

## *Governments, Citizens, Churches, & Christians*

*David Halbrook*

Our government has many problems, and *sin is a reproach to any people*, so many citizens hope sinful laws will change (Prov. 14:34). In their zeal, some assume that God wants His churches actively involved in the social process of changing laws. Is this idea from the knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 1:3)?

Jesus cooperated with the government but never involved His churches in organizing or financially supporting groups organizing social/civil change. Likewise, a Christian should cooperate with the government without involving the church in the social process of social change (1 Pet. 2:17; 5:1-2). A church may not do all that a Christian individually may do.

In Scripture, the churches of Christ learned/taught God's will for each spouse, employer/employee, and citizen without doing the work God assigned to the government, business, or home. Hosting voter registration rallies or voting booths is work God assigned to citizens or the government, not His churches. Will churches also host executions (Rom.13:4)?

God's word applies to every part of our life, but we must study the Bible to know who God assigned certain works to. Visit our website for more study.

Editor's Note: The Bible repeatedly shows that sometimes God not only cares what is done but who does it. Many religious groups do not give thought to or rightly divide God's word in this area. Help your friends think about this, using this week's article in *Arkansas Weekly*. "Rebel" against our culture and talk about politics AND religion by helping others to see God's plan for both.

### Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Please check the lists of various assignments and work needing volunteers on the bulletin board at the back.

Pray for: Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Novela Puckett, Samuel Southall, others with ongoing trials, our brethren who are travelling, and new Christians among us.

*We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM*

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# The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

Church of Christ--Quail Valley

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## *The Bible Teaches Individual Responsibility (2)*

*David Halbrook*

*God expects individuals to identify and choose between right and wrong* God expects the government to distinguish between right and wrong, cause evil people to fear, and praise those who do good (Rom. 13:1-4). However, God also expects every individual to recognize what is right and wrong, based first upon the authority of Christ, not the authority of the government (Matt. 28:18; Jn. 19:11). One danger of citizens having an excessive amount of trust in the government is that citizens forget that God has all authority. When citizens forget God, then they must decide whether they believe the government or themselves individually have final authority. Both ways lead to destruction, both for the government and individual (Prov. 14:12, 34).

When citizens view the government as the final authority, then they let the government do the work of identifying and choosing right and wrong. In our country, that means that the public sale of alcohol was once absolutely wrong ("Prohibition") and is currently only sometimes wrong (depending on whether you live in a "wet" or "dry" area). God actually expects each citizen to examine the decisions of the government and give honor to God first, before accepting the rulings of the government (Acts 5:29). So in the case of alcohol, God expects us to recognize that intoxicating drink is for foolish people even if the government approves (Prov. 20:1; Rom. 1:22). In this case, sin has become a reproach to our nation.

When citizens view themselves as the final authority, then they will cooperate with the government as long as the government agrees with them. Such people quickly come into conflict with both God and His governing authorities, thus we are told to *fear the LORD and the king; do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?* (Prov. 24:21-22). Those who do not pay their taxes because they do not like how the government spends the money find both physical and spiritual calamity.

Jesus put this individual duty in the simplest of terms--*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it* (Matt. 7:13-14). No civil leader can legislate you into the narrow way, but many are following them down the broad path.

*God expects individuals to work* I believe that God has a better plan than our current social security and food stamp plans. At the least, God's principles would improve them. While there are many complex problems that arise, they do not change the simple wisdom and order God designed. All of it begins with the individual's determination to work with his own hands (1 Thess. 4:11). *If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat* (2 Thess. 3:10). Withholding food from someone until they are willing to work is actually an expression of mercy and love, for it may be the only way to train someone, or those who watch them, in God's plan. Neither we, nor the government, should imagine that we can be more wise, merciful, or loving than God.

*God expects individuals to be content* When we work according to our ability, God expects us to be content with what we have (Heb. 13:5). Some individuals say they are willing to work but repeatedly refuse available work, citing the low wages. They refuse to work unless the pay allows them to own a nice car, have cable TV or the internet, have a talk-text-data cellphone plan, and/or live in the neighborhood of their peers. So, *the fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. Better is a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind* (Eccl. 4:5-6). Our consumer-driven economy is consuming itself to death because many of us are not content with the basic necessities of life but pursue the pleasures of life at the expense of our daily spiritual needs, our family, our nation, and the churches (1 Tim. 6:8; Rev. 3:17). When our government persistently passes budgets that put our nation in debt, then it is no surprise when our citizens similarly spend irresponsibly. Is there a lack of elders, class teachers, evangelists, and spiritually mature Christians because the pursuit of the pleasures of life consume the time wherein we could bear fruit (Lk. 8:14-15)? If Christians do not learn and live this lesson, how can we expect our nation to escape this foolishness?

*God expects individuals to share* Work is not only intended to provide for ourselves. God also expects each individual to be *working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need* (Eph. 4:28). As you plan your daily, weekly, or monthly spending, do you depend on the government (or church) to do your sharing for you? If so, you have missed one of the purposes for work. In this passage, the one who works also does the giving to the person in need. If

each family took care of the members of their family (1 Tim. 5:4-8), each neighbor provided for their neighbor (Lk. 10:29-37), each community took care of the members of their community (Lev. 19:9-10), Christians took care of Christians according to God's plan (Acts 2:45; 4:37; 20:35; 1 Tim. 5:16), and every individual worked according to their ability and was content, I believe there would be little need for federal, benevolent aid. While society will likely never choose to function this way on a large scale, the best that you can do is share according to your ability and teach this plan to everyone you can, especially your children.

Conclusion "In God We Trust" our currency claims. Whether or not America puts their trust in God, Christians must trust Him by following His plan for us, even as citizens. "God Bless America," our nation sings. Whether or not God blesses America, He has promised to bless us if we keep His commandments. Is our government following God's plan for individual responsibility? More importantly---are you?

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If I tell you that life is not always easy or fair, I won't be telling you anything you don't already know. Christians, like all others, must deal with sickness, suffering, death, financial difficulties, and a host of other problems. In addition, there are times when Christians face persecution. Indeed, life throws some harsh, bitter realities at us, but what are we to do? Are we going to give up?

*"My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful."* James 5:10-11

Let's not give up, but instead, let's maintain our endurance to the end by considering some of the great examples who have gone before us and also by realizing the end intended for us by the Lord. Don't allow today's difficulties to cause you to miss out on tomorrow's great reward.

- by John R. Gibson, an among the Pepper Rd church of Christ, Athens, AL; Lenoard Westbrook is among this church also.