

A brief overview of *Bible and Government: Public Policy from a Christian Perspective*

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A. Some Key Terms: law, legislation, public policy, regulation, executive orders, judicial rulings, bureaucrat, politician

B. Rights: Foundational Issues (Negative Rights v. Positive Rights Theories)

C. Four Types of Public Policy

1. **Reactive**
2. **Inefficient provision** of genuine market goods and services
3. **Proactive:** (a) Aimed at *changing behavior* and (b) Aimed at *redistribution*

D. Key Biblical Passages on Civil Government: Romans 13:1-7, II Peter 2:13-17, Titus 3:1

1. Romans 13:1-7: “**1** Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. **2** Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. **4** For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. **5** Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. **6** For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. **7** Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”
2. 1 Peter 2:13-17: “**13** Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, **14** or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. **15** For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— **16** as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. **17** Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”
3. Were the Apostles out of their minds? Cruel and oppressive Nero was Caesar when they wrote!
4. Note: the Bible was written for all cultures and times.
5. Beware: nationalism and an Americanized theology are problematic
6. No one, not even Bible-believing Christians, consider these commands to be absolute (cf. Peter and John preaching in Acts 5:28-29, the midwives in Exodus 1:15-21, Ehud in Judges 3:15-26). The issue revolves around when Christians may or must disobey.

E. Two Evangelical Schools—and Four Major Evangelical Views—of Public Policy and Civil Government (see handout pages 5-6).

1. Key question: “Is the state a special sphere of authority along with the family and the church?”
2. School 1: Integrated Authority
 - a. **Theonomy** (Christian Reconstructionism): Bahnsen, North, Rushdooney, Hall, Weaver, Calvin, Luther (?)
 - b. Revitalized (reshaped) **Divine Right of Kings (DroK)**: Spurgeon, Waldron, Eidsome, Macarthur, Gill
3. School 2: Competing Kingdom
 - c. **Anabaptist** (pacifist): Menno Simmons, Mark Roth, Harold Bender, Heinrich Bullinger
 - d. **Liberty of Conscience**: Isaac Backus, Roger Williams, John Leland, John Bunyan (?)
4. The Liberty of Conscience view is developed and applied in a practical way in *Bible and Government: Public Policy from a Christian Perspective*. In the same way that Theonomy is the logical outcome of a Presbyterian and postmillenarian theology, Liberty of Conscience is the logical outcome of a Baptist theology (whether premillenarian or amillenarian).

F. Submission to the State and Public Policies (per Romans 13:1-7, II Peter 2:13-17, Titus 3:1)

1. To which ones? For what reason? Liberty of Conscience perspective on *why* it is morally wrong at times to rebel against the state (see handout page 4).
2. Some examples:
 - a. Prevention of gospel preaching
 - b. Aborting every child after the first

- c. Preferential hiring of homosexuals
- d. Prohibition of spanking
- e. Mandatory attendance in public schools
- f. Mandatory working on Sunday
- g. Poaching
- h. Hiring illegal aliens
- i. Speeding (doing 67 in a 65 zone)
- j. Mandatory purchase of automobile insurance
- k. Prohibition against throwing stones at birds in Dublin, Georgia
- l. Prohibition against playing pinball for those under 18 in South Carolina and Nashville, Tenn.
- m. Prohibition spitting on the street in Dunn, North Carolina

3. Extrapolation: theoretical/theological motivations for supporting the American Revolution

G. The Nature of Civil Government

1. Biblical record of public policies: Is the state intrinsically good or evil? (see handout page 6)
2. Historical record of public policies (highlighting the work of Prof. R. J. Rummel)
3. Biblical teaching (see handout page 3): 90% of governments and policy are evil.
4. Revelation 13:1-9: *"1 Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. 2 Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. 3 And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. 4 So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" 5 And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. 6 Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. 7 It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. 9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear."*
5. Notice the similarities (beast from the sea, lion, bear, leopard, ten horns) in Daniel 7:1-28: *"1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts. 2 Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. 3 And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. 4 The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it. 5 And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!' 6 After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. 7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8 I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words. 9 "I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; 10 A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened. 11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. 13 "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed. 15 "I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. 16 I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: 17 "Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever."*
6. Both passages concern governments, since it can be shown that the beasts represent kings. Both passages note the nexus between Satan and government.
7. For further study: list of Bible passages relating to the nature of government and public policy (see handout page 3).

H. A very practical chart in the book (chapter 7) indicates suggested Christian responses to public policy. The big question: "Should we participate voluntarily, work for it, buy from it, take benefits from the state in this circumstance?" (see handout page 3).

I. The necessity of supporting Christian liberty and toleration of different views (Romans 14:4)—see handout page 3, last paragraph.

Excerpt from pages 218-220 of Bible and Government:

There is no single passage from the Bible that delineates the whole doctrine of civil government, public policy, or how Christians should behave under the state. Instead, the doctrine is fragmented throughout the Scriptures. Nine of the most important single passages considered (and cited in their entirety) in the book are:

- I Samuel 8:4-20
- Matthew 17:24-27
- Matthew 22:15-22
- Mark 12:13-17
- Luke 20:20-26
- Romans 13:1-7
- Titus 3:1-2
- I Peter 2:13-17
- Revelation 13:1-8

Eighteen of the most important supporting passages cited in the book are:

- Genesis 41:33-44
- Psalm 94:20
- Proverbs 8:15
- Proverbs 20:2
- Proverbs 21:1
- Proverbs 23:1-3
- Proverbs 24:21-22
- Ecclesiastes 5:8
- Ecclesiastes 8:2-5
- Isaiah 27:1; 30:33
- Ezekiel 28:12-19
- Daniel 4:17, 34-37
- Daniel 10:13
- Luke 3:12-14
- Acts 5:17-29, 37
- I Corinthians 7:20-24
- Revelation 17:1-7, 11-14
- Revelation 19:9, 20-21

Taken on the whole, these passages form the bulk of “the whole counsel of God” (cf. Acts 20:27) regarding public policy and the nature and role of civil government. Christians who study public policy would do well to reflect on the principles contained in these passages.

Accordingly, principled inferences were drawn about how Christians ought to behave while living under state authority. These recommendations and principles are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Public policy paradigm for Christians

Policy type	What may a Christian do?			
	be employed by it	receive or use its benefits	voluntarily pay taxes to support it	buy or use its products and services
Reactive	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Inefficient provision	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Proactive	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>

Nevertheless, when it comes to public policy, there must not be a hard and fast rule or a bright line whereby Christian reactions may be judged. Liberty of conscience must be permitted in a variety of responses to government action, especially because it is not always easy to classify a particular policy as reactive, inefficient provision, or proactive. Politically, Christians ought to champion the principles of limited government and individual liberty embodied in reactive public policy. In so doing, they should also generally reject proactive policies, especially welfare state redistributive policies, and oppose policies of inefficient provision. Even if exceptions to this rule are found in certain cases, for instance, where a Christian’s use of proactive policy benefits would be justifiable, they must remain *exceptions* rather than the rule. Some generalizing is possible—even if there are exceptional situations—by utilizing the theoretical framework found in this book. There is usually no moral problem caused by disobeying a policy. For instance, it is not immoral to drive over the speed limit or to evade taxes, but it is usually unwise to do so. Moreover, it might be disobedient to God to defy a given policy since pragmatic submission is clearly required under normal circumstances.

The biblical principle of submission to civil government

In *Bible and Government: Public Policy from a Christian Perspective*, Christian submission to the state and public policies is set forth as pragmatic or expedient from the point of view of the policy (legislation, ruling, executive order) itself. That is, Christians obey in order to avoid incurring the state's wrath. They do not want to incite a break out of Leviathan against them on account of their public disobedience to most policies. Thus, Christians do not sin by violating these rules per se. However, the Apostles do give a command to submit to the state and, even if it has to be applied differently depending on the historical and cultural context, that principle still stands for all believers at all times. Disobeying apostolic teaching does indeed have moral implications: it involves sinning. However, the Apostles are not telling Christians that they sin when they do not follow the "letter of the law" of the state's policies. On the contrary, there are clear cases when Christians must violate public policy: prohibitions of Gospel preaching, mandates to kill children, and so forth. Submission to the state is not an absolute command. Furthermore, one cannot say that he has sinned necessarily because he has violated some policy: like not coming to a complete stop behind the limit line at a stop sign or hiring an illegal alien. What makes the action sinful is (a) the public and flagrant nature of the sin and (b) the cavalier disregard for Apostolic concerns that (c) do not bring glory to God in the world.

The Apostles were concerned that disobedient believers would sin by: (1) dishonoring God in the sight of others; (2) harming the testimony of Jesus Christ in society; (3) bringing wrath unnecessarily upon believers and their families; (4) acting foolishly—or least without the appropriate amount of wisdom and prudence; (5) being poor stewards of God's provisions; (6) giving the state an excuse or reason to single out Christians for persecution; (7) worrying about what the state might do to them and thus violating the teaching of Christ in Matthew 6:25; and (8) beginning to engage in ostensibly benign activities that (a) might eventually lead to temptation to do sinful things or (b) might at least have the appearance of evil deeds to onlookers.

Alternatively, the revitalized (or restyled) Divine Right school—and the theonomic school if an ideal government were in place—would say that sin occurs because the civil government is a special authority sphere in life, and the believer must submit to what it decrees as if God Himself were speaking. They would not hold the state's word to be God's word, but they would hold public policy to be directed by Providence and a manifestation of His will for believers affected by it. Thus, violating the policy is said to be sinful in and of itself.

Nevertheless, as noted in the commentary below, and as pointed out in *Bible and Government: Public Policy from a Christian Perspective*, the state is not a special sphere of authority to promote or enhance the kingdom of God. It is an agent of the kingdom of Satan that God ordains and uses primarily as His servant to bring terrestrial judgment on sinners. Accordingly, disobedience to the evil state is never sin in cases when public policy would compel us to violate a clear commandment of God or to disregard or abrogate a conviction we hold with a strong basis in Scripture. In all other cases, disobedience to the state might be sinful—but not because of disregard of a public policy per se. Civil disobedience would be sinful if it were public and flagrant—especially during dire times such as Christians faced under Nero—and if it involved careless or cavalier disregard for God's glory and the apostolic concerns noted above. Otherwise, violating biblically innocuous public policy would not be sinful if done discreetly, privately, clandestinely, wisely, prudently, and carefully (or if done through ignorance of the policy). Whether or not a Christian's disobedience to the state or public policy is sinful will depend in large part on the cultural context in which he lives. Disobeying curfew rules while living under Nero or Stalin is one thing, but running a stop sign at 2AM in rural North Dakota is another. Trying to pull off a revolution under a powerful Caesar or Czar might be suicide, and thus not glorify God, while revolting against King George actually brought American Christians greater freedom and has given more glory to God in the long run. American Christianity has been a tremendous boon to worldwide missionary endeavors, the printing of Christian books, and the promotion of theological study. In brief, the choice to revolt, or even to what extent a Christian may prudently disobey, depends on the political, technological, and economic context in which he finds himself. However, a Christian who unintentionally or inadvertently offends men—government officials in particular—or gives occasion for reproach of Christ on account of his disobedience to such policies (even if the policy is considered asinine, like prohibiting spitting on the sidewalk

or requiring using a seatbelt before driving down the block at midnight), must be willing to apologize quickly and humbly make amends when confronted.

Summary of the four major Evangelical paradigms regarding civil government

Table 1: Evangelical public policy paradigms (historical categories and their main branches)

Category by Disposition / Action	Integrated Authority	Competing Kingdom
Transformational / Involved	Theonomy	Liberty of Conscience
Non-Confrontational / Passive	Divine Right	Anabaptist

Table 2: Views of the Evangelical public policy paradigms

Historical line of thought: Paradigm / Perspective	Integrated Authority		Competing Kingdom	
	Theonomy	Divine Right	Anabaptist	Liberty of Conscience
1. Views the state as a special sphere of authority like the family and the church?	Yes	Yes	No	No
2. Views the state as a transformable institution under the dominion mandate (Gen. 1:26-28)?	Yes	Yes	No	No
3. Views the source or foundation of the state's rules as:	God's law when the state is a covenant-keeper; men or Satan otherwise	Providence: state speaks God's will to the church / its subjects as God's servant (or oracle)	Providence; He is doing His will in the competing realm; a few would say Satan	Satan (Rev. 13:2b, 4a; cf. 12:9a), or at least the state's own cultural or moral standard
4. Views the nature of the state as:	Evil if a covenant-breaker, good if dominated by covenant-keepers	Benign: Good when good men run it and bad when bad men run it	A realm that competes with God's Kingdom (some regard as evil)	Evil: the greatest source of oppression and affliction besides false religion in history
5. Views military service and the draft as:	Morally permissible under some circumstances	Morally permissible under Providence	Pacifist (making the draft a bad thing too)	Often morally permissible, esp. for just war (the draft is bad when it is proactive policy)
6. Views the primary role of the state as bringing terrestrial judgment upon sinners or harassing the church under God's permissive decree	No	No	Yes, but also sees a role for the state in punishing criminals, etc.	Yes
7. Views the primary role of the state as promoting or upholding the kingdom of God in the world	Yes	Yes	No	No
8. Views the state as "ordained" by God just as:	Family and church (cf. the Westminster Larger Catechism)	Family and church	Any other thing God ordains outside of His Kingdom	Satan, the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4a)

9. Views the church's role in political life as:	The church preaches to the state and the state enforces God's Law; transforming the state (dominion mandate)	Supportive and active, endeavoring to promote "better" legislation with more God-honoring rules	The church should have nothing to do with the state or politics; Christians sin by participating in it	The church should not provoke the state, and must not hope that the state will help it achieve its godly ends; individual Christian involvement is left as a matter of conscience
10. Views open rebellion or revolution as:	Laudable and right when against a covenant-breaking state and led by a lower magistrate	Generally sinful	Unavoidable when the state intrudes into the life of the believer	Morally permissible so long as no other sin is committed by doing so; can be led by anyone
11. The godly goal of revolution would be:	Bring down a covenant-breaking king	Unlikely (if ever) to be ascertained	Unattainable since not permissible for believers	Permissible when it can be done wisely, God is glorified, and the church is benefited
12. Views resistance as:	Morally right when resisting a covenant breaking state, otherwise wrong	Generally sinful, except for a few items like prohibiting preaching the gospel and forced abortion	Unavoidable but not to be sought after	Morally right whenever it can be done without bringing public shame on Christ or wrath on the church, and when no other sin is being committed by doing so
13. Views lying to the state (e.g., hiding Jews from Hitler, not reporting all income on a tax return, etc.) as:	Morally right when resisting a covenant breaking state	Generally sinful	Unclear, but likely right / OK when promotes God's glory; tendency to shun taxes for warfare	Morally right when it can truly be used to promote life, stewardship, and God's glory
14. Would use public policy to promote righteous living	Yes	Yes	No, other than crime control	No
15. Would consider reporting "tax protesters" or other rule breakers to the state	No, unless a covenant-keeping state were in power	Yes	No	No

Excerpt from page 211 of Bible and Government (second printing):

Table 3: Good and bad public policies in the Bible

Policies	Theocratic		Non-theocratic		Total	
	No.	as %	No.	as %	No.	as %
Good	29	39	11	10	40	21
Bad	44	60	101	89	145	77
Ambiguous	1	1	2	1	3	2
Total	73	100	113	100	188	100