

THE LIMITS OF CIVIL AUTHORITY

From the Standpoint of Natural Right and Divine Obligation



There seems to be in this country, at the present time, an urgent need for better understanding by the public on the subject of the boundaries of the domain of popular government. There are indications of ignorance upon this point that cannot fail to be addressed.

The principle that “*the majority must rule*,” is the correct one, but is not of universal application. There is danger that it may be extended altogether too far; for it must be evident to all that the majority cannot prescribe rules for the minority in everything, no matter how small that minority may be. If it can, there is no such thing as individual rights, for that which is subject to the will of a majority is not a right. *A right* is something which, by its very nature, is inherent in the one possessing it, independent of the will of all other persons. Otherwise it would be but a mere privilege, such as a superior might grant to an inferior, and take away again at his pleasure; and the saying would be true that “*might makes right*.”

But it is one of the fundamental principles of our government that “*all men are created equal*.” It is not the prerogative of any one to be lord over any other, to prescribe rules by which he must live. They are equal in this, that all have an *equal* right to think and act as suits their inclinations. But this right is limited by the fact that all are equal, which forbids each to do anything that would encroach upon the rights of his neighbor. For that which would interfere with the rights of others is not a right. Rights cannot conflict. Rights run in parallel lines, never crossing, never clashing.

All individuals have rights. The Declaration of Independence declares that “*all men are created equal*,” “*and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights*,” that among these are “*life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*,” and the same great truths are embodied in the fundamental principles of English and American law.

“*Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*” are general terms, but it is not left to governments to arbitrarily define the limits to which these rights extend. There is a natural limit already fixed for each and every individual, and that limit, as has been said, is the line which borders the rights of his neighbor. The rights of one must not be made to conflict with those of another. It may be generally stated by saying that every man has a right to do whatever he will, provided that in so doing he doesn’t interfere with the like right of any and every other person.

These rights are a necessary consequence of the fact that all men are created equal. This fact gives to each one equal authority, and leaves no one with any natural authority over and above another. *No man gets his rights and liberties from his fellows, but from his Creator*, who, as the Declaration of Independence says, endowed him with them; and therefore only his Creator can rightfully take them away. Other than this, he can only be deprived of them by forfeiting them due to misconduct.

The purpose of governments, as the Declaration of Independence asserts, *is to protect these rights - the rights of the individual*. Governments are not instituted merely to run themselves, or to become rich, great and powerful at the expense of the individuals composing them. They are not to perpetuate themselves regardless of the wishes of the governed, but exist to protect each individual in the enjoyment of his rights. The individual could not well protect himself against all others, so each delegates his right in this respect to certain ones chosen to make laws and preserve peace and order, and who are backed up by the power of the people who choose them. This is what constitutes government in its republican form: the delegation of the power and authority of the people, the individuals, to their representatives. And this is done, directly or indirectly, by means of election, in which each individual has an equal voice.

THE LIMITS OF CIVIL AUTHORITY

From the Standpoint of Natural Right and Divine Obligation

The people do the governing, and those chosen to office are but the servants of the people, to carry out their will, and not in any sense rulers over them.

Governments should, therefore, exercise themselves in doing what they are instituted to do; that is, protect the people in the enjoyment of their rights. Outside of this they have no legitimate authority whatsoever; for governments, in their popular form, are but the expression of the will of the majority. The majority can and must rule in the sphere that governments are instituted to fill, in prescribing the manner in which the purpose of the government— the protection and preservation of individual rights – shall be carried out, whether that government be municipal, state or national. Beyond this the majority has no right to go. And let it be remembered that while popular governments represent the will of the majority, they are instituted to protect the rights of the minority - *the individual*. The moment, therefore, that the government undertakes to regulate an individual's conduct in matters which do not concern the rights of others, it begins to do just the opposite of that which it was instituted to do, since it begins to invade, not protect, the rights of the minority.

However, there are other considerations that enter into this question as well. Man's first and highest allegiance in all things is due to his Creator; therefore, *the domain of conscience* is one that human government has no right to invade." No man can surrender his conscience to the keeping of another and maintain his loyalty to God; but as a responsible moral being, he must remain loyal to his Creator at whatever cost, even at the sacrifice of life itself.

While God demands man's first and best affections, He throws the safeguards of His law around his creatures, and to each moral being He says, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" But at an early period in the history of the race man rebelled against the law of his Creator. The divine injunction of equal love for fellow-creatures no longer afforded the protection necessary, and so God ordained that men should organize for the protection and securing of their own natural rights. This we call *civil government*, but this in no way supersedes the divine government; it doesn't in any measure release the individual from obligation to obey *a divine law* or *any divine command given to him*. It simply provides a way whereby men may compel their fellows to yield to them that which is their due.

that which is their due. Notwithstanding the ordinance of civil government, *God is still the great moral Governor*; to Him every soul is responsible; to Him every free moral agent must give account. To permit any power whatsoever to come between the individual and God's requirements would destroy individual responsibility toward the Creator. If it were the province of the State to enforce the law or any requirement of God, the individual would naturally seek to know not the will of God but the will of the State. The effect would be to put the State in the place of God. Civil government as it exists is an absolute necessity for a race of social free moral agents - in a state of alienation from their Creator.

It is evident from the facts stated that there never can be any conflict between *legitimate* civil authority and the claims of the divine law, "rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," [Acts 4:18-20] *UNLESS* a religious body or organization resorts to the State for repairing grievances against their neighbors.

The Creator calls this *illegitimate union* of church and state - a church employing the State or its laws on her behalf by enforcing her authority against "the religious convictions and consciences" of other fellow men - "*the beast and image of the beast*" (Revelation 13). In so doing, He warns the world and professed Christians, including Seventh day Adventists, against such unions. Any church that resorts to any civil government to make of this illicit union an *official union* will become in that same instant a "religious beast or a persecuting power" (Rev 17).

In these last days, it doesn't matter how *civil* or *subtle* a religious persecution is manifested, *a spirit of force* will always manifest itself through forceful actions.

**Did you know *AMERICANS* have been
JAILED for the *NAME* of their faith?**

**-- PLEASE --
SIGN THE PETITION
www.LibertyPetition.com
TO PREVENT FURTHER
PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS
csdapublications@gmail.com
1-800-754-8021**

