

God's Word on Governing

A Study
Through Discussion

Part VI: The Purposes of Government

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VI. PURPOSES OF GOVERNMENT

- What are the purposes of civil government?
- What are key principles to be followed in pursuing those purposes?

We will not discover all the purposes of our transcendent and omniscient God, yet what He reveals, He intends sincere seekers to understand. Purposes expressed in Scripture are directed to our attention more than others. Let us consider first civil government, without implying it is more important than other God-ordained “governments,” which we considered implicitly in earlier sessions and which are discussed specifically in Session VII. Of course, some principles will apply equally to all human governments. We may, for example, view kings and judges as prototypes and the exhortations and injunctions to them as applying to us in other positions of trust. Some principles may apply more particularly to family or church (see Session VII).

We may trust our benevolent God to encourage our efforts to discern them more fully, as we face our own responsibilities in life.

1. Why does God ordain civil government?

a) I Peter 2:14

Would you prefer the words “reformation,” “correction,” or “rehabilitation” to “punishment”? Why is punishment (literally “vengeance”) used here? What word do various translators use? Why have these choices been made?

What governmental actions are called for in the office of “praise” (or the other translations of “commendation” or “honor” or “reward”)?

What common civil governmental activities might not be included?

b) 1 Tim 2:1-4

What two adjectives and two nouns are used to describe the desired characteristics of community life? (v.2)

What two purposes are thought to be advanced by the characteristics mentioned? (v.4)

What are you exhorted to do toward these ends? (vv 1-2, Rom.13:1).

c) Romans 13:4

What punishment is particularly indicated by the concept of sword-bearer and avenger? (Other translations refer to “punishment” and “retribution”.)

What is the word for that which is to be suppressed by the office of the sword? (The King James and the New American Standard Bible are the more literal translations.)

d) Genesis 18:18

This may be considered a messianic allusion, but does the reference to “a great and mighty nation” suggest as well that through Israel's role and experience of nationhood, “all the nations of the earth will be blessed”?

e) II Chron. 9:8

Why might God appoint a king to govern over a nation?

2. What are some responsibilities for which governments are accountable before God?

a) Genesis 18:19

Keeping the way of the Lord means doing what two things? What is the relationship between the two?

b) Leviticus 19:15 (see verses 9-19); Deut. 1:16-17

Toward what two groups must judges give no partiality?

What category of persons is mentioned (Deut.1:16) for whom extra thought may be necessary to avoid partiality?

What does it mean to say “You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God’s”?

c) Jeremiah 22:2-3

What three categories are mentioned toward whom injustice must be avoided?

Who are the different people (three categories) responsible to see that this command of the Lord is obeyed?

The decrees of justice must bring about what result in relation to the wronged and the wrongdoer?

Explain what it would mean to shed innocent blood or guilty blood.

d) Amos 5:1-15

Toward what persons and attitudes in the judicial process is the rebuke and warning of Amos directed? (vv.7, 10)

What attitude of heart is requisite for restoring justice in the courts (gates)? (v. 15)
What hope is held out if justice is restored?