

The State and Its Citizens

Table of Duties

Lent 2, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

God instituted the State. God instituted the government.

The government is a very powerful institution. God is the most powerful being in the universe. Therefore if God is the most powerful being in the universe then the government exists only because He wants it to exist. It exists because it is an institution of power and God is a God of power. Therefore the God of power institutes the institutions of power.

This is not only true because God is Almighty, it is also true because the Word of God says so. Like it or not the governments on the earth that exist exist because of God. They exist at His will. If He had not willed them to exist, they would not exist. Those that hold office in the government hold office because He wills them to hold office. If He did not will them to hold office, they would not hold office.

God instituted the government.

Since God instituted the government, there are some things that logically follow.

First of all, you obey the government. Since God instituted the government, the government's authority comes from God. Therefore obeying the government is obeying God. That includes the government at all levels. Therefore everything from laws forbidding first degree murder to simple traffic and parking laws are all laws that the government institutes in order to prevent harm. When you obey those laws, you are obeying the government. When you obey the government you are obeying God.

Secondly, it is right that you pay taxes to the government. If the government is indeed God's servant and serves at His behest, then it is right that you pay taxes to it. The government and those who serve in the government need money in order to perform their duties. Most of them devote their full time to governing. Therefore they need income and salaries. That income comes from taxes. Therefore we pay taxes to the government at God's command.

Thirdly, it is right that we should pray for the government. Pray for all those people who are in authority. Pray that they do right.

One of the problems that we have in America is the separation between the Church and the State. When our Lord says, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and render unto God the things that are God's," it sounds like He is endorsing a sort of separation between Church and State such as we practice here in the United States.

Fortunately for us our Lord sent His apostles to make sure that we understand such statements properly. In the United States the separation of Church and State as it is currently practiced seeks to establish a secular state separate from the influence of any kind of God whether it be the one true God or a false one. The only authority our government seems to recognize is the authority of the people according to our American Constitution.

This notion is false. If God has instituted the government and requires us to obey it then the government is by definition responsible to God. It is false to say that God rules in the Church and not in the State. God rules in His Church and God rules in His state, but He uses Church and State for different ends and because of that He grants to them differing authorities.

To point it out: last week we talked about the authority of the preachers to preach correct doctrine according to the faithful Word. In other words the preachers preach Jesus. When they preach Jesus they are preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins and everlasting salvation through the

resurrection of the dead. Nowhere does God give the state such authority. That means that the State does not have the authority to tell you your sins are forgiven in front of God. The State does not have the authority to tell you that you have everlasting life by the resurrection of Jesus. The State does not have the authority to announce salvation. Therefore the State is outside of its vocation when and if it should try to do these things. Nowadays the State sins when it says that all gods are equal and the same and that all religions are equal and the same. It is not the State's vocation to assess the doctrines of those who preach.

The Church has the authority to forgive sins in front of God. The Church has the authority to proclaim everlasting salvation in Christ Jesus. The Church has the authority from God to deal with those things that are eternal.

What therefore is the vocation of the State? What does God want it to do? God wants the State to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. What authority has God given to the State to punish those who do wrong? God has given the State the authority of the sword for in Romans 13 He says that the State does not bear the sword for nothing.

In the ancient world the sword was the common weapon of the Roman soldier. The Roman soldier also served as the police force of the empire. The sword was employed to keep people in order. The Roman authority used the sword to put some people to death who were unruly. Avoiding death by the sword was the Roman authority's way of praising those who did right.

Therefore the government has the authority to coerce. It can bend and force people to its will by means of force. In the ancient world it was the sword mainly that was used and so God refers to this authority by calling it "the sword." However, both in ancient and certainly in our contemporary times the government employs all manner of coercive instrumentation. The government has an army. It has a police force. Those forces employ weapons capable of killing. They do this because God has given them to do this. The government may deploy any coercive measure it likes to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. If it wants to use prisons, it may do so. If it wants to use electric chairs or gas chambers, it may do so. If it wants to impose fines on people, it may do so, etc. What it may not do is threaten people with eternal things in order to get them to behave.

What is the purpose of this vocation? Why has God given the State such authority? He has done this so that you and I may lead quiet and tranquil lives. In other words it is hard to lead a quiet life when someone is trying to break into your house all of the time so God has the State deploy a police force designed to deter crime such that you can enjoy your daily bread in peace. It is hard to enjoy your daily bread if a foreign country or a terrorist organization is staging an invasion or an attack on the place where you live so God grants the government the authority to deploy an army to protect you.

God authorizes soldiers and police officers to use deadly force if necessary to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.

How does the government decide what is right and what is wrong? If the government is to punish those who do wrong, how does it decide those who are doing wrong? If the government is to praise those who do right, how does it decide those who are doing right? It must do so according to God's laws. And here is where our State is astray in some areas. Our government is determining the difference between right and wrong on the basis of the majority of the population. So when the majority felt that homosexuality was wrong, it was illegal in our country. When the majority changes and feels that homosexuality is ok, then it is legal in our country. The United States has an emperor just like the emperors of old. It is the majority. The majority rules in the United States of America. The majority is astray from God's ways in its thinking and therefore our government has followed suit.

A government that is working according to God's will allows the Church to manage the holy things without interference and it punishes those who wrong and praises those who do right. In other words the government deals with actions. A person has to do wrong before he is punished. The Church can threaten judgment on motives the State is not called to do that. It only judges on the basis of actions. If God has not called the State to preach everlasting salvation, then the State does not enforce the First, Second, or Third Commandments as the catechism lays them out. The State does enforce the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Commandments. The State does not enforce the Ninth and Tenth Commandments because those have to do with motive and the State is to judge actions only.

Therefore God calls the State to enforce the Fifth Commandment and prevent harm. That is what murder laws and traffic laws are for. They are designed to prevent harm. The State is charged to enforce the Sixth Commandment and protect marriage as God instituted it. The State is charged to protect personal property by enforcing the Seventh Commandment and punish thieves and swindlers. The State is charged to enforce the Eighth Commandment and punish those who slander or commit liable. This is the State's calling.

I would point out at this point that the State is not called to heal the sick. The State is not called to feed the poor. The state is not called to manage some kind of economic system. The only economic policy that God has called the State to do is to determine who the thieves are and put them in prison and make them pay restitution for what they have stolen.

Now here is a curious thing about the United States of America. In the United States the people are in charge. The people in Springfield and the people in Washington are our elected representatives. God has instituted a republic for the United States. We do not live under a dictator or a king. We live in a republic. That means that in the end the majority is in charge. The majority rules. You are part of the people who determine who the majority is. In other words when you go in to the voting booth to vote you are determining which direction our government will take. Obviously you are doing it together with a whole bunch of other people, but you are doing it nonetheless. Therefore God has called you to vote for those individuals who will enforce the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Commandments in accord with God's will. If you vote on any other basis, then you are voting on an ungodly basis. That is the question when voting. Will the candidates in question enforce God's Law and I would point out in our current political climate that God does not care whether or not the government is big or small. As long as it does His will the government is doing what it is supposed to be doing according to God's will. That means that if you do not vote you are shirking the authority that God has given you when He made you a citizen of this country. You are in violation of His will and you are part of the problem that we have created for ourselves in the United States. In the voting booth God has called you to vote for those candidates who will enforce His laws for the punishment of those who do wrong and for the praise of those who do right.

Having said all of this I think it is obvious that governments will live outside of the will of God. So little is known of the will of God even among those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, that it is virtually impossible for a government to do its job in accord with God's will. But just because a government does not perform its vocation according to God's will does that give you leave to disobey it. When God inspired Romans 13 Nero was the emperor that God was commanding His people to obey. Nero was a terrible emperor when it came to God's will. He was full of greed and all kinds of sexual perversions and pride. But even Nero kept enough order and kept enough other evildoers in check for there to be some measure of peace in the empire. It functioned at any rate. A contemporary example of this same phenomenon is Saddam Hussein. He was ruthless. He did not keep the Fifth Commandment himself

even though as dictator of Iraq God had called him to keep it. However, when our government went in and overthrew him and he was no longer in power Iraqi warlords and tribal affiliations in Iraq began to kill one another in feuds that went back prior to Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. It seems to me that fewer people died under his dictatorship than died in the blood feuds that followed his removal from office. He was evil, but in spite of that he kept other evil in check. God fulfilled His will through such evil men in spite of them. He will do the same in our government.

Therefore the only time you are permitted to disobey the State is if it should command you to do something contrary to God's Law. Then you may disobey it. God's authority still trumps the State's authority. God is not saying that the State is supreme. God is teaching you the true nature and use of the State. And when you do disobey it, you are subject to its reprisals. God does not give you an out. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were willing to lay down their lives because they refused to worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. In that particular instance God rescued them from their punishment from the king. But the apostles often suffered in prisons for refusing to obey the State's mandate to quit preaching the Gospel and on only one occasion was Peter rescued by an angel. On the other occasions God left them in prison and they counted it privilege to suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ.

These are the vocations of the State of the citizens of the State. The goal is not everlasting salvation. The goal is not to preach Christianity or to establish some kind of "Christian nation" which the Bible never envisions. The goal of the State of the citizen's obedience to the State is to produce a society with enough order in it that we may lead quiet and peaceful lives.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.