

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Church and State as Articulated in his Exposition of Romans 13:1-7

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) was an extraordinary Welsh preacher and Christian leader. His preaching and pastoral ministry spanned 40 years, first as the minister of the Calvinist Methodist Mission Church in Aberavon, South Wales, and then as the minister at Westminster Chapel, in London, not far from Buckingham Palace. At 23, he was Chief Clinical Assistant to Sir Thomas Horder, the King's Physician to King George V but four years later, at age 27, he decided to leave medicine believing God had called him to the Christian ministry.

In his excellent two-volume biography of Dr. Lloyd-Jones, Iain Murray writes: "Some regarded his change of career as romantic, others as foolish. But Lloyd-Jones himself was sure that his settlement amid the industrial depression of South Wales was no sacrifice: 'I gave up nothing. I received everything. I count it the highest honour God can confer on any man to call him to be a herald of the gospel.'"¹ This attitude marked Lloyd-Jones throughout his life and ministry, and his preaching was a great blessing in his day and continues to be so through his published works and the Martyn Lloyd-Jones Trust.²

Why Lloyd Jones' "Political Theology?"

It should be noted at the outset that Lloyd-Jones did not use the term "political theology." I am using it in this paper to describe his views on church and state as one perspective along with others that are discussed in this volume. I have chosen to examine what Lloyd-Jones has to say about the relationship between church and state not only because he is one of my favorite preachers, but because he specifically addressed this subject as a Bible expositor and pastor at a time in the 20th century when there was tremendous growth in the power of the state. He lived through two world wars, the depression, and the rise of the postwar welfare state in Britain. Although he had no formal theological training, anyone who reads or listens to his sermons is immediately aware that he was a gifted man who did his homework. One indication of his reach and impact are the endorsements on the MLJ Trust website.³ I also appreciate his willingness to think outside the ecclesiastical boxes of his day because of his commitment to the scriptures as the inspired word of God and the ultimate grounding authority of Christian faith and practice.

I have decided to restrict my investigation to a series of 11 sermons Lloyd-Jones gave on Romans 13:1-7, which he regarded as "the great New Testament statement on the relationship between church and state."⁴ Lloyd-Jones preached these sermons as part of his weekly Friday evening meetings that took place in Westminster Chapel from October to May, with breaks at Christmas and Easter. The entire series on Paul's Epistle to the Romans ran from October 1955 until March 1968, during which time he

¹ See Iain Murray, "D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First 40 Years 1899-1939," Banner of Truth Press, 1982.

² Details of MLJ Trust (mljtrust.org) – In email correspondence with Greg Jones, the President of the MLJ Trust on January 11, 2023, he confirmed that since they started in 2013 there have been 16.7 million downloads or plays and in 2022 alone, they were close to 3 million downloads or plays. Obviously, an impactful ministry. His sermons are freely available to anyone who wants to listen. There is an opportunity to give a donation if one desires.

³ Endorsements include Mark Dever, R. C. Sproul, Iain Murray, John Stott, John Piper, James I. Packer, John F. MacArthur, Jr., R. Albert Mohler, Jr., I. H. Marshall, Darrell L. Bock, D. A. Carson, Alistair Begg, Timothy Keller.

⁴ See: Exposition of Romans, "This passage... is a kind of *locus classicus* for several urgent and relevant questions concerning the Christian's relationship to government and to the state", 16. "This is a subject that is not dealt with frequently in the Scriptures and that is what makes this passage a kind of *locus classicus* with regard to this matter", 31. Cf. 48.

expounded Romans 1:1 to 14:17.⁵ This Friday evening series was more lecture-like than the sermons he preached on Sundays, which focused on exposition in the morning service and evangelism in the evening service, and this gave him the opportunity to expand upon his topic in a way that he could not during Sunday services. I have not yet had a chance to read all his writings or listen to all his audio messages, but I believe that when it comes to the NT doctrine of the relationship between church and state, his exposition of Paul's magisterial epistle reveals the heart of Lloyd-Jones' understanding and teaching.

In this essay, I will summarize 9 of the 11 messages Lloyd-Jones preached, skipping the ones on pacifism and capital punishment.⁶ Fortunately, Lloyd-Jones proceeds in a logical manner, starting with an exposition of the text and then moving step by step to apply the text to the issues of his day. I have followed the order of his messages and rather than repackaging his thought in a way that might suggest itself to contemporary lecturers. The biblical nature of his messages and his conviction that the Bible is the word of God gives his exposition a timeless quality that unsurprisingly continues to be relevant.

Background and Context of Romans 13:1-7

Like any good expositor, Lloyd-Jones begins with the background of verses under consideration. Thus, he observes that in this part of his letter, Paul is dealing with the application of the gospel.⁷ He notes that some commentators see no connection between what comes before and after Romans 13:1-7. Others see the verses as an interruption in Paul's argument and believe nothing is lost in going from 12:17 to 13:8 and skipping over 13:1-7. Still others think that Paul blatantly contradicts what he wrote in 12:2, or that 13:1-7 is eschatologically disconnected from 13:11-14, or that it is an example of the apostle temporarily reverting to sub-Christian Old Testament rabbinic teaching when it comes to church and state. Lloyd-Jones rejects these suggestions and not only insists that the passage is interconnected with its context, but that its connectedness has interpretive significance. The problem is not with the apostle Paul but with his interpreters.

For Lloyd-Jones, Romans 13:1-7 is consistent with everything Paul has written so far. The "state" in Paul's teaching was part of the present order of things, and therefore reference to it is not out of place in a section where Paul encourages his readers to live at peace with everyone, while refraining from taking vengeance when wronged. This kind of instruction was vital because there were Jewish Christians in the church in Rome who had to come to grips with life in a non-theocracy.⁸ They needed answers to questions about paying tribute/taxes to Caesar (Mt.22:17) and political messianic

⁵ There is an unconfirmed story that Lloyd-Jones believed that God had stopped him from going further than Romans 14:17 because he did not know enough of the HS https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martyn_Lloyd-Jones.

⁶ I have decided to skip these chapters because though helpful they are peripheral to Lloyd-Jones' views on church and state. While he does allow for pacifism within a context of "Christian liberty" he does believe that Christians can and should fight for their countries against tyranny taking a "just war" position. He also argues for the moral and legal legitimacy of capital punishment in the event of the unlawful taking of human life. See Exposition of Romans chapters 4 and 5 (48-74).

⁷ Romans 12-16. Most commentators divide Romans into 2 parts: doctrine (1-11), application (12-16).

⁸ In the old covenant life was different for the Jewish nation. There was a theocracy and God ruled over them through prophets, priests, and kings he appointed. Cf. Deuteronomy 17:15 "Be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite." Life in the new covenant era is not the same and adjustments need to be made in this and many other areas of life.

expectations. Instruction was also necessary because of the outsized influence of Jewish Christian teachers in the church due to their perceived Old Testament expertise.

Paul was concerned about the witness and testimony of the Roman Christians. Regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, Christians in Rome were required to live in this world under the authority of secular leaders even though their ultimate citizenship is in heaven. Paul did not want them to be anarchists living in rebellion to the secular state, instead they were to endeavor to live at peace with all men. In Paul's teaching, Christianity has implications for the totality of life including how Christians relate to the state. His treatment of this theme is consistent with this part of his epistle to the Romans where he is dealing with the practical application of the gospel to life.

After clarifying the context, Lloyd-Jones reiterates some of his interpretive principles which he believes are derived from the text of scripture, before proceeding with his exposition of Romans 13:1-7. He reminds the listener/reader that theology must be based on scripture and not philosophy, and that the nature of scripture as the word of God requires careful, accurate exegesis and exposition. Doctrine must not depend on one solitary passage of scripture but must be substantiated by comparing scripture with scripture. As a further interpretive safeguard, our exposition should not contradict the plain tenor of scriptural teaching in general. This kind of canonical wholeness where scripture interprets scripture is a corollary of its God-breathed origin. Lloyd-Jones then proceeds to demonstrate his commitment to these principles as he examines the text and works out its application.

Exposition of Romans 13:1-7

Lloyd-Jones begins with the recognition that Paul's statement/injunction, "Let everyone be subject to the higher powers" (1a), is addressed to all Christians. It is an emphatic, universal command from which Christian conversion does not exempt us. The "higher powers" of vs.1 are not "supreme or angelic powers" but any human being who is set over us by God. It refers to the dignity and authority of their office which God requires Christians to respect regardless of whether the person who occupies that office is good or bad.⁹ "Be subject," is a military word that communicates the idea of being arranged in order under a general and subject to his commands. It does not, however, mean simply "to obey." If Paul wanted to say "obey" he had other Greek words at his disposal. Instead, Paul uses *hypotasso* which is used 30x in the New Testament and means "to submit." The idea being that Christians are to recognize and submit to lawful authority but not necessarily obey them in a mechanical, robotic way. This is plain from the usage of the word elsewhere in passages like 1 Cor.16:16; Eph.5:21-22; Col.3:18; 1 Pet.3:1, 5 as well as Titus 3:1; 1 Pet.2:13-14; James 4:7. For instance, in Ephesians 5:21 Christians are told to, "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," but this cannot be reduced to simply "obey one another" without becoming nonsensical. There is more to it than that.

For Lloyd-Jones another verse that clarifies what Paul means is Romans 12:10, "Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." Lloyd-Jones reads this verse in conjunction with Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." When read together, Lloyd-Jones believes that in these verses Paul is instructing Christians to recognize and respect the place and role God has given to the governing authorities and to

⁹ Cf. 1 Cor.15:24; Eph.1:20-21; 3:10; 6:12; Col.1:16; 2:20, 15; 1 Pet.3:22.

be subject to them in that regard, not flaunting their authority as though Christians are a law unto themselves.

Returning to the command in 13:1, Paul adds a positive and a negative reason subjection is required. Positively, “there is no authority except that which God has established” (1b). This is an affirmation that God is the source of all power and authority, including that of the Roman government. But here, Lloyd-Jones observes that Paul is referring to the office of government, not necessarily the office-holder.¹⁰ This is an important qualification. Negatively, “to resist the governing authorities is to resist God” (2). To “resist” is to set yourself against, or to fight against the government. If we rebel in this way, we bring judgment on ourselves, that is, divine judgment mediated through the governing authorities. Paul goes on to explain that “rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but only for wrongdoers” and if we do what is right, we have nothing to fear rather we will be commended (3).

In a summary statement, Paul writes: “For they are God’s servants for your good, but if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They have been authorized by God to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (4). The “sword” is a symbol of authority and death. Governments are authorized by God to punish to the point of death where that capital punishment is warranted by his word. Christians should be clear about this, and it should not come as a surprise, even when the government that was in power when Paul wrote these words was the Roman government led by Emperor Nero.

Lloyd-Jones argues that “submission is required not only for wrath (or to avoid judgment and punishment) but for conscience” (5). Here “conscience” refers to the Christian’s conscience which has been instructed by scripture. As a result of Paul’s instruction, Christians know God’s will and purpose when it comes to their relationship to the governing authorities. To illustrate his point, Paul gives as an example paying taxes: “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing” (6). The payment of taxes is a recognition of duly established government authority. The word used for servant in this instance is not *diakonos* (twice in vs. 4) but *leitourgos*, which highlights the dignity of the office as it has been established by God.¹¹

Paul concludes his teaching on “church and state” with a series of applicatory commands. “Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe them taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (7). Lloyd-Jones is quick to point out that “honor is not fear.”¹² We are to “fear (phobeomai) God” and “honor (timaō) the emperor,” as Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:17. God possesses all authority; the emperor too has authority but only so far as God has bestowed it on him. This is an important point that provides guidance when the delegated authority of the state comes into conflict with the inherent and ultimate authority of God.¹³

¹⁰ Cf. Gen.9:5-6; 2 Sam.12:7; Jer.27; Dn.2:17, 25, 32; 4; 5:21.

¹¹ Cf. Heb.8:1-2 where *leitourgos* is used of Jesus as our great high priest serving in the true tabernacle of God.

¹² “So, for these reasons I would say that when the Apostle tells us, ‘Render... fear to whom fear’, he is telling us to fear God, and when he writes, ‘honour to whom honour’, he is referring to the king, the emperor, the parliament, the magistrate, the civil authorities, or whoever holds power”, 30).

¹³ Cf. Acts 4:18-20 “Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you or to him?’ You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’”

The Church and the State Generally

Lloyd-Jones follows his general exposition of Romans 13:1-17 with a treatment of the general relationship between church and state, noting that in the Bible explicit teaching on the subject is sparse. This is because in the OT God's relationship with the nation of Israel was unique among all the nations and in the NT the church of Jesus Christ is his primary concern, not the nations of the world as nations. In the OT the "church" and "state" were one in Israel, but that is no longer the case. This change and lack of explicit biblical material is perhaps one reason the relationship between "church and state" has been a problem for the church almost since the beginning of the new covenant era. But although there is not an abundance material, there is enough to know what God requires of his people.¹⁴

Lloyd-Jones then sets the discussion in a broader context with a series of propositional theological statements.¹⁵

1. Christians have a relationship with the state.
2. While we are not of the world *spiritually*, we live in the world *practically*.
3. God has not abandoned the world, and his purpose is to restore it.
4. God's saving purposes are universal, but this should not be confused with universalism.
5. Jesus is the Lord of his people, the Lord of history, and the Lord of all.¹⁶
6. Therefore, Christians are not just interested in ourselves but in the welfare of others.

The Bible teaches that the state is not a human invention, but something ordained by God. This does not mean, however, that there is only one form of human government ordained by God. Lloyd-Jones does not believe in the "divine right of kings" as something that should not be questioned, revised, or reformed. In the Old Testament, Israel was a theocracy, with no women rulers.¹⁷ Now there are many forms of human government but none of them is "biblical" in an absolute sense that requires Christians to pursue one rather than another. Arguments to the contrary are built on inference and interpolation, not on exegesis. The divine ordination of the state in its various forms means there is nothing inherently wrong with Christians being actively involved in government and politics.

Lloyd-Jones believes that some Christians want nothing to do with the state because they see it as a "dirty business." In the NT, however, we are clearly commanded to pray for kings and those in authority (1 Tim.2). Furthermore, it is important that we do not make a hard and fast distinction between the "spirit and the flesh" and on that basis conclude that we should only be involved in "spiritual" matters as Christians and not the "fleshly" matters of this world. Lloyd-Jones believes there is a "neutral realm" where God gives Christians freedom to operate and to work in conjunction with others to develop public policy and strive for the general welfare and betterment of society. Examples of neutral areas where Christians can serve include public health, law enforcement, and the development of fair economic systems. Exactly how public health, law enforcement, and economic systems should function are not spelled out in scripture, because there is not one "biblical" way of doing politics and

¹⁴ This is not to say that there is no material. The relationship between Israel and the church is typological and if the reader follows the biblical storyline from OT to NT the similarities and differences between Israel and the church are obvious. But if the reader misses the typological connections, it is easy to misread the biblical data.

¹⁵ Exposition of Romans, 32-33.

¹⁶ Cf. Ac.5:31; Rev.5:5; Mt.28:18; Heb.10:12-13.

¹⁷ Exposition of Romans, 36.

economics. There is no such thing as a Christian political party, nor is there a “Christian” position in these matters that comes with the authority of scripture.¹⁸ Some systems more generally conform to God’s righteous standards than others, but all human solutions fall far short of the perfection that is found in the rule of God alone. This explains why the prophet Daniel, while in exile, could serve at the highest level of the pagan Babylonian Empire for a lifetime and not be personally guilty of sin because of his involvement.¹⁹

From the standpoint of the NT, the function, object, and purpose of the state no matter what its configuration is to make it possible for its citizens, including Christians, to live quiet and peaceful lives (1 Tim.2:1-2). This goal is accomplished negatively, by restraining evil in a fallen world, and positively, by promoting the well-being of all without ever envisioning the establishment of a theocracy.

As mentioned above, state power is not absolute, and Christians can participate in the political process to bring about change. Historically while not all Christians have agreed on this point, the Bible does give us freedom to work for change, depending on the form of government under which we live. If Christian citizens are allowed to vote, then they should participate in the political process and do so thoughtfully and prayerfully for the common good.

Somewhat surprisingly Lloyd-Jones even goes so far as to say that there may be times when the state is so evil and tyrannical, and blatantly and persistently operating in defiance of God’s purpose for human government, that participation in the political process may justifiably take the form of rebellion against the state with purpose of forming a new government. In his mind, this is possible because state power is ultimately divinely delegated power, and it does not possess power inherently or independently of God. If the state grievously transgresses the place God has established for it, it forfeits the support of its citizens including Christians. But this revolutionary action must only be taken with the greatest of care because the risks are great, and many times citizens, including Christian citizens, are powerless to bring about change through outright revolution. Furthermore, even if a wicked government is successfully replaced, the new government is only relatively better (or worse) than the one it replaced and over time it too will be subject to the corrosive influence of time, money, and power and outlive its usefulness.

The Christian and the State Individually

First, when it comes to how individual Christians interact with the state, Lloyd-Jones believes there are two extremes to be avoided. The first is idea that Christians should support “maintenance of the status quo” by taking as a default position the side of privilege and wealth. He argues that this is an old idea that dates to Constantine in 325 A.D. When Constantine adopted Christianity the persecution of Christians ceased, but other pernicious problems ensued. As mentioned before, while God has ordained

¹⁸ “You cannot have a Christian political party because Christians can hold different views on the economy and other issues. You can have equally good Christians in the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, and the Labour Party. What is it that divides them? Not their Christianity, not their spiritual point of view, but their opinions with regard to specific problems in the realm of economics, or drainage even, or any one of these other questions that law, and government consider,” Exposition of Romans, 40-41.

¹⁹ See Daniel 9 where his enemies unable to find any evidence of political wrongdoing even though Daniel worked for years at the highest level of the pagan Babylonian and Medo-Persians kingdoms. This is possible because outside of Israel, even in the days when the old covenant was in force in Israel, there is a foreshadowing of what now exists with the inauguration of the new covenant and the distinction between church and state.

government, he has not ordained a particular form of government. Christians are not required to accept the current form of government as something divinely given that cannot be changed. For Lloyd-Jones the attitude expressed in the old hymn that God made, “the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate,” and the idea we should accept what is and leave well-enough alone, is fallacious.²⁰

The second extreme to be avoided is the “anarchist view” in which democracy runs wild. As an historical example of this extreme, Lloyd-Jones points to what took place in Britain in the middle of the 17th century after the first part of the civil war when Oliver Cromwell and the army gained power, and also in connection with the Fifth Monarchy Men and others.²¹ He believes that Christians should not be advocating anarchy and revolution against the state, nor should they oppose laws imposed by the state unless they represent a gross abuse of power.²²

Christians should avoid both extremes because Romans 13:1-7 supports neither view. Normally speaking, Christians are to be the best citizens in a state. Not only are they subject to state power, but they are good and peaceful citizens who seek the welfare of others. They understand that the state is a good gift of God because they know what the Bible says about human nature, sin, and its consequences. Christians know that sinful human beings need restraint, regulation, law, and order. Ironically, humanists do not see things the same way and their naïve view of human nature, its problems, and possible solutions, leads them to take positions that are not optimal for human flourishing.

Again, Lloyd-Jones is aware that the Bible never speaks of the authority of the state as absolute. If the state exceeds its lawful authority and comes between the Christian and God, Christians must obey God and not the state.²³ In his view, “the state must never tyrannize over my conscience, when my conscience tells me that I am being asked to do something that contravenes my relationship to God, I listen to my conscience.”²⁴ But it should be noted that he also recognizes that when we listen to our consciences we must be prepared to pay the price for our decisions when they run contrary to the demands, even if improper, of the state.²⁵

One of the remarkable things about Lloyd-Jones’ exposition of Romans 13:1-7 is his biblical and theological balance. He is aware that some will abuse “liberty of conscience” to get out from under what the scriptures teach about being subject to the governing authorities when they do not want to obey. Just as state authority is not absolute, neither is liberty of conscience. The authority of conscience is not infallible because it has not escaped the effects of sin and the fall. Conscience must be instructed by the word of God. Therefore, liberty of conscience is not permission to do whatever we want based on our idiosyncratic view of things; it must be balanced by Romans 14:7. There Paul reminds all Christians that they “do not to live and die for themselves alone”. Conscience is not the final arbiter of conduct, and we cannot ignore the clear teaching of God’s word whenever it suits our individual interests.

So, the rule, as Lloyd-Jones sees it is this: *If we are not talking about our relationship with God, then we must abide by the wishes of the majority, even when we do not agree with them.* He reminds us,

²⁰ Exposition of Romans, 50, Lines from a well-known 19th century hymn-writer Mrs. C. F. Alexander.

²¹ Exposition of Romans, 54,

²² This allowance he makes elsewhere based on the delegated nature of the state’s authority.

²³ Cf. Act.4:18-20; 5:28. This calls for wisdom.

²⁴ Exposition of Romans, 53.

²⁵ For instance, during war Lloyd-Jones believes there is a place for the conscientious objector, but that person must be prepared to be incarcerated for refusing to serve until the conflict is over (Romans, 63-74).

everyday people are forced to give up freedoms so that they can live in society with others, and this is true of Christians as well. Christians cannot put everything we do not want to do or agree with in the category of our “relationship with God,” otherwise there would be no give-and-take and human society would be impossible. The Bible must not be interpreted so narrowly as to make reasonable compliance impossible. We do not always get our way, nor is everyone required to acquiesce to our brilliant ideas, phobias, or bullheadedness.

Second, when Christians interact with the state on an individual basis, they are permitted to claim the protection of the state and its laws. Paul used his Roman citizenship in Acts 16:19-40 and 25:11 to prevent injustice and to further the cause of the gospel. Lloyd-Jones also refers to John Wesley and George Whitefield, who used the influence of the Countess of Huntington to provide opportunities for them to preach when they are barred by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities.²⁶

Third, Christians must not glory in the state. We are never *entirely* on the side of the governing authorities because they are provisional authorities, and they rule according to the dictates of this world. We are not the greatest “royalists,” as Lloyd-Jones puts it, or supporters of the ruling classes, nor do we glory in democracy as if it were the ultimate political system. Lloyd-Jones is clear: “It is as unscriptural to be a mad democrat as a mad royalist.”

Fourth, Christians must never expect too much from the state. We should be interested and informed, and if we have an opportunity to participate in the political process, we should do so intelligently and prayerfully. But we should never get excited about one political party or another because they cannot deliver the utopia they are tempted to promise, and they cannot establish the kingdom of God on earth. They are run by fallible, sinful human beings who cannot by their policies put everything right. Biblically informed Christians do not believe in salvation by law or legislation of any sort, and they should understand that politics is just a form of social control that cannot bring true peace, prosperity, justice—in short, salvation! Lloyd-Jones states: “The state, whether it be a monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, or any other form you may choose, can do very little positive good, and people have got into trouble when they think it can”.²⁷

Finally, but in my view more important than all the rest, Lloyd-Jones is adamant about the priority of Christian fellowship. He says, “Whatever your view of the state, you must never allow it to affect your relationship with other Christians. If your interest in the state, or your view of it, or your reaction to it, comes between you and other Christians, you are in a wrong and false position.”²⁸ We must remember that our relationship with the state is temporary (Phil.3:20). Politics is not ultimate, and it must not become our religion. We should not believe that the world will be reformed through politics, nor will perfection come in this way. Our hope as Christians is in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore, our stance toward politics is one of detachment.

²⁶ Exposition of Romans, 55-56.

²⁷ Exposition of Romans, 58. By saying they cannot bring about “positive good” he is not denying that they can do some relative good. Good governments are a blessing to the people of all classes of society. But even they cannot root out the fundamental evil that is endemic to the structures of human society as it is to the human mind and heart. I would rather live in Canada than North Korea, but even Canada is riddled with injustice and corruption and all the political, legal, and economic reform in the world will not change it from Babylon into Zion.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

The Relationship of the Church and the State Historically

Next, Lloyd-Jones turns his attention to the historical interaction between church and state. He begins by reminding Christians that both church and state are ordained by God and connected to one another. Then he reminds his listener/readers that in the present age, Christians belong to both. Sometimes the church and state share the same concerns, sometimes they do not. The Bible teaches that the Lord Jesus is the head of the church as well as the Lord of history and the cosmos. For Lloyd-Jones these truths are clearly taught in passages like Revelation 5, Matthew 28:18-20, and Ephesians 1:22. But these biblical passages do not explain the relationship between the two realms and how they interact with each other. Studying church history, moreover, reveals that the nature of this relationship is not easy to understand.

Historically, Lloyd-Jones believes there have been two main positions on the relationship between the church and the state: 1) the church and state are one, 2) the church and state are essentially different.

For the first three centuries of the Christian era the church and state were separate from one another. This changed when Roman Emperor Constantine (325 A.D.) took the Roman Empire into the Christian Church and exercised authority over both. After Constantine and the collapse of Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church took control and claimed that the state was subservient to the church. So, although there were different masters of the church, first the Roman empire and then Roman Catholic Church, church and state were still considered two parts of the same entity.

The 4th Lateran Council (1215) referred to this oneness when it declared, “the Roman Catholic Church through the Pope exercising authority over the state, is supreme over kings and emperors and rulers, *and exercises* complete control over the activities of men, politics, thinking, scientific development and investigation.” The scope of this control is seen in the fact that during this time Roman Catholic clergy were exempted from the laws of the land. This domination of the state by the church was resisted in England from the 11th century on when Henry II was the King, and the laws and customs of the land applied to everyone, including the church and its clergy.

Another example of organizational and functional unity between church and state is known as *Erastianism*. This is where the church is technically under the power of the state. Erastus (1524-1583) was a Professor of Medicine and a follower of the Swiss Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli. Erastus taught that the church is a branch of the state, a servant or aspect, under the control and power of the state. The church has no power to make laws or inflict penalties, these are carried out by the state. The Church of England is Erastian, and therefore King Henry VIII, and his successor are regarded as “supreme head and governor of the church” even though they are secular authorities. In Lloyd-Jones’ view, Erastianism has done great harm to the church by putting over it the secular, civil magistrate.²⁹

²⁹ Exposition of Romans, 75-87, Lloyd-Jones refers to Erastus’ famous book, *Theses Touching Excommunication*, that deals with the question of who has the power to excommunicate in the church. Erastus argues that the church does not have the power to make laws or to enforce them or inflict penalties. These powers belong to the civil magistrate. Erastus writes: “The general government of the visible Church is part of the one function of dominion entrusted to the State; the office-bearers in the Christian society as such are merely instructors or preachers of the Word, without any power or right to rule except what they derive from the civil magistrate, and ecclesiastical

The 37th Article of the 39 Articles of the Church of England reads: “The Queen’s Majesty is the chief power in the realm of England and her other dominions... this includes ecclesiastical or civil realms – the princes rule all state and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be ecclesiastical or temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil doers.”

Lloyd-Jones notes that the English Puritans who had separated from the Church of England and came to America to escape religious persecution did not turn away from having the state enforce Christian beliefs, practice, and the administration of justice. Once established in America, the Puritans inflicted on those who opposed them the same persecution they had crossed an ocean to escape. There were among this group what Lloyd-Jones calls “semi-separatists” who held to the Belgic and Westminster Confessions, but even these did not conform the teaching of scripture in these elements of their ecclesiology. On the other hand, there were also “Free Church” who wanted to be free from the control of the state, beginning with separatists who lived during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in the 1580’s. They believed that there should be no connection between church and state and were brutally repressed.

The case for the church and state as essentially different is fourfold. First, church and state are different in origin. The state is part of the sovereign rule of God over human beings, but it is part of the realm of common grace. The state has nothing to do with salvation. The church as the body of Christ and the new Israel is the result of the salvific work of God in Jesus Christ; thus, the state belongs to the order of nature, the church is of the realm of grace.

Second, church and state were created and instituted for different reasons. The primary task of the church is spiritual and involves preaching, evangelism, and seeking the welfare of believers. The primary task of the state is preserving peace and good order. The state has no business intruding on spiritual matters.

Third, there is a different power committed to each. The church is given the power of grace and persuasion via the Holy Spirit, not coercive power. The state is given coercive power over secular matters up to the point of having authority to carry out capital punishment where appropriate.

Fourth, there is a difference in the way church and state carry out their responsibilities. The church has apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers, etc., whereas the state has kings and queens, emperors, presidents, and prime ministers, armies, and police forces, etc.³⁰

censure, and more especially excommunication, is a civil punishment which the magistrate may employ the officers of the Church to inflict, but which owes its force to civil authority alone” (82).

³⁰ Exposition of Romans, 92. Lloyd-Jones writes: “But when you come to the state you find something entirely different. Here you have the magistrate—the chief magistrate, the king or the queen or the emperor, or whatever it may happen to be. It is an entirely different order, with various dignitaries and functionaries working under one supreme authority, and this order, too, is made perfectly plain in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New”.

The fact that the church and state are not one entity but essentially very different was lost by the time of Constantine and recovered to some degree by the time of the Protestant Reformation, but the recovery of the biblical distinction was not complete, and it is still a problem into our own time.³¹

Why has the church struggled to understand the relationship between church and state?

For Lloyd-Jones it comes down to the question: Can the unity of the church and state be found in the Bible? This is a very important question and continues to be relevant because there continue to be theological configurations that perpetuate this confusion, sometimes with disastrous results.

At this point, Lloyd-Jones is adamant. There is nothing in the New Testament to support the unity of church and state! There is no Roman Catholic-type domination of the state by the church, and neither is there an Erastian-type domination of the church by the state. There is nothing in Romans 13:1-7 or in other relevant texts like 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 2. Rather the teaching of the New Testament is consistent with the situation that existed in the early centuries of the church until Constantine brought the Roman Empire into the church. This is where the trouble began, it has lingered throughout the Christian era, and we are not over it yet. Constantine's move may have brought an end to the persecution of Christians, but it also introduced confusion, carnality, and a power struggle that has done untold harm.

How did this happen to people guided by the Bible? How did they get it so wrong? How do they continue to get it so wrong? Lloyd-Jones believes that the error lies in basing teaching about the church and state on the Old Testament, rather than the New Testament. For example, in Chapter 23 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, when dealing with the relationship between church and state there is only one New Testament reference, Matthew 2:4-5, offered as biblical proof for the confessional statement. For Lloyd-Jones, this is unbelievable yet telling, given what the framers of the confession are vainly attempting to assert, buttress, and teach. But, while there is only one NT reference, the WCF quotes numerous OT passages in support of their theologizing, including Isaiah 49:23; Psalms 122:9; Ezra 7:23, 25-28; Leviticus 24:16; Deuteronomy 13:5-6, 12; 2 Kings 18:4; 1 Chronicles 13:1-9; 2 Kings 23:1-26; 2 Chronicles 34:33; 24:12-13; 19:8-11! As Lloyd-Jones puts it: "I cannot imagine anything so weak!"

This misreading of the "biblical evidence" is visible in the Belgic Confession as well.³² Lloyd-Jones quotes Arthur Cochrane, an editor for SCM Press in 1966, referring to Section 36 of the Belgic Confession: "This section, like the corresponding sections in other Reformed Confessions, is framed on the theory of a union of the church and the state."³³ Lloyd-Jones also notes that other writers try to

³¹ Exposition of Romans, 92. "This was the truth that was rediscovered, recaptured, at the time of the Protestant Reformation. It had become lost, as we saw, at the time of Constantine, and it was given to the Protestant Reformers to realize and, in a measure, to restore this vital and essential distinction."

³² Although Lloyd-Jones does not say this, it is not so much the "biblical evidence" that is the problem (after all the Old Testament is part of the Bible) as it is a failure to read the Bible and the biblical covenants in a redemptive historical manner. The Reformed Confessions mentioned posit too much continuity between old covenant Israel and the new covenant church that they fail to see the important ways in which they are different from each other. It is this failure to read the Bible redemptive-historically that leads to the confusion regarding church and state.

³³ See, Exposition of Romans, 120-121. "And at the relevant section of the Belgic Confession, which is Section 36, this book has a footnote that says, 'This section, like the corresponding sections of other Reformed Confessions, is framed on the theory of a union of church and state.' MLJ comments: "And that, of course, is the simple truth. They all approach this problem with the assumption that there is such a union, and those today who believe in a state church, or an association between state and church, are, of course, compelled to do exactly the same thing."

explain the absence of material in the NT about the church-state on the condition of the church before Constantine came along and things reverted to the Old Testament pattern.³⁴ To Lloyd-Jones, this is all quite unacceptable and contrary to scripture.

The key to understanding the teaching of the NT is to recognize that in the case of Israel, the OT people of God, the church and state consisted of the same people.³⁵ Even so, Lloyd-Jones notes that within Israel there was a distinction between the secular and the religious authorities as there were officers of the Jewish church and officers of the Jewish state, and the two spheres were maintained throughout the Old Testament. But the crucial point that must not be forgotten or minimized is that God's dealings with Israel in the Old Testament were preparatory, and now, in the church we have come to the fulfillment in Christ in which the old patterns no longer obtain. This he believes is evident from an array of texts from the gospels, Paul's letters, and the book of Revelation.³⁶

Lloyd-Jones writes: "Now my argument is that not only particular statements in the NT contradict completely the teaching that is put forward among Roman Catholics and was current for the first 150-160 years of Protestantism, but also that the whole spirit of the NT is entirely opposed to this idea. In the NT you always have a contrast between the natural and the spiritual, and throughout the NT regeneration is seen as vital. That is way, if you are guided by the NT, you never have such a thing as a state church."³⁷

His position is that when Christians cease to be governed by NT teaching, they will slide into tyranny regardless of whether they are Roman Catholic, Protestant, or something else. Even so-called "free churches" can fall into this confusion when the wealthy and powerful but frequently unregenerate are given preference and allowed to push their weight around in the church. If this is allowed to go on unchecked, hypocrisy flourishes and Christianity becomes superficial and powerless.

Lloyd-Jones and the Common Grace, Christ is King Argument

This raises another question: Does the state have any *positive* function?³⁸ Lloyd-Jones' answer is unequivocal. In his view, Romans 13 is entirely negative, and this is supported by what the same apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 where he tells Christians to pray for those in positions of power so that they might lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness. The apostle Peter says something similar when he teaches Christians that the governing authorities are given the responsibility of punishing evildoers while praising those that do well (1 Peter 2:1, 14). These texts do not present the state as a positive force for good in terms of advancing some utopian agenda. It is, rather, a restraint on evil that uses its

³⁴ Exposition of Romans, 121. Quoting an unnamed magazine article by a man known to Lloyd-Jones and a fine evangelical Christian he writes, "In the article he actually uses these words: 'Of course, we would not expect the New Testament to deal with this subject'... the writer goes on to explain... 'the New Testament does not help us because of the Roman Empire,' but then he adds, 'Once Constantine came in, the position again reverted to the Old Testament position.'"

³⁵ Cf. Acts 7:38.

³⁶ Cf. Mt.21:43; Lk.20:22-25; John 18:36; Mt.20:25-28; John 3:1-5; 1 Tim.2-3; 1 Cor.6:1-5; 2 Cor.4:3-4; Eph.2:1-5; Phil.3:20-21; Gal.1:4; Rev.13, 17, 18.

³⁷ Exposition of Romans, 126.

³⁸ Again, as mentioned earlier, by "positive" he seems to mean the ability to bring about things like joy and purpose in life. His response in these messages is uniformly negative. The state restrains evil, it protects, it punishes wrongdoing, but it cannot bring about things like love, joy, and peace, that are only found in God's salvation.

God-appointed authority to maintain law and order within human society. The need for this restraint is grounded in the biblical teaching of the fall with the consequence that fallen human beings cannot govern themselves and do what is right without oversight. God's provision of the state as a way of compensating for human weakness is a manifestation of his common grace toward undeserving sinners.

Then Lloyd-Jones takes on another "common grace" argument, this time one that is tied to the biblical assertion that Christ is King. If God's common grace is available to all human beings because they are God's creatures and live in his world, the "Christ is King" argument asserts that it is the job of the church to teach the state about its responsibility to enforce the Lordship of Christ in every area of life. Christians are to "Christianize" the world by applying Christian teaching to all of life. This idea was particularly popular toward the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries before the bloodshed and devastation of two world wars and other conflicts that chastened Christianizing expectations.

As proponents of this view, Lloyd-Jones mentions F. D. Maurice, Canon Scott Holland, Bishop Gore, and Archbishop William Temple, as well as Abraham Kuyper, the prototypical preacher/politician and promoter of Christian education whose plans included establishing a Christian university. Lloyd-Jones also refers to a group called the Student Christian Movement whose slogan was, "Christianizing the world in our generation."³⁹ Even though these people were well intentioned and passionate about what they believed, what they accomplished fell far short of their rhetoric and they certainly did not Christianize the world in a significant, sustainable way, and neither have those who take up their cause.

Their problem, according to Lloyd-Jones, is that it is always wrong to talk about "Christianizing" anything.⁴⁰ It is equally wrong to talk about Christ's lordship and kingdom coming gradually as the world bows incrementally to his authority. Matthew 13:33 and the parable of the yeast that is mixed into the dough is often employed as proof of the gradual growth of the kingdom of heaven which is erroneously explained as Christianization. However, passages like Luke 17:20-30 teach the opposite of Christianization. There Jesus said, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." And in Luke 18:8 Jesus asks a question that points in the opposite direction, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" This is confirmed by Revelation 17 and 18 which do not describe a "Christianized" world in the end but a wicked one which will be judged and destroyed by God.

Although eschatological certainty is not possible this side of the parousia, the Bible seems to teach that the end will come quickly and unexpectedly. The idea of gradual change is a kind of evolutionary, progressivist myth that is attractive in a world that has its own secular dreams of a world where everyone lives happily ever after. On the contrary, there is what Lloyd-Jones calls, "periodicity" where nations and kingdoms rise and fall, where there are times of advance and retreat but where change is never permanent, and any great moral and spiritual improvement is only temporary.⁴¹

³⁹ Exposition of Romans, 145.

⁴⁰ Exposition of Romans, 143.

⁴¹ Exposition of Romans, 147. Lloyd-Jones writes, "There is no greater fallacy than the fallacy of thinking that you can permeate the whole life of society by Christian teaching. That idea is not only negated by the teaching of our Lord Himself and by the Apostles, particularly the teaching of the Book of Revelation, but by the long history of humanity and of civilization."

As an example, and summary of a false, triumphalistic position, he quotes at length from an unnamed and what he describes as a “comparatively modern statement of the whole position”:

“The Apostle Paul teaches us that God the Father has committed all power and authority upon earth to His Son through who He now rules all things (1 Cor.15:24 and following). The risen and ascended Christ has been entrusted by God the Father with the great task of transforming not only individual life but all cultural, legal, political, scientific, and economic life. As the Lord of history and of time and space Jesus Christ can be satisfied with nothing less than a Christian organization of human society as a whole, and it therefore becomes the bounden duty and privilege and glorious task of all Christians to struggle for a condition of modern society which will give the maximum opportunity for other people as well as for themselves to live a full, free, and more abundant human life, and to make sure that Christians are never controlled by an apostate and rebellious world, but that they control the world in the strength and power of Almighty God.”⁴²

Lloyd-Jones observes that there has always been a tension between the two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, dominated by the god of this world, who is the devil. Christians are not commissioned to transform the world but to proclaim the gospel while they wait for the Lord to make his enemies his footstool (Heb.10:13).⁴³ This will happen at the second coming of the Lord, and then and only then, will the victory be complete. This is also the teaching of the apostle Paul in Roman 8:18-19. One day in God’s time, the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

For Christians, this means that we must always make a distinction between common and special grace. If common grace is God’s grace that is available to everyone, special grace is saving grace known only by those who come in faith and repentance to God by the power of the Holy Spirit. This distinction carries over when it come to what we think about the task of the church as church, and the responsibilities of individual church members living in society. According to Lloyd-Jones we must be careful that we do not confuse the two categories. The idea of a pastor-preacher-politician is out of sync with the teaching of the NT. And we must also not confuse these two categories as church members. For example, there are no Christian political parties or Christian unions, etc. even though there are Christians involved in politics and unions, and much more besides.⁴⁴

The responsibility of the Christian church and its leaders is to preach the gospel (Rom.10:14), to build up in the Christian faith those who have been converted (Eph.3:17-19). The church must proclaim the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and this means that we are duty bound to apply the gospel to every area of life in terms of biblical principles. But it is not our job to take over politics, economics,

⁴² Exposition of Romans, 149-150.

⁴³ Ibid., 150-151.

⁴⁴ Cf. Exposition of Romans, 152. “The tendency to confuse the different functions of church and state is very evident at the present time. We see it in the phenomenon known as ‘the preacher politician’. Perhaps it is not quite as common as it used to be, but it was very frequent indeed in the early years of the twentieth century. I think this was the point at which Nonconformity went astray in the nineteenth century... as long as you have bishops in the House of Lords, I say that the Nonconformist preacher is entitled to dabble in politics... but what I am suggesting is that both are wrong—that the preacher politician is wrong and that the lords spiritual are equally wrong—and that if we are to come back to the New Testament position, we should do away with both.”

academia, entertainment, business, healthcare, or any other sphere of human endeavor. We bear witness to Jesus Christ in all these areas, but they are not part of the spiritual realm that will enter the new heaven and earth, rather, they are part of this old world which is slated for destruction.⁴⁵

When it comes to the state, the church defines the function of the state based on scripture (e.g., Romans 13:1-7). The church insists that the state is not a human invention, but that it has been ordained by God. The state's God-given role is to maintain order and preserve freedom for its citizens. When it comes to something like public education, the state has a role to play in the education of its citizens, but it is not to teach them Christianity, nor to teach them atheism, or any other religion. We cannot force people to become Christians, neither can we educate them into the faith. But neither should the state try to prevent people from becoming Christians. This distinction is not easy to maintain, but it is essential as a critical distinction derived from the scriptures if we follow the biblical storyline from Genesis to Jesus and the establishment of the new covenant community of the church.

What about the individual Christian? What can they do? Lloyd-Jones believes it is their responsibility to work out the principles of the word of God in their own lives. Christianity takes up the whole person and cannot be confined to our personal lives, piety, and worship. We must work out how we can serve the Lord for ourselves. It is not something we can delegate to the church and its leaders.

Lloyd-Jones suggests, for example, that Christians can form Christian associations where they work out the implications of their faith in the jobs that God has given them. While he believes that Christian political parties are highly dubious because this is not how the gospel advances and political solutions will not prevail in the end, Christians can and should be involved in the political process. If so inclined they can work within political parties where they should testify to the truth, and they should seek to influence public opinion while steadfastly resisting theocratic temptations to force compliance.

In all this Christians must be clear about their motives. We are not trying to force people to become Christians, or force Christianity on them, but to show the superiority of our view. We use whatever is legitimately at our disposal depending on the form of government under which we live, whether it be the ballot box, public speech, or writing, to persuade and educate, and where possible to point them to Jesus Christ and their need of him.⁴⁶

Although there is much that Christians can do in a society, we must never lose sight of what the Bible teaches about this world being destined for judgment and destruction. Nothing less than a saving

⁴⁵ See, Exposition of Romans, 153-154. "What is the business of the church? Her prime task is to preach the gospel of salvation. The business of the church, if I may so put it, is to produce Christians. She is called to do that—we are heralds of the gospel; we are sent forth to preach: 'How shall they hear without a preacher?' [Rom.10:14]."

⁴⁶ Exposition of Romans, 155-162, is a very helpful section where Lloyd-Jones shows how the church and Christians can work out biblical principles without compromising the unique task God has given them in the world. For example, they talk about how the Bible defines the role of the state, and the importance of political freedom and freedom of religion. He outlines how Christians can be involved in education without forcing the faith (or any other) on students which is a denial of the Christian position. He touches on Christianity and culture, art, music, and science. Christians should counter the almost universal idea that the will of the people is supreme when it comes to truth and morality, they must always do so "careful to preserve a balance... so the church keeps to the realm of principles and not detailed programmes. She does not, as it were, enter into the arena either through preaching politics, or by sitting in the House of Lords, or anything else. She must not do this because it brings back the old confusion... it also does harm to the preaching of the gospel and to the prospects of successful evangelism."

relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ, we bring us through the judgment into the new heaven and earth. No matter what we do, or how hard we work, we can never create a truly Christian state or society. The lordship of Christ is only a reality where he is recognized as Lord. It is not enough to have a degree of external conformity to his authority, or a superficial acknowledgement of his lordship.

For Lloyd-Jones, the function of the state is mainly negative. It is to keep order and to rule and, in these ways, restrain the evil effects of sin. Attempts to use the state to do positive good are only relatively successful and rarely accomplish much other than combating by means of legislation and law enforcement the tendency of human beings to take advantage of one another in a variety of ways.

The main purpose of common grace is to assert the Lordship of God and of Christ. Although the world does not believe in him and will not bow to his authority, it cannot do whatever it likes, nor has God abandoned it and left it on its own. His word is true and authoritative and when he comes at the end of the gospel age, he will destroy all who have not believed in him and submitted to him in the totality of their personalities. He will destroy them and establish his eternal kingdom where he will reign forever in the whole range and realm of life, and everything opposed to him will be no more.

Conclusion

I believe that Lloyd-Jones has much to say to Christians today at a time when the church is in danger of confusing political theory whether on the left or the right with the Christian gospel. What seems obvious to some is clearly not obvious to all. Politics has become as a new kind of religion and people who have otherwise banished God from their lives are putting their faith and hope in politics and political action to solve local, national, and global problems. Lloyd-Jones reminds us that this is asking too much of politics and politicians and it is most inappropriate for Christians who should know better. He sees the teaching of the apostle Paul in Romans 13:1-7 as consistent with the biblical message that begins with God's creation of human beings in his image, their devastating fall into sin and death, and then moves to irrevocably to Jesus, the Son of God, as the only savior of all who call on him.

Lloyd-Jones is unequivocal about the state and the relationship between church and state. Human government has been ordained by God and serves an important purpose in the world, but it is not ultimate, it cannot save and bring about the righteousness that God requires. Salvation from sin, death, and Satan, is what human beings need more than anything else, and this salvation is of the Lord. While Christians are living in the world, they should do what they can to alleviate pain and suffering, and to restrain human avarice and selfishness. Humans will not flourish if they flaunt God's purpose for their lives and make for themselves gods that cannot see, hear, speak, or save.

The state, politics, and politicians have their place in the present order, but one day human kingdoms and governments will no longer be necessary because God's great work will be complete, and everything made new. Lloyd-Jones' exposition is a timeless corrective. Christians of all political stripes and inclinations would do well to listen. Only the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is commissioned by the risen Lord to proclaim the gospel, and whatever else we do as individuals or groups of Christians, this must be our great priority and everything else evaluated over against that great end.

It is my prayer that millions more download and listen to the sermons of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and to the degree that he follows God's word may we all learn what it means to serve the Lord faithfully in our generation. Though he is dead, he still speaks with a timelessness that is urgently needed today.

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