

THE BIBLE AND LIMITED GOVERNMENT

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The title of this sermon is “The Bible and Limited Government.”

This week Americans all over the country will celebrate our nation’s birthday on July 4th. And that’s a good time to preach on politics to better equip you to be a more effective citizen.

Why talk about politics in church?

The only time we shouldn’t talk about something in church is if God doesn’t care about it, and if God is silent about it.

Does God care about politics? Of course He does. God cares about people, and politics has a big impact on people. Therefore God cares about politics.

Think about it. Why are we able to worship God the way we want without fearing for our lives? Because of politics. Our nation protects religious liberty. People in other countries have to meet in secret or they’ll be thrown in jail.

Why do we have such nice roads to drive on? Politics.

Why is it legal to kill unborn children in our country? Politics.

Why are wedding vendors being sued and losing their businesses for refusing to participate in a gay wedding ceremony? Because of politics.

Why am I able to homeschool my children, but people in Germany are not allowed to homeschool their children? Politics.

Why are we allowed to travel wherever we want, but in North Korea and Cuba they are not allowed to leave the country? Politics.

Politics has a big impact on people, and therefore God cares about politics.

As well, the church should only be silent about politics if the Bible is silent about politics.

Is the Bible silent? No.

The Bible has a ton to say about politics specifically, and it has a ton of general principles, both practical and moral principles that tell us how a good government should work.

For example, one of the government's jobs is to make laws. But just because it's the law doesn't make it right.

Every law is either just, or unjust.

How can a government make sure that it makes just laws that lead to human flourishing? We need to use our heads for sure. But human understanding is limited. That's where the Bible comes in.

The Bible is God's revelation of morality and ethics, or right and wrong.

And so if we want to make sure that our laws are just, that our laws will lead to human flourishing rather than human suffering, then we need to make sure that our laws don't contradict the Bible.

So we need to talk about politics because God cares about it, God has a lot to say on the matter, and because Christians need to be engaged in politics.

Now why should you be engaged in politics? It's simple. Aside from that fact that politics has a great impact on you, and so if you want what's best for yourself then you should engage in politics, but also, God has called you to love your neighbor (Mt 22:39). And your neighbor is greatly impacted by politics. By engaging in politics you can help your neighbor. By not engaging in politics you can hurt your neighbor. So we have a moral mandate, a spiritual mandate to be civically engaged.

Today I want to talk to you about one particular issue of politics. This will help you know how to vote, and how to think about political issues. I want to talk to you about the Bible and limited government.

Let's start with this thought.

A good government is necessary for human flourishing.

The Bible is not ant-government. Christians are not anti-government. We are not against the government. We are not anarchists.

A government is a good thing. Why? Because of the existence of evil.

People are sinful. **Romans 3:23**¹ says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Many people are not controlled by the Holy Spirit; many people are not Christians; many people are not living according to the Bible – love your neighbor as yourself; treat others as you want to be treated; don't steal; don't lie; don't commit murder; don't commit adultery. Many people are living according to self-rule – they do whatever makes them happy.

And the only thing that keeps certain people from harming others, is the government. Think about it.

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Even with a strong police force, people still commit murder, rape, theft, fraud, kidnaping, child molestation, drunk driving, speeding, etc.

Imagine what would happen if the government just disappeared. It would be total chaos.

So a good government is necessary for human flourishing.

Without good government people would harm each other until humanity became extinct.

This is why the Bible says that God created government.

The idea of government comes from God. Look at **Romans 13:1-6**.

1 Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. 2 So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. 4 For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. 5 Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. 6 And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks.

The passage says so much.

It commands us to submit to the government – obey the law.

It says that government is instituted by God – government is God's idea.

It brings wrath – the sword – on the one who does wrong. In other words, the government’s primary purpose is to prevent people from doing evil.

We see this also in **1 Peter 2:13-14**. “13 Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority 14 or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.”

So a good government is necessary for human flourishing.

In other words, **if people were not sinful, then we wouldn’t need a government**. But people are sinful, and therefore government is necessary.

James Robison and Jay Richards wrote, “Because of sin, we need governments and other institutions that can enforce a rule of law. Otherwise, the strongest and most wicked will enslave the weak (*Indivisible*, 23).

Charles Colson wrote, “Christians... understand the necessity of a strong government. The Bible teaches that God ordains government, appoints leaders, and requires obedience so that we might live peaceable lives. Why is this? God recognizes that among fallen humans in a fallen world, even a bad government is better than no government. No government leads to chaos and mob rule (Colson, *The Sky is not Falling*, 12).”

But here’s a second thought.

The founding fathers of our nation established our government upon the principle of limited government.

They did not want the government to get too big, or to do too much, or to have too much power.

For example, the founders put **five boundaries** in place to make sure that the federal government did not get too big and too powerful.

Five Boundaries To Limit the Government

1. Democracy.

First, they established our country as a **democracy**.

To be more technical, we are actually a republic, which means that the citizens vote for representatives, and the representatives make the laws.

But the purpose of democracy is to limit the power of government officials. It is to make sure that too much power is not put in the hands of a small group of people.

2. Separation of powers.

Second, **the separation of powers**.

The founders separated the federal government into three separate branches.

The legislative branch – Congress – which makes the laws;

the executive branch – the President -- who executes the laws and commands the military;

and the judicial branch – ensures equal justice under the law.

The purpose of the three branches was to prevent one person, or one group of people, from getting all the power.

3. The Constitution.

Third, **the constitution**.

When the founders created our nation, they created a written constitution.

And the constitution is the supreme law of the land.

Everyone has to submit to the constitution – the president, the congress, the Supreme Court.

The constitution is king.

The purpose of the constitution is not to limit the freedom of the citizens, but to limit the power of the government.

If the constitution doesn't give the government permission to do something, they can't do it.

For example, the constitution says that the government cannot prohibit religious exercise, it cannot establish a religion, it cannot prohibit free speech, etc.

When a member of the House of Representatives is sworn in, he has to stand in the House chamber, raise his right hand, and recite **the oath of office** at the beginning of each new Congress.

The entire oath is a pledge to defend and uphold the constitution. **Listen to what it says:**

"I _____, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

Jim DeMint writes about when he took the oath. "There is nothing in this oath about representing my district and state or helping the poor and downtrodden. There was nothing about responding to the woes of the American people. There was no list of duties because everything we were supposed to do in Congress was

written in the Constitution. All federal officers, the president of the United States and his cabinet, justices on the Supreme Court, and members of the armed services all take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution.”

In other words, government leaders, once elected, don’t have a green light to just do whatever they want. They must follow the guidelines of the Constitution.

4. Enumerated Powers.

Fourth, **enumerated powers**.

Within the constitution are what are called enumerated powers.

Enumerated means specified, or delegated.

The constitution actually specifies exactly what the federal government can do, such as print money, a postal service, assemble an army, wage war, etc,

and then it says that whatever powers are not enumerated in the constitution to the federal are reserved for the people and the states.

Listen to the **10th 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 other words, the constitution tells the federal government that it can only do a certain amount of the things.

Why? Because the founders did not want the government to get too big and too powerful.

5. Terms of office.

Fifth, **terms of office**.

The founders set up our government so that once a politician is put in power, they only hold power for so long before they have to be chosen by the people again.

For example, the president has to run for re-election every four years.

Senators have to run for re-election every six years.

And congressmen have to run for re-election every two years.

The purpose of this is to prevent someone from having too much power.

So here's a question. **Why was the principle of limited government so important to our founding fathers?**

A government that is too big prevents human flourishing.

Remember, if people were not sinful, then we wouldn't need a government at all. But because people are sinful and will devour one another, a good government is necessary.

At the same time, because people are sinful, if the people in charge of the government are given too much power, then they will abuse that power and hurt people.

In other words, we need government to prevent people from harming each other. But what's to prevent the *government* from unjustly harming people?

You see, the very reason that we need government is also the reason that the government needs to be limited in its power. **People are sinful.**

If people were perfect, then we wouldn't need a government at all. But because people are sinful, we need to keep the government small and limited.

James Robison and Jay Richards wrote, “Sin is the main reason we need government and also the main reason to limit government (*Indivisible*, 25).”

The founding fathers had a Biblical worldview.

They believed that all people are created equal.

Where did they get that idea? The Bible.

The Bible teaches that people are made in the image of God, and that God doesn’t love anybody more than anybody else. We are all equal in value and before God.

Their belief in equality led to the belief in liberty, or freedom.

If nobody is superior to anyone else, then nobody has the right to rule over another person without their consent.

People are born free, and deserve to live free – to do what they want, and go where they want to go, and say what they want, and believe what they want, etc.

However, the founders also knew that people were sinful, and that people would eventually abuse their freedom and injure each other. Thus, there is a legitimate need for government so that people can enjoy freedom.

However, because people are sinful, the government itself must be limited or else it would injure the people.

And that’s why the founders established our nation upon the principle of limited government.

They wanted the federal government to remain small, because if it got too powerful, the sinfulness of the human heart would cause those in power to hurt people.

So the founders put these five boundaries in place.

Why? To keep the government small. To keep the government from getting too big.

Why? Because the founders believed that people are sinful, and if you put too much power in the hands of the government, the government will abuse that power and hurt the populace.

Russell Kirk wrote, “Man is corrupt; and therefore his best chance to attain justice and freedom lies in keeping the hands of ambitious men from that power which invites corruption.”

Lord Acton famously said, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

James Madison, the author of the Constitution, wrote, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither the external or internal controls on government would be necessary.”

President **Gerald Ford** said, “A government big enough to give you everything you want is a government big enough to take from you everything you have.”

And so today I simply want to remind you of one of the first principles of our country – limited government.

If we want to keep America great, then we need to keep the government small.

We need a government because of human sin, but we also need the government to stay limited and small because of human sin.

Why This Message Now?

Now let me tell you why this message is so urgent.

Today the federal government is huge. It is much larger than the founding fathers ever dreamed it would be, or intended it to be.

How did it get this way?

Jim DeMint writes that the Constitution gives Congress the power to make laws for specific federal purposes,

like raise money (taxes), and spend money. It gives the president the power to execute the laws and to command the military.

But Congress is allowed to make laws and spend money only when it comes to protecting against enemies, foreign and domestic, by establishing and funding the military and punishing counterfeiters and pirates on the high seas.

Congress is also given the power to regulate commerce between (not within) the states and foreign nations and to establish post offices and post roads.

That's it.

But somewhere along the way certain politicians started grossly misinterpreting **Article 1, Section 9**.

Section 9 says that Congress cannot spend money unless it is properly appropriated by law.

So some politicians and judges have said that this gives Congress "the power of the purse" to spend money on anything it pleases.

But this is crazy.

The Constitution clearly means that Congress only has the authority to spend money on those purposes that are consistent with the enumerated powers.

But that misinterpretation has led to the explosion of the government's power and size.

Think about it. There's no way that the Constitution would give Congress the power to spend money on whatever it wants as long as it is lawful, because Congress is the one who makes the laws!

I'll give you two examples of how the government has gotten involved in things that are unconstitutional. The War on Poverty, and the Department of Education.

The Constitution does not give Congress the power to be involved in poverty aid.

But in 1965 President Lyndon Johnson declared war on poverty.

So he started over 70 government programs – today it is over 90.

And since then the government has spent over \$25 trillion dollars.

That's way more than the money we have spent on all US military wars combined.

To make matters worse, poverty hasn't gone down. The poverty rate was around 15% in 1965; today it's around 15%.

Another example is the Department of Education.

Again, the Constitution does not give the federal government the authority to establish a Department of Education.

Education is something that should be handled by parents, and parishes, and maybe on a state level.

But in 2016 the budget for the Department of Education was \$68 billion.

And what's worse is that now that the federal government is involved in education, they pretty much dictate what public schools have to teach, because if they don't cooperate the federal government will withhold funding.

Not only has the government gotten out of control, but there are many in our country who no longer respect the principle of limited government.

They believe that government is the solution to every problem.

And so they want the government to get bigger and bigger, and to have more and more power.

You need to understand that this is one of the fundamental differences conservatives and liberals, or leftists, or progressives.

Conservatives treasure the founding principle of limited government. They want the government to remain small, and just do the limited things that are enumerated in the Constitution.

But liberals believe that the government is the solution to every problem; the answer to every question; the supplier of every need.

Liberals have never seen a problem that the government cannot and should not fix.

This is why conservatives usually vote against tax increases, and new government programs, and liberals do the opposite.

Conservatives usually find themselves in the Republican party, and liberals usually find themselves in the Democratic party.

And so what we need to do is to be like former Senator Ron Paul.

Senator Ron Paul was a doctor from Texas, and over time they started calling him **Dr. No** because he voted no on just about every piece of legislation.

He argued that just about everything that the Congress tried to do was unconstitutional.

Whenever we vote, we need to keep the principle of limited government in mind. We need to remember that the federal government is only supposed to do a few limited things. We need to vote for politicians who don't want to grow the government, who don't want the government to do more, but who want the opposite.

We need to remember the famous words of **Thoreau**. "That government is best which governs least."

I want to close with a story.

Long ago in a distant land, a very old man called his son to his dying bed. There he revealed an amazing secret: The old man's father had bequeathed him a genie he kept locked in a small cage and hidden in a closet. The genie provided two services to the kingdom where the man's family lived for generations. First, he protected the people from any person or country that attempted to harm them. Second, he guaranteed all the citizens of the kingdom were treated equally and fairly. Because of these two protections, their kingdom was the happiest and most prosperous in the land.

The man told his son to bring the genie's cage to his bedside. "The genie is now your responsibility," he said, "but you must never ask him to do any more than the two services he has provided for years. If you do, he will grow in size and strength with every new request. Then he will break out of his cage and become a threat to the kingdom instead of a blessing."

The son promised to heed his father's warning, and for several years he kept his promise. Then a neighbor's home burned along with all of the possessions in the house. Instead of waiting for the community to help the man rebuild his home as with the kingdom's custom, the son decided to ask the genie to help. The whole community was amazed at the beautiful new home with all the man's possessions restored. They held a great celebration for the son and gave him a beautiful award. But soon another man's home was destroyed by a flood, and instead of rushing to help, the community came to the son's house and demanded that the genie restore the man's home.

The son relented and asked the genie to help. This time the genie grew large enough to break out of the cage. He escaped, and everywhere he went someone asked him to do something new. He grew and grew and began to demand more and more food and possessions from the kingdom. The genie built a huge castle on a hill and demanded that all citizens bring him half of everything they produced. But citizens continue to ask for more and more, and the genie continued to grow and demand more and more from the citizens. The people became weaker and poorer, and their kingdom eventually disappeared from the land.

Who is the son in this story? That's you and me.

Who is the father? The father is God.

Who is the genie? Government.

God has given us the government as a gift; it's a good thing.

But we must keep the government small by only asking it to do a few things.

If we don't, and we keep asking more and more of the government, eventually it will grow so large and powerful that we will lose all of our freedoms and God-given rights.