

# THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW

## Handout for Lesson 19 of *Thought Provoking Questions*

### BASIC SCRIPTURES RELATING TO THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW

- » Romans 13:1-7
- » 1 Corinthians 6:1-11
- » 1 Timothy 2:1-2
- » 1 Peter 2:13-17

### MAY A CHRISTIAN BE A LAWYER?

1. There are dishonest lawyers, a shortcoming that is common to all professions.
2. It can be morally challenging but it is not difficult for a Christian to be a lawyer.
3. There is a very high percentage of lawyers who are honest, at least in the practice of law.
4. There were Christian lawyers in the New Testament church. (Titus 3:13)
5. Suspicions of lawyers often arise from the nature of the United States' judicial system.
  - a. The American system of justice is based upon an adversarial approach to the search for truth.
  - b. As an adversary, a lawyer is obligated ethically and morally to present his client's case in the manner most prejudiced in his favor consistent with truth.

### MAY A CHRISTIAN EVER GO TO LAW WITH HIS BROTHER?

1. The basic (but not the only) scripture on this subject is 1 Corinthians 6:1-11.
2. The issues under consideration here were *not* issues in which:
  - a. One brother who was clearly in the wrong was being charged by another brother who was clearly in the right.
  - b. One brother was making a charge against an entire congregation, or even against several members of that congregation.

- c. A brother was bringing charges against an eldership.
- d. Bible teaching and sacred principles were being considered (since it would not be right in such cases to give in).
- e. Matters strictly legal were in dispute.

3. Paul is here discussing private disputes and he instructs the brethren to settle these disputes by third-party arbitration – by selecting a wise brother(s).
4. Strictly legal matters can be handled only by legal authorities.
5. The church is not equipped to handle legal matters and has no meaningful way to enforce them, except possibly through binding arbitration, which then requires a court to enforce.
6. God has ordained civil government to handle such matters; when the church undertakes to handle them it violates both the law of God (who ordained the courts for this purpose) and the law of man (practicing law without a license).

### WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO GOVERNMENT?

1. Romans 13 teaches that earthly governments are God ordained.
2. We are also given the duty to pray for earthly government that it may fulfill the tasks that God has given to it.
3. For God's sake we are called to be model citizens, but there are occasions when we not only may, but must disobey civil government. (Acts 5:29)

### WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE CHURCH?

1. What is the "separation of church and state"?
2. Both church and state are subject to God.
3. When the state strays from conducting its affairs justly, it is the task of the church to be a prophetic voice calling upon the state to repent and to do what God commands.

### IS IT EVER RIGHT FOR A CHRISTIAN TO PARTICIPATE IN REVOLUTION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT?

1. The fact that God ordains earthly government does not mean that God endorses everything that earthly government does.
2. However, God calls upon Christians to obey earthly government "for the Lord's sake." (1 Peter 2:13-17)
3. Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and in earth has been given (Matthew 28:18), has delegated levels of authority in various spheres – government, church, family, business; proper obedience in these areas honors Christ, disobedience of proper commands in these areas dishonors Christ.
4. This was a crucial issue in the American Revolution, and there were theologians on both sides.
5. While there was disagreement on the application of the principle involved, all agreed that the applicable principle was that the only time revolution was justifiable was when the government itself became lawless and functioned in an illegal or unlawful manner.