics (after all, these are moral issues). The problem is that politicians have involved the state in issues of morality. Murder is wrong (I Timothy 1:9; Revelation 21:8); therefore, abortion is wrong no matter what the state says about it. Homosexuality is wrong (Romans 1:26-27; I Timothy 1:10); therefore, same-sex “marriage” is illegitimate no matter what the state says about it. The list could go on. But we must remember this point – righteousness exalts a nation, not godless governments attempting to legislate matters that have already been settled by God.

Conclusion

The Lord’s church – the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:31-32) – must be kept pure (Ephesians 5:27) from the corruption that is inherent in human government. However, as Christians, we are the “salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). Therefore, we must influence the world around us toward greater morality, righteousness, and godliness. This will always be good, right, and necessary, regardless of the protests from the liberals, secularists, and haters of God that abound in this society.

The Corinthians’ Error on Baptism

By Perry Hall

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (I Corinthians 1:17 CSB).

When people today use this passage to discredit the place and importance of baptism, ironically they make the same mistake as the Corinthians but for a different reason.

Paul's actual defense of baptism shows that the Corinthians had placed who baptized them above their baptism. They placed what man was doing above what God was doing in their baptism (I Corinthians 12:13). That's why, ironically, Paul is thankful he had not baptized many:

"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't recall if I baptized anyone else" (I Corinthians 1:14-16 CSB).

The Corinthians mistake is downplaying the importance of baptism by emphasizing what is not important - the preacher who baptized them. Paul is thankful his lack of physically putting people under the water did not contribute to their division. Again, ironically, what should have united them, divided them (I Corinthians 12:13).

But notice what is implicit in how important baptism should have been to the Corinthians:

"What I am saying is this: One of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in Paul’s name?" (I Corinthians 1:12-13 CSB)

If they are dividing into groups based upon who baptized them ... *then every one of them had been baptized!*

Today, people still downplay baptism, even if they are baptized, but for a different reason. Is it because they are putting preachers above baptism? Sadly, that answer is still yes. So this downplaying is not being done in the same way as the Corinthians who were obviously all baptized.

Then how are people today diminishing baptism by emphasizing preachers? *The answer is found in putting more emphasis on what uninspired preachers say than what is written by inspired preachers in the Bible.*

Anytime preachers are put above baptism, in some form or fashion, the Corinthian error is committed.