

**Romans (83)**  
**The Christian and the State (cont.)**

Let us read once again Romans 13:1-7.

<sup>1</sup>Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup>for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. <sup>6</sup>For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

There has been great confusion and error through church history regarding the role of the Christian and/or church and the state. Here we read some clear instructions, principles by which we Christians are to live under the government in which God has placed us. Last Lord's Day we set forth the principles that should govern our attitudes and actions as Christians living in a secular nation. But toward the end of last Sunday's message we pointed out that these instructions are to be understood as directly applied to Christians who are living under a system in which there is a monarchy or a government in which the citizen has little if any influence. But it is important for us to remember that we Americans stand in a rather unique place in history and live in a rather unique land, politically speaking. As Christians in the United States of America, we have a relationship with the state that is quite unusual and unique in the world in which we live. People in other nations and cultures do not commonly understand this about our nation. We do not have a king, a ruling monarch, as other nations. Our government by definition is "of the people, by the people, for the people."<sup>1</sup> Here are the words of **Donald Carson** in a book that he wrote that touches on this matter:

Most who read these pages live in democracies. Compared with Christians of the first century under the Roman Empire, this reality brings new freedoms and new responsibilities. On the side of freedom, it is difficult to imagine a Christian in Judea in about A.D. 65 singing, "And I am proud to be a Judean man/For at least I know I'm free." Yet on the other hand, the biblical injunctions to submit to the state as to God means, in our context, that we *must* take our obligations toward a *participatory* democracy seriously. This combined with the moral obligation to "do good to the city," involves believers in matters of government at *some* level) (all the way from voting to influencing government to legislating and governing) in ways impossible for Paul or Luke—and this means that today it is more difficult to develop a "them" verses "us" mentality typical of believers under totalitarian regimes. While that may improve our sense of participation, doubtless it also increases the possibility of being snookered into confusing the kingdom of god with our own government or party.<sup>2</sup>

Here in America we have a constitution that is the law of the land. It is on the basis of this contract Americans have agreed to function as a nation. The people are the rulers, so to speak. As a republic we select men and women to represent us, but when we do, we grant them the authority to govern us according to the constitution. It is for that purpose we elected them. It is their responsibility to perform that duty to which we appointed them. We declare to them in effect, "Here is our constitution. It identifies and defines who we are

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<sup>1</sup> From Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited* (Eerdmans, 2008), p.196.

and how our government is to function. We have elected you to govern us according to this rule.” When our governing authorities assumed their office, we elicited a commitment from them. They swore an oath to us that they would govern us according to this law of the land, the constitution. The requirement of this oath is itself in our constitution. Here is how Article II, section 1 of the constitution reads regarding the presidential oath of office:

Before he enter on the execution of his office, he shall take the following oath or affirmation: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

The people, the government, have limited the authority and have stipulated in what arena of authority he may govern us. The constitution, as amended by the states and interpreted by our courts, is the law of the land. It would seem to me that before God we have a responsibility to submit to every ordinance within the arena to which he was appointed and to which he agreed when voted into office. And I only single the president out because he is the chief executive. But this responsibility and authority to uphold and govern us by the constitution is at every level of government and applies to every government official. It would seem to me that this allows for dissent and non-conformity to laws imposed and actions taken by our government leaders that are in conflict with the constitution to which they agreed to uphold and was the one condition we placed upon them when we conferred political authority upon them.

Our **Declaration of Independence**, which was the official beginning point of our nation, advocated the citizens’ right and responsibility to overthrow a government when it ceased to fulfill its responsibility as a just government. Here are some of its words:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.

There is included at this point a long list of specific grievances and abuses of power of the King of England over the colonies. The Declaration continued:

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people...

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the

British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Now please do not misunderstand me. We are not advocating insurrection or rebellion. What we are saying is that the nature of our government and the limitation and stipulations that we have placed upon our leaders in the specific ways that we permit them to lead us, sets parameters for us that governs our conscience before God. We are under no obligation to obey laws that they have imposed that are in contradiction or are beyond the arena of rule that we have granted them. The authority they claim or exercise that reaches beyond the limitations of the constitution is illegitimate. The 10<sup>th</sup> Bill of Rights first amending the Constitution, proposed in order to assure the initial ratification of the constitution, limited the powers of the federal government. Here is the Tenth Amendment:

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

In those areas in which the federal government has exerted its authority in ways not stipulated in the constitution, are by the declaration of our constitution, illegitimate and invalid. It is sad that our federal government has transgressed this fundamental right of the people in numerous ways.

But the point we are making is this: we as Christians are living in a unique situation in that we have the privilege of influencing even controlling the powers of our government. But we must recognize, that with privilege comes responsibility. And so, we are not to be a people who withdraws from interest and involvement in the political process. But as citizens we have the privilege, and as Christians we have the responsibility to inform others and vote according to our Christian convictions. And we do so not in a spirit of rebellion against legitimate authority, for our desire is to submit to all such authority. It is illegitimate authority that expects and demands submission that calls for our response, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Now, in order for us to best understand the subtleties of the issue and the errors that Christians have committed in the past, it would be good for us to stand back and attempt to understand the larger picture of how we as Christians are to view ourselves and our role as citizens in the nation in which we live. This has to do with the nature and relationship of the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. I would like us to consider the kind of worldview we should have with respect to Christians living in a fallen world. That this is always an important matter to rehearse before the Lord’s people should be evident to us. **John Calvin** believed it was important for him to rehearse these matters before his people. In Calvin’s famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he wrote these words regarding the importance for Christians to distinguish their heavenly citizenship in the spirit from their physical life under human government in this fallen world.

And first, before entering on the subject itself, it is necessary to attend to the distinction which we formerly laid down<sup>3</sup>, lest, as often happens to many, we imprudently confound these two things, the nature of which is altogether different. For some, on hearing that liberty is promised in the gospel, a liberty which acknowledges no king and no magistrate among men, but looks to Christ alone, think that they can receive no benefit from their liberty so long as they see any power placed over them. Accordingly, they think that nothing will be safe until the whole world is changed into a new form, when there will be neither courts, nor laws, nor magistrates, nor anything of the kind to interfere, as they suppose, with their liberty. But he who knows to distinguish between the body and the soul, between the present fleeting life and that which is future and eternal, will have no difficulty in understanding that the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things very widely separated. Since it is a Jewish folly, therefore, to seek and include the kingdom of Christ under the elements of this world, let us, considering, as Scripture clearly teaches, that the

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<sup>3</sup> Here he was referring to Book 3, Chap. 19 sec. 16, of his *Institutes*.

blessings which we derive from Christ are spiritual, remember to confine the liberty which is promised and offered to us in him within its proper limits.

In other words, Calvin was saying that it is very important for Christians to recognize and remember that they are living in two kingdoms, but they are primarily citizens of a heavenly kingdom. And so, with this our aim, consider the following doctrine (teaching) of Scripture regarding this matter.

Now here in Romans 13:1-7 the apostle Paul gave instruction to the members of the church at Rome on how to live as Christians under the authority of the Roman Empire. Rome, of course, was a non-Christian state. The state religion of Rome was paganism, in which a pantheon of ancient gods were revered and worshipped throughout the empire.<sup>4</sup> The religion of the Jews was a legal religion in the Empire; they were permitted to worship freely. Christian churches were also tolerated by Rome at this time, for they were viewed as a sect of the Jews' religion. The instruction of Romans 13 is to a people who lived under a government in which they could move freely in society and gather unimpeded by the civil authorities, as long as they were regarded as good citizens they enjoyed this freedom. This changed, however, not too many years from the time of the writing of this epistle, perhaps about 7 years or so. It was then that Emperor Nero falsely accused the Christians, who would have probably included recipients of this epistle, that they had caused the terrible fire that consumed most of the city of Rome in AD 64. Tremendous persecution was unleashed upon the Christians for a season. Thousands of Christians were martyred. Many must have fled the city at this time.

By describing the historical setting in which these Christians lived when Paul wrote this letter, we are not saying that the instruction of Romans 13:1-7 is so historically conditioned that it only applied to them or to Christians who live in a culture like theirs was. No, rather, these are general principles by which all Christians should govern their attitudes and actions living under virtually any kind of political system. But what is most important for us to remember always is that we are to regard ourselves first as citizens of the kingdom of God, even while we are dwelling presently in a world (or country) in which we are strangers and foreigners. We are to live as ones within a political system and under God-ordained leaders. We are to seek the good of our nation of which we are earthly citizens, but we must always keep in our minds the preeminence of our citizenship in the spiritual kingdom of our Lord Jesus.

This is how the people of God have always viewed themselves down through history, that is, except for the time in which Israel was a constituted nation in which it existed as an independent entity from the 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the end of the kingdom of Judah in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, that is, from the days of the early kings of Israel—Saul, David, and Solomon, to the latter days of the kingdom under Kings Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Consider these references in which the people of God revealed their understanding that they were strangers in this world, pilgrims passing through this life/world unto their future inheritance.

We read of Abraham in Genesis 12:10, which reads, “Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.” Now some translations have the word “live” or “dwell”, but the English word “sojourn” is best in that it describes living temporarily as a stranger in a strange land.

God gave instruction to Isaac to live in this manner:

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup>And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup>*Sojourn in this land*, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. (Gen. 26:1-3)

We read of Jacob describing his life as one entire sojourn, or traveling through this world staying here and there, but never at “home.” He is described early on as one who was dwelling in “tents”, which were temporary dwelling places in lands not their own. We read in Genesis 25:27, “When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, *dwelling in tents*.” In Genesis 32:4 we read of Jacob

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<sup>4</sup> However, there existed among the populace a common spirit of dissatisfaction with the official religion and there was skepticism to the degree that many would not have regarded themselves as devout followers of the religion of Rome.

returning to Palestine after living for 20 years in the country of his father-in-law, Laban. Here we read of Jacob's words to his brother Esau whom he expected to meet on his return to Canaan.

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. <sup>2</sup>And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

<sup>3</sup>And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, <sup>4</sup>instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, '***I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now.*** <sup>5</sup>I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight'" (Gen. 32:1-5)

We later read that Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, and here we read that the entire lives of Abraham and Isaac could be described as a sojourn, that is, the dwelling of strangers in a foreign land not their own.

<sup>27</sup>And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), ***where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.*** <sup>28</sup>Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. <sup>29</sup>And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him. (Gen. 35:27-29)

Many years later, after Jacob's son, Joseph, had become the prime minister of Egypt, and Jacob had learned that his son was alive in Egypt, Jacob and his sons traveled to stay in Egypt due to the great famine in that part of the world. Joseph introduced Pharaoh of Egypt to his father Jacob. When the elder Jacob sought to summarize his life to Pharaoh, he expressed himself in these words:

So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen." <sup>2</sup>And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. <sup>3</sup>Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?"

And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were." <sup>4</sup>They said to Pharaoh, "***We have come to sojourn in the land,*** for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen." (Gen. 49:1-4)

Clearly Jacob was telling Pharaoh that it was their intention to live their temporarily, sojourning in a foreign land, a country not their own. We then read of Jacob's description of his entire life as well as the life of his father and grandfather as sojourning, living temporarily as strangers in a place that was not their homeland.

<sup>5</sup>Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. <sup>6</sup>The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

<sup>7</sup>Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. <sup>8</sup>And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?"

<sup>9</sup>And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "***The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years.*** Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to ***the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.***" (Gen. 47:1-9)

The worldview of the patriarchs was that they were passing through this world, dwelling temporarily in a foreign land, as they waited for the day when God would give them their own land in which they would dwell.

At the time of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, God told His people that He would deliver them from slavery in Egypt and bring them to possess the land in which the patriarchs lived as strangers and pilgrims. We read in **Exodus 6:2-8**:

<sup>2</sup>God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. <sup>3</sup>I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. <sup>4</sup>I also established my covenant with them ***to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as***

*sojourners.* <sup>5</sup>Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. <sup>6</sup>Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. <sup>7</sup>I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup>***I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession.*** I am the LORD.'"

Now many believe and argue that the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were looking forward to this Promised Land, the geographical land of what became Israel, which God had promised their heirs would inherit. But the New Testament book of Hebrews reveals that their fixation was not on a future earthly homeland, but rather they anticipated what the Promised Land prefigured, a new heavens and new earth and a heavenly Jerusalem in which they would dwell with God and all of God's people.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup>By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup>For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

<sup>13</sup>These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that ***they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*** <sup>14</sup>For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup>If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup>But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:8-16)

They did not view themselves as citizens of any earthly kingdom, but were heirs of a promised kingdom. They lived lives of faith awaiting the realization of God's promises to them.

Now earlier we said that this is how the people of God have always viewed themselves down through history, that is, except for the time in which Israel was a constituted nation in which it existed as an independent entity from the 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the end of the kingdom of Judah in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. But actually had they been able to understand the purposes of God, they would have understood that the kingdom of God was spiritual in nature and future from their perspective, not physical and political and centered in the land of Israel in which they were living. Even when Israel was living in the Promised Land as their "possession" they were to view themselves as strangers or pilgrims in that Promised Land. We may see this in Leviticus 25 in which God set forth the laws of the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee, which was to be a special sabbatical year every 50<sup>th</sup> year in which the people of Israel dwelt in the Promised Land. The reason that God had established the jubilee was so that the people of God could maintain their ancestral property through many generations. Nevertheless, we read the idea behind this institution of the jubilee year in Leviticus 25:23f.

"The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. ***For you are strangers and sojourners with Me.*** And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land."

There are hints that there were some who understood in a measure the temporary nature of the kingdom of this world and that this life was a pilgrimage to a future, more glorious inheritance. King David expressed these words in Psalm 119:54, "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of ***my sojourning.***"

However, it was after God had judged Israel through His instrument of Assyria, and He had judged Judah through His instrument of Babylon, and after the surviving remnant had been taken into exile in Babylon, that the people once again began to view themselves as pilgrims in this world who were looking forward to a future spiritual kingdom.

God communicated to His people while they were in exile the spiritual nature of His kingdom. He did this in at least three different ways. ***First, God promised to give the Holy Spirit to the people He would restore to their "land" that would transform His people into a living, vital, community of faith.***

**[Read Ezekiel 36:16-32]**

*Second, God revealed the spiritual nature of the promised kingdom through His description of a renewed temple* that could only be understood as depicting a spiritual reality (Ezekiel 40-48). In these chapters an angel measures a temple, but the physical dimensions and other features of the temple militate against the possibility of it being a literal, physical temple. Rather, it served to display before the people of God a future relationship with God illustrated by a restored “temple” and “priesthood” that they would have valued and appreciated. The note in the Reformation Study Bible is an appropriate word on this passage:

An angel leads the prophet on a tour of the city, beginning at the gates to the outer court of the temple (40:6-27) and ending after several chapters with a division of land among the twelve tribes (47:13-48:35). Interpretations of these chapters vary widely. Many have seen in these passages a blueprint and building specifications for a normal city that was to be built (43:10, 11). However, elements of the prophetic vision seem to go beyond a literal understanding (e.g. 47:1-12). Other interpreters understand Ezekiel’s temple vision as a largely symbolic description of the way God would bless His people, with the temple preeminently standing for the presence of God in the midst of the people. Through the use of vision and symbol (40:2; Num. 12:6), the prophet describes a point in the future when the presence of God among His people would transcend anything that Israel had experienced in history.<sup>5</sup>

*A third way that God revealed the spiritual nature of the promised kingdom to Israel was in the promised blessings of those in the new covenant.* God declared through His prophet that all that are restored to Him would do so based on a new covenant through which God would secure the obedience of everyone in the new covenant relationship with God.

**[Read Jeremiah 31:31-34]**

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament declares that this new covenant was established by Jesus Christ and is that which is enjoyed by every true Christian. Jesus Christ, the faithful High Priest to His people has established and administers this new covenant to His people.

**[Read Hebrews 8:1-13]**

*A fourth way that God revealed the spiritual nature of the promised kingdom to Israel was that the kingdom would encompass the world incorporating innumerable Gentiles.*

**[Read Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-6]**

When we come into the New Testament, we read that the Lord Jesus distanced Himself from the common Jewish expectation of the Messiah inaugurating an earthly, political kingdom. His kingdom was spiritual in nature, it was not a political or geographical nation, but it was a spiritual kingdom in which all people everywhere could be citizens. He declared that the kingdom of God was present where He was, for He was the promised King.

<sup>25</sup>Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. <sup>26</sup>And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup>And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup>But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Our Lord taught the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God in **John 18:33ff**:

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<sup>5</sup> R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., *Reformation Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson), p. 1314.

<sup>33</sup>So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” <sup>35</sup>Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” <sup>36</sup>**Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”** <sup>37</sup>Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

Our Lord never taught that the kingdom that He was bringing to realization was anything but spiritual in nature. His people, those who believed on Him as Lord and Savior had entered the Kingdom of God. This kingdom was inaugurated after He had died upon the cross but raised from the dead by His Father. He ascended into heaven and was enthroned as King over the Kingdom of God. The New Testament teaches a realized eschatology, that we are living in the days of the promised Kingdom of God, the kingdom that God had promised throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, particularly in the prophets. As Peter declared on one occasion when preaching:

<sup>24</sup>And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. <sup>25</sup>You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ <sup>26</sup>God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” (Acts 3:24-26).

But in addition to the *present* reality of the Kingdom over which Jesus Christ rules as King, the New Testament also teaches the *future* realization of the Kingdom of God with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God (or of Jesus Christ) is a present reality but also a future prospect. And so, we can read of the Kingdom as “not yet” as well as “realized now.” Consider these verses:

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11.** “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not *inherit the kingdom of God*? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will *inherit the kingdom of God*. <sup>11</sup>And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

**Galatians 5:16-21.** “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup>envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that *those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*.”

**2 Timothy 4:1, 18.** “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and *by his appearing and His kingdom*.” “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and *bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom*. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

**2 Peter 11:10f.** “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup>For in this way *there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*.”

We may see from these verses that the Scriptures teach us that we are both presently now citizens of the kingdom of God and yet God has promised us that we will one day inherit His kingdom. Here we have the present, realized kingdom and the future promised kingdom. It is one kingdom both present and yet coming.

Now as Christians, we are to identify ourselves first as citizens of the kingdom of God. We have been delivered from the fallen kingdoms of this world. We are as free men within this kingdom, being able to experience joy, peace, and righteousness, regardless of the kind of earthly political kingdom we may find ourselves living. **However we are to live as citizens of a heavenly kingdom toward which we are traveling through this life. We are, therefore, sojourners while in this fallen world. We live within this world, but we are not of this world.** Consider these verses:

**Philippians 3:17ff.** “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup>For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup>**But our citizenship is in heaven**, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are ambassadors of Christ’s kingdom. We are to live in this world, in the nation in which we find ourselves, as ones who represent Christ’s kingdom to those around us.

**2 Corinthians 5:16-20.** “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, **we are ambassadors for Christ**, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

**Matthew 17:24-27.** “When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?” <sup>25</sup>He said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?” <sup>26</sup>And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, **“Then the sons are free.** <sup>27</sup>**However, not to give offense to them**, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.”

**1 Peter 1:13-17.** “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup>As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup>but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup>since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” <sup>17</sup>And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your **exile...**”

This pulls many of these ideas together:

**1 Peter 2:9-17.** “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

<sup>11</sup>Beloved, I urge you **as sojourners and exiles** to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup>Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

<sup>13</sup>**Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,** <sup>14</sup>**or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.**

<sup>15</sup>For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

<sup>16</sup>*Live as people who are free, not using your freedom* as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.  
<sup>17</sup>Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. *Honor the emperor.*

And so, we are to regard ourselves as people in exile, sojourning in a foreign land, even while we dwell as Christians here in America. This is not our home. But while we are dwelling here we are to attempt to do good and bring benefit to others living about us, but in doing so we always recognize our heavenly citizenship and our principle loyalty to the Kingdom of God, that will one day be fully revealed to us. In short, we are to take the instructions that God gave to the remnant of Israel after they had been taken from their land to far off Babylon. We read in **Jeremiah 9:1-7**:

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. <sup>2</sup>This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said: <sup>4</sup>“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup>Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>But *seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile*, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

So, too, we are exiles living in “Babylon”, but even while we sojourn here for a while, we are not to become a part of “Babylon.” To use the language and imagery of the Revelation, we are to refuse to take the mark of the beast (i.e. Rome, Babylon, the world system), which would identify this world owning our souls. We have the mark of God’s ownership upon our foreheads, even His name (cf. Rev. 22:4). We belong to Him. And one day, perhaps before long, we will be with Him in the Kingdom of which we are true citizens that He has promised we will one day inherit.

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“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely... <sup>20</sup>He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” (Rev 22:19-20)