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Citizens of Heaven

I. Introduction:

- A. Where do governments derive their authority?
- B. Should Christians obey the government? Why or why not?
- C. ***Fallen Condition Focus:*** As sinners, we fail in two main ways in relation to governmental powers.
 - 1. We reject their authority because we think that it is evil or that we don't have to listen to anyone but Jesus.
 - 2. We place our hope in government for our security, prosperity, identity, or value.
 - 3. Both of these stem from a failure to understand God's plan for government, but more fundamentally, both problems stem from our sinful nature which is rebellious and idolatrous.
 - a. Because we hate submission and we want to worship whatever we desire in order to find happiness, we reject the government's authority.
 - b. Because we refuse to place our trust solely in Christ, and because we find our righteousness in our culture or national identity, we wrongly place our hope and security in government.

II. **Basic Message:** Although God has graciously given mankind government to restrain evil and to promote justice and mercy, we must trust in Christ alone by remembering that we are citizens of an eternal kingdom and subjects to the one true King, Jesus Christ, who graciously died for my sin to bring me into his kingdom.

III. **Organization:** Today we will look at government throughout Scripture. We will examine the establishment of government on earth, the pattern of the eternal kingdom in Israel, the responsibilities of all governments, the establishment of the eternal kingdom in Jesus Christ, and our responsibility to government as citizens of heaven.

IV. **The Establishment of Government:** God gave government to all people. (Genesis 9:5-7)

- A. We know that after Cain killed Abel, creation devolved into a chaotic sinful state. So great was the increase in sin that God decided to judge the world through a flood.
- B. The flood wiped out mankind, save Noah and his family, and as they got off the ark, God commissioned Noah to take up the mission God had assigned Adam and Eve. They were to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.
- C. But, God added a new command that he did not give before. This time, in order to restrain evil in the world, God instructed Noah in Genesis 9:5-6 that bloodshed shall be repaid by human agents of God.
- D. **Genesis 9:5-6** And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. ⁶ "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

1. Killing another human unjustly is a capital offense because God made us in his image. To kill an innocent person is to attack God himself.
 2. The agent of retribution is another person. God appoints other people to avenge the murder: ‘by man shall his blood be shed.’
- E. Christians have always understood this directive to be the establishment or ordination of government by God. Considering the context of the preceding narratives on the prevalence of sin in the world, this command seems to be God’s solution to the rampant sin in the world.
- F. Thus, government is God’s gift common to all humanity to restrain evil in the world.
- G. This conclusion is supported by the teaching of the New Testament which affirms God’s purpose for government. (Romans 13, I Peter 2.13-14)

V. The Pattern of the Eternal Kingdom: The People of God model a future kingdom by their just law.

- A. There is no one passage to demonstrate this truth, but it is the clear teaching of the Old Testament that God made Israel into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in order to shine as a light to the world so that the world may see what God’s kingdom is like.
1. **Exodus 19:5-6** ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."
 - a. God set Israel apart to be holy.
 - b. God set Israel apart as a kingdom that demonstrated God’s holiness.
 - c. God was the king of Israel.
 2. **2 Samuel 7:12-16** ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."
 - a. God promised David that his kingdom would go on forever.
 - b. Christ took David’s throne as the Messiah and rules forever. This passage is ambiguous in that it describes the discipline God will bring upon David’s royal offspring as a result of their sin, but it also speaks to an eternal king, who we know as Jesus who never sinned.
 - c. Thus, Israel was a foretaste of the eternal kingdom.
- B. The Law of God demonstrated the justice that characterized God’s kingdom. They were to be holy because God is holy.
1. Israel’s law was full of mercy.
 2. Israel’s law was just. The punishment matched the crime. It did not exceed the crime.
- C. Israel was unique. Under the Old Covenant, God’s people were a political nation. Thus, ‘church’ and state were the same.
1. This meant that the law of God was the same as the law of the state.
 2. This meant that the state had perfect laws that were in line with God’s justice.
 3. This meant that a person who belonged to Israel belonged to God’s covenant people.
 4. This meant that Israel had a special and higher responsibility to be just.
 5. This will never happen again until Christ ushers in his final kingdom victory.

VI. The Responsibility of all Governments: Governments are to promote justice and help the weak and oppressed.

- A. Even though God did not give his law to all the nations, all governments always have been and always will be required to govern justly.
 - 1. In Genesis 15:16, God tells Abraham that the wickedness of the Amorites had not yet reached the level of evil that would bring his judgment. However, later, before Israel entered the Promised Land, God told Israel that the Canaanites were wicked and had to be judged. The book of Joshua records the judgment of God on the wicked nations of Canaan by Israel.
 - 2. Thus we see that God holds nations corporately responsible even though not every single person in those nations is guilty.
- B. God judges Babylon and Assyria for the injustices of the government's army.
 - 1. **Habakkuk 2:12-17** ¹² "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! ¹³ Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing? ¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁵ "Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink- you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! ¹⁶ You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD'S right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! ¹⁷ The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.
 - 2. Nahum 1.1-19
 - 3. Jonah 1.1-4.11
 - 4. **Daniel 4:27** ²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."
- C. Some responsibilities of government seen in the Old Testament:
 - 1. Promote justice
 - a. Punishment should match the crime, not exceed it, though mercy can be shown
 - b. The government should not advantage some and disadvantage others so that the wealthy get away with wrongdoing
 - c. Violent warfare for unjust profit should never occur
 - 2. Provide protection for the weak
 - a. Help those who have no voice in society
 - b. Make sure all can have access to basic goods
 - c. Fend off violent offenders

VII. The Establishment of the Eternal Kingdom of Jesus Christ: Jesus is the eternal king!

- A. Jesus is the King of Creation, and all who believe in him for the forgiveness of sins enter into his kingdom.
 - 1. **Mark 1:14-15** ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."
 - 2. **Colossians 1:13-14** ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- B. Christ's kingdom was present in his ministry, but not yet fully realized.
 - 1. Present: **Luke 11:20** ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

2. Future: Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matt. 22.1-14), Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13.24-30, 36-43), and Parable of the Dragnet (Matt. 13.47-50).
- C. Christ's kingdom is unlike the kingdoms of this world. It is now in heaven, and it will soon break into the kingdoms of this world and put all things under submission.
1. **John 18:36** ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."
 2. **1 Corinthians 15:21-28** ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.
- D. Our citizenship is now in heaven:
1. We are called citizens of heaven and ambassadors to this world.
 - a. **Philippians 3:20-21** ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
 - b. **2 Corinthians 5:20** ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
 2. We are called aliens in exile in the world.
 - a. **1 Peter 1:1** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion
 - b. **1 Peter 1:17-19** ¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.
 3. We are in the world but not of the world. (John 17)
 - a. **John 17:14-17** ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.
 4. Our primary identity is in Christ and his Church.
 - a. **Ephesians 2:13-22** ³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
- E. Jesus brought us into his kingdom by humbling himself to take on human flesh and dying on a cross. He established victory over the powers of this world and over the devil through his own sacrificial death. He did not first come in judgment and in power but in

humility and in weakness. But, he triumphed powerfully in his weakness, defeating Satan and the kingdoms of the earth that follow him.

VIII. Our Responsibilities to Government as Citizens of Heaven:

A. We are to honor and submit to our government.

1. **Romans 13:1-4** 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.
2. **1 Peter 2:13-14** ³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. **1 Peter 2:17** Fear God. Honor the emperor.

B. We are to pray for our leaders.

1. **1 Timothy 2:1-2** First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

C. We are to pay our taxes.

1. **Romans 13:7** ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.
2. **Matthew 22:17-21** ⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?" ¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹ They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
 - a. This passage tells us that our obligations to the state are not the same as our obligations to God because they are different entities. At one level, this affirms a separation between Christ's church and the state.
 - b. This passage tells us that our obligations to God trump our obligations to the state because God's image is on all of us.

D. We are not to worship our nation, government or leaders, or pay allegiance to them:

1. Daniel
2. Revelation 18 – God's judgment pronounced against Babylon which represents all governmental powers in which men trust for security, pleasure, and wealth.

E. Implications and Applications:

1. We must not put our hope in any nation or governmental system.
 - a. If we find ourselves fearful to the point of despair, paranoia, or hysteria when our nation is threatened, then this reveals that our hope is in the protection of our government.
 - b. If we find ourselves feeling safe and in control because we live in an economic system where we control our destiny, then we have lost perspective on reality and have failed to trust in Christ alone.
 - c. If we find ourselves exhausted from working for the success of our political party, then we have failed to rest in Christ alone.

2. We must not take pride in our national heritage or political party, and we must understand that God's kingdom is not advanced through politics.
 - a. If we find ourselves or our church spending more money on political campaigns than helping the poor and sending missionaries, then we have aligned ourselves with the powers of this world and attempted to run Christ's kingdom the world's way.
 - b. If we find ourselves angry at any threat to the dominance or success of our nation, then we have rested our identity and found pride in our nation rather than Christ.
3. We must have compassion and concern for all nations.
 - a. If we find ourselves connecting more with those of our national heritage or political party than with Christians from all political parties and nations, then we have found our identity in those things rather than Christ.
 - b. If we look down on foreigners, then we have failed to see that God has people from all nations which will stop us from taking the gospel to all nations.
4. We must be thankful for the peace and prosperity we can experience.
 - a. It is good and right to thank God for giving us peace.
 - b. It is good and right to thank God and rejoice when the wicked have been defeated.
5. John Neuhaus in the 1981 statement of the Institute on Religion and Democracy: [Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the first and final assertion Christians make about all of reality, including politics. Believers now assert by faith what one day will be manifest to the sight of all: every earthly sovereignty is subordinate to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. The Church is the bearer of that claim. Because the Christ is pledged to the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus, it must maintain a critical distance from all the kingdoms of this world, whether actual or proposed. Christians betray their Lord if, in theory or in practice, they equate the Kingdom of God with any political, social or economic order of this passing time. At best, such orders permit the proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom and approximate, in small part, the freedom, peace, and justice for which we hope.](#)¹

¹ Carson, D.A. [Christ and Culture Revisited](#). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008, pg. 203.