

## *I Corinthians 6:1-8*

### *Church and State*

- What is the Biblical role of the State? - Caring for the poor? Protecting life and rights? Mediating personal conflicts? Maintaining a fair playing field for business? Basic education?
- There are four popular political philosophies:
  1. **Socialists** - prefer to control both personal moral issues & public economic issues,
  2. **Liberals** who prefer freedom in personal moral issues & control in public economic issues,
  3. **Conservatives** who prefer control in personal moral issues & freedom in public economic issues,
  4. **Libertarians** who prefer freedom in both personal moral issues & public economic issues.
- For more information look at [apptoteach.org](http://apptoteach.org) **theology file #807**

### **A. In I Cor.6:1-8 Paul addresses the church's posture in an issue where the state should not be exercising its authority.**

“1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent {to constitute} the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? 4 If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? 5 I say {this} to your shame. {Is it} so, {that} there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that {your} brethren.”

### **B. Four observations.**

1. **Civil conflicts among believers are inevitable and not necessarily evil.**
2. **The church and the state have distinct roles and spheres of authority.**
  - a. **Prosecuting criminal conduct is the domain of the state not the church**

Romans 13:3 “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.”
  - b. **Disputes between Christians and those outside the faith are the responsibility of the state.**

Acts 25 “<sup>10</sup> Paul answered: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. <sup>11</sup> If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!” <sup>12</sup> After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

3. Christians should look to the church to mediate relational conflicts between members.
4. Justice is not the ultimate goal of Christian community.

**C. The point of this text**

Christians need to take community life seriously  
and not give too much authority to the state.

**D. In what sense is America a "Christian nation?"**

1. There are four forces that made a contribution to the development of our republic.
  - a. **Classic Republican model** — This model respects both the necessity of respecting self interest and societal interests. It sees social restraint as necessary for controlling self-interest that may be destructive to community. This is in contrast to both raw self-interest and raw societal interest.
  - b. **Puritan Christian values** — These values include a God-ordained and sanctioned plan centered in a covenant community of individuals and state interests with accountability of conscience before God.
  - c. **Enlightenment ideals** — Rationalism, Humanism, Pragmatism
  - d. **Pluralism** — tolerance of individual differences within a broad framework of common cultural, "rules of engagement."
2. America was founded as a "**Christian nation**" only in the sense that it:
  - a. Assumed that we live under a sacred canopy - a God-centered universe.
  - b. Assumed a personal and public ethic shaped (roughly) by Biblical moral law.
  - c. Assumed a personal moral accounting of individual conscience before God.
  - d. Assumed a sense of Divine calling and favor.
  - e. Assumed a view of humanity that respected both its dignity and depravity.
3. America was not an evangelical Christian nation, but rather a nation that held to a very **general Biblical ethic** and worldview.
  - a. It was a secular state with the soul of a saint. It separated the state from the church (any one denomination or sect), but not the state from a generic theism.
  - b. Thomas Jefferson called it "**general religion**" (the general creed that distills values common to all sects, in all religions, from all cultures).
  - c. The Mayflower Compact with its strong Christian language stands in marked contrast with the American Constitution. This was because the Compact reflected the old worldview that came to America from Europe, a view that the founding fathers of Revolution deliberately set out to counter.

- d. When we read the essays and speeches of our eighteenth and nineteenth century forbearers, one of the most striking revelations is the extent to which they shared a common moral vocabulary. This vocabulary was drawn from both the Judeo-Christian Biblical tradition and the Greco-Roman classical tradition (America was called "the new Athens.")
  - e. In 1797 America made a treaty with Tripoli, declaring that "the government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion." This reassurance to Islam was written under Washington's presidency, and approved by the Senate under John Adams.
4. America was to be a **civil society** with support from both government and religion.
- Civil society is characterized by - Law and order, Diversity, and Tolerance.
  - When civil society is weak it can be taken over by either government or religion resulting in **Fanaticism** (intolerance, forced uniformity, and lack of human freedoms). *Civil Society and Fanaticism* by Dominique Colas, Stanford Univ. Press. 1997

### E. The nature of the American democratic republic

1. It is **two principles** held in balanced tension.

E PLURIBUS	UNUM
Diversity	Unity
Enlightenment ideals	Classical & Biblical values
Freedom	Order
Individuality	Community
Personal choice	Common good
Personal rights	Social responsibilities
Man is exalted by self	Man is both sacred & sinful
Man deserves freedom	Man needs restraint
A democracy	A republic
The Constitution	The Bill of Rights

2. **Neither of these two forces can to be allowed to dominate** or eclipse the other.
- a. America is not to be **E PLURIBUS (Period)** — a radical democracy where everyone is free to do what is right in their own eyes, a tyranny of the masses.
  - b. Nor is America to be **E PLURIBUS UNUM (IN CHRISTO)** — a theocratic state where unity is "in Christ" or defined by evangelical Christianity.

3. **The preservation of this balance is fragile** and only possible with the cooperation of the great institutions of our nation — the universities, the churches, the courts, and the legislative government.
4. **There is ample evidence for a respect for UNUM in early America.**
  - a. Laws of nature and **nature's God**. Some examples of "laws of nature" - *incest, sanctity of life and property, marriage, civil order, etc.*
  - b. The national motto — E PLURIBUS UNUM (in diversity, unity)
  - c. The language of the U.S. Constitution "*...to form a more perfect **union**, ... provide for the **common** defense, promote the **general** welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty ... our **posterity**...*"
5. **The loss of balance and its consequences.**
  - a. When E PLURIBUS is exalted at the expense of UNUM (as is the case today) —
    1. Idealism tends to result. No compromise of rights is allowed out of respect for diversity.
    2. Man concludes that he can exalt himself through political revolution, educational socialization, and psychotherapy — without the unifying influence of transcendent authority.
    3. MAN/god — God is optional or a chaplain to humanity.
    4. Man both ignores the threat of, and encourages the expression of his dark side — his "selfishness."
    5. The disorder and crisis that results forces the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction toward tyranny or the loss of E PLURIBUS all together.
    6. The civilized values retained are borrowed capital from the past. They have no logical root in the prevailing philosophy.
  - b. When UNUM is exalted at the expense of E PLURIBUS —
    1. Cynicism tends to result — people feel insignificant and in bondage.
    2. Man loses sight of his exalted dignity.
    3. An elite group of managers wind up dictating society.