

1 PETER 2:13-17 STATE AND CHURCH

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. ¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

In this era of judicial activism, this passage of Scripture strikes an odd chord. The refrain from entities like the ACLU is “separation of church and state.” A wall of separation has been divined from the Constitution by various justices over the past 50 years. Is such an interpretation justified? Does this passage of Scripture say that there should be no separation?

First, Peter is not addressing how a nation should be governed. If that were the case, we would already be out of God's will by having a democracy rather than a monarchy. Second, Peter is addressing how the church should live out its ministry under any form of government. He lives in a culture of kings and governors, so that is the context from which he develops his example. Third, Peter is telling us who God is.

Through Creation we know that God is a God of order. He brings order out of chaos, and makes a garden out of a wilderness. He has made the universe as a reflection of his nature, and therefore, it is ordered. He is also sovereign and almighty. As such, all authority comes from him, and without him no one has any authority. To rebel against authority, unless it is manifested through the command to disobey God, is an evil.

Peter is addressing the church and not the state. Believers are to pray for the state and to be leaven in the dough of the government. We are to respect the offices of government and honor those who hold the offices, for they are our neighbors made in the image of God. Peter commands us not to gossip, lie or participate in character assassination in the name of our religious belief. When we criticize our leaders or those who are seeking political office, let us make very sure that we are exposing the truth and not motivated by our personal agendas. Our only agenda is to be the glorification of God.

Lord, help me to see through my words to my motivations. Take my focus off what my neighbor is doing and place it on what you are doing. Help me to pray with my heart before I speak with my mouth. Direct my ways according to your ways and guide my actions through your Spirit. Amen.