

WE ARE BAPTIST

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Matthew 22:21 *They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

Introduction

In this final lesson in our *We are Baptist* series, we have arrived at the last distinctive in the acrostic, Separation of Church and State. In this study, we will find that this doctrine is incredibly relevant for our church, community, and nation in the midst of the current tension in our society. This doctrine will enable families to make God-honoring decisions about how to proceed in these trying times. As we apply the biblical truth of this doctrine, we will be able to maintain a respectful and obedient relationship with our worldly authority without sacrificing our heavenly calling.

I. The Basis of the Doctrine

- A. Edward Hiscox gives a thorough definition of this doctrine.
 - Civil governments, rulers and magistrates are to be respected, and in all temporal matters, not contrary to conscience and the word of God, to be obeyed; but they have no jurisdiction in spiritual concerns, and have no right of dictation to, or control over, or of interference with, the matters of religion; but are bound to protect all good citizens in the peaceable enjoyment of their religious rights and privileges. (The New Directory for Baptist Churches written by Edward T. Hiscox 1859)
- B. The Government should have no **control** in the operation of the church. Churches should be free to worship as they deem appropriate without interference from the government.
- C. **Jesus** set the principle when He told people to render unto the government what belonged to them and the church what belonged to God.

Matthew 22:21 *They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

1. Taxes belong to the government. These are mandatory.
 2. Tithes belong to the church. These are voluntary.
- D. All men will stand before God and give account **alone**. If they are alone in this account, then they ought to have the right to choose how they worship.

Hebrews 9:27 *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:*

2 Corinthians 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

II. The Baptist Influence in Religious Liberty in America

- A. Wikipedia includes the history of separation of church and state:

"Separation of church and state" is a legal principle in the United States, which is related to, but not found within, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, in the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

The principle is paraphrased from Thomas Jefferson's "separation between Church & State." It has been used to express the understandings of the intent and function of this amendment, which allows freedom of religion. It is generally traced to a January 1, 1802, letter by Thomas Jefferson, addressed to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut, and published in a Massachusetts newspaper.

Jefferson wrote,

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.

Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties."^[1]

Jefferson reflects other thinkers, including Roger Williams, a Baptist Dissenter and founder of Providence, Rhode Island. In 1644, he wrote:

When they [the Church] have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall itself, removed the Candlestick, etc., and made His Garden a wilderness as it is this day. And that therefore if He will ever please to restore His garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be walled in peculiarly unto Himself from the world, and all that be saved out of the world are to be transplanted out of the wilderness of the World.^[2]

In keeping with the lack of an established state religion in the United States, unlike in many European nations at the time, Article Six of the United States Constitution specifies that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

*Jefferson's metaphor of a wall of separation has been cited repeatedly by the U.S. Supreme Court. In *Reynolds v. United States* (1879) the Court wrote that Jefferson's comments "may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the [First] Amendment." In *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), Justice Hugo Black wrote: "In the words of Thomas Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and state."*

- B. Timon Cline writes in his article on Baptist and religious freedom several distinctive truths:

*Henry C. Vedder, in his *Baptists and Liberty of Conscience* (1884), proudly declared that the "glory of Baptists" was that they were the first to advocate religious liberty for all people. B.H. Carroll, founding president of Southwestern Theological Seminary, echoed this sentiment in his sermons outlining distinctive Baptist principles. Are these claims legitimate or self-interested posturing? Upon reviewing the unique contributions of Baptists to the Western tradition of freedom of speech and religion, it becomes apparent that Vedder and Carroll were on to something. Indeed, Baptists were among the first to argue against government censorship and religious coercion, something for which most*

historical accounts of the subject do not afford early Baptists credit.

Most accounts of the development of the Western political theory look to figures like John Milton, John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, or James Madison as the chief architects of modern conceptions of liberty. In one respect this tendency is appropriate, but it does not tell the whole story.

Modern Baptists have a vested interest in drawing attention to the significant role Baptists played in the development of religious liberty, telling the whole story, as it were. Ignoring this facet of the Baptist tradition is to dishonor the lineage of early Baptist figures who suffered for liberty of conscience, speech, and religion. To rediscover this aspect of Baptist heritage one must begin with the very inception of the English separatists of the 17th century.

1. *Thomas Helwys 1612 publication “A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity – was an appeal to King James 1 for liberty of conscience for all citizens of faith. It marks the first real defense of religious liberty and freedom of conscience published on English soil. He was thrown into prison for this book and died four years later.*
2. *The First London Baptist Confession (1644/1646) declared it the duty of magistrates “to tender the liberty of men’s’ conscience,” and therefore not require citizens to violate such.^[23] The General Confession of 1660 declared that “it is the will, and mind of god (in these Gospel times) that all men should have the free liberty of their own Consciences in matters of Religion, or Worship, without the least oppression, or persecution.”^[24]*
3. *While in England to obtain a patent to unite the settlements in Rhode Island, Roger Williams, founder of the First Baptist Church in America, penned The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience, drawn from the ideas of John Murton. The following year, Williams returned to his colony of “soul liberty,” and ultimately influenced the discourse on religious liberty thenceforth.^[27]*
4. *Figures like Obadiah Holmes, Isaac Backus, and John Leland championed the cause of “soul freedom” all across New England and Virginia in the lead up to the American Revolution. Their basic polemic was that religious freedom is not a spoil of politics, to be divvied out to—and defined by—the highest bidder. Rather, religious freedom is a transcendent*

right, acknowledged by government, but impossible to legislate into, or out of, existence. “[R]eligion,” Backus noted, “is a voluntary obedience unto God which therefore force cannot promote.”^[30]

5. *No discussion of religious liberty is complete without some mention of the Danbury Baptists and their correspondence with Thomas Jefferson. As should be apparent now, their stance was not novel in the context of historical Baptist principles. That faithful group of Connecticut Baptists was merely guarding an inherited soteriological and anthropological pillar of their faith. “Our sentiments are uniformly on the side of religious liberty: that Religion is at all times and places a matter between God and individuals, that no man ought to suffer in name, person, or effects on account of his religious opinions, [and] that the legitimate power of civil government extends no further than to punish the man who works ill to his neighbor.”^[32]*

III. The Principles of Separation of Church and State

- A. The government is to be **obeyed** in matters not applying to religion.

Romans 13:1-7 *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*

1 Peter 2:13-17 *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will*

of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

Titus 3:1-2 *Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.*

1. There was clear teaching in the New Testament that we are to submit to the government in areas that do not contradict our conscience and clear teachings of Scripture.
2. Our approach is not to fight, but in meekness to follow.
The Christian was not to be the violent group in society, but the one who helped make the community stronger and better.
3. Freedom of religion is not freedom to do what we want void of the law and government on every matter.
 - Some religions are taking this separation too far and acting as though they do not have to do anything the government says that they don't like. This is not biblical.
4. We can only disobey when the government clearly contradicts, not our preferences, but biblical commands.
 - a. The three Hebrew children in the book of Daniel refused to bow to the idol because it would break God's command not to worship any other idol.
 - b. Daniel kept praying to Jehovah even when there was a command not to pray to any other god.
 - c. The disciples kept preaching the gospel, even after they were told to stop.

B. We have more religious **freedoms** than most countries.

1. Our brothers and sisters in many countries cannot meet the way we do or practice openly because of restrictions.
2. We need to thank the Lord for our freedoms.
3. We need to realize that our freedoms may not always be there.

- C. There is much more **wisdom** in having a friendly relationship with rulers than to be in opposition to them.
 - 1. You don't have to agree fully with someone to still have a relationship with them and an influence.
 - Example: Missionary Phil Stephens and his illustration about the criminal Roger.
 - 2. Joseph did not agree with the Egyptian ways of worship, but as a friend of the court he was used by God to save his people.
 - 3. Daniel did not agree with the ways of Babylon and the Persians, but as a servant of the court he made a great impact on the future.
 - 4. Missionaries who go in and become friends with the rulers get more done than those who go in and fight them. The same goes for churches in the states.
 - a. If you treat the rulers like enemies, then they will act one.
 - b. God can work through the leaders to open up great doors of opportunity to preach the gospel.
 - 5. I believe we should do everything in our power to find peace. That will not always be possible, but it should be the first avenue of pursuit.
 - 6. We should follow the laws and use them wisely to accomplish God's plans in our lives. Paul used the government regulations to accomplish his goals by appealing legally as a Roman citizen.

D. What about the **present** and **future**?

First Amendment:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

1. The government cannot mandate legally that churches cannot assemble. This is clearly defined in the First Amendment. They can request and suggest, but legally they cannot force.
2. The government can mandate using masks as it does not infringe on our meeting. You may not like it, but it is not a battle I am willing to fight since it does not stop us from meeting.
 - There is no biblical reason to disobey an ordinance just because we don't like it or think it is foolish. It must contradict a clear biblical mandate before we openly oppose it.
3. When the government mandates the mark of the beast, we will refuse because that clearly violates Scripture.

Revelation 13:16-18 *And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.*

4. Although the events happening around us are clear indicators leading to the rule of the anti-Christ, we should still walk in wisdom regarding our responses. Our main goal is to glorify God and to reach the lost. We must not do anything that would distract from our ability to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whatever sacrifice we must make to see people saved, is a worthwhile sacrifice.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The state or federal government is to have no control in the affairs of religion, as people should be free to worship as their conscience dictates.
- B. Baptists have long fought for religious freedom and we should continue that pursuit.
- C. We need to have a proper respect for government and only disobey when government infringes on clear biblical teaching.
- D. We need to use our religious freedom for the benefit of others by spreading the gospel. *“Ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”* (Galatians 5:13).