

Christian Kings Will Suppress False Religion

Revelation 17:16; Psalm 72:8-11

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Rev. Greg L. Price

There is coming a time when the kings of the earth will suppress and restrain false religion within their nations and will turn to Christ to establish and promote biblical Christianity as the national religion of their kingdoms (Psalm 72:8-11; Zechariah 2:11—national covenanting by not only Israel as a Christian nation, but also by the Gentile nations of the world; Isaiah 19:21-25—Egypt and Assyria as covenanted nations which has never yet been realized). And as biblical Christianity will be established within those nations, those nations will in turn cease from tolerating and promoting false religion as we saw in the last two sermons from Zechariah 13. When reformation comes to a nation at all levels of society, the outcome will be that the true religion will be promoted and false religion will be suppressed. And as this is what the Holy Spirit declares He will bring to pass by His power in that glorious time of millennial reformation among the nations of the world, it becomes unmistakably clear that the suppression of false religion by the magistrate cannot be evil, cannot be a violation of any actual civil right granted by God to man, and cannot be a violation of true liberty of conscience (regardless of what is stated in the First Amendment to the Constitution or regardless of what is believed by the vast majority of the population within the United States). “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4).

This Lord’s Day, I would like for us to consider another prophecy that addresses the suppression of false religion by the kings of nations who will turn to Christ when they have been converted by the power of God and by the gospel of Jesus Christ: Revelation 17:16. Let us consider the following two main points for today’s sermon: (1) When Kings and Nations Will Be Converted to Christ, They Will Suppress False Religion (Revelation 17:16); (2) Two Pragmatic Arguments against the Establishment of a National Church.

I. When Kings and Nations Are Converted to Christ, They Will Suppress False Religion (Revelation 17:16).

A. In the sermon this Lord’s Day, we have a particular focus in considering this text, namely, we desire to understand from this prophecy what kings and kingdoms that are converted to Christ will do with false religion: tolerate it, grant it an alleged right of conscience to be practiced, or suppress and restrain it?

B. There are two main characters mentioned in our text from Revelation 17:16 that must be identified if we are to understand this portion of God’s Word: (1) the ten horns, and (2) the whore. Let’s begin with the whore and then return to the ten horns.

C. The whore is described for us in Revelation 17:1-6. The symbol of a whore or harlot in this context is one that speaks of a woman who is unfaithful to her husband and who commits spiritual fornication with the nations of the world by means of her false religion, idolatry, and superstitious worship. This harlot is presented before our eyes in stark contrast to a woman (or Church) that is faithful to her husband, Christ (in Revelation 12:1-6). I submit this Great Whore represents the Roman Catholic Church as manifested, particularly by its clergy. For notice the following identifying marks of the Great Whore.

1. This Great Whore sits upon many waters (in Revelation 17:1) which “waters” represent “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues (Revelation 17:15). In other words, this harlot Church is not limited to a small geographical area of the world in promoting its spiritual fornication against Christ and the true religion of the Bible, but is an international Church that encompasses even whole nations. That

certainly is true of the Church of Rome (presently with over one billion members worldwide in nearly every nation of the world).

2. This Great Harlot was clothed in “purple and scarlet” (Revelation 17:4), colors that speak of her claim to royalty which emperors, kings, and nations have granted to her throughout her history. Even the bishops, archbishops, and cardinals of Rome are found on official occasions clothed in such “royal” garments of purple and scarlet.

3. This Great Harlot is further said to be “decked with gold and precious stones and pearls” (Revelation 17:4), which wealth has been the reward of her spiritual fornication committed with the kings and nations of the world. Who is not impressed by the sheer value in gold and the wealth found in the many cathedrals of the Romish Church found in Rome and in most major cities of the world?

4. This Great Harlot is also said to have “a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication” (Revelation 17:4), which I submit could not better represent the abomination of her mass wherein the priest by his mere words allegedly transforms mere bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Christ and then worships that bread and wine. By the idolatrous mass in allegedly and blasphemously creating God and then worshipping its own creation, the clergy of Rome promote idolatry of every kind (not only in the alleged transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the actual body of the God-man, Jesus Christ, but as well in the bowing down to images and praying to departed saints—all in violation of the First Commandment and the Second Commandment, Exodus 20:3-6). But she is also “the Great Whore” because she offers to the kings and nations of the world another head of the Church (namely the pope who is declared to be the head of the Church upon earth), another head of the church upon earth other than the Lord Jesus Christ (though Christ alone is the head of the Church, not only in heaven but on earth as well, Ephesians 4:15). This too is an abomination.

5. This Great Harlot is also identified as “Mystery, Babylon, the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth” (Revelation 17:5). Here this harlot Church is identified as “Babylon the Great.” But in order that we might not think this Great Harlot is the literal Babylon of old, we are told that in this name, “Babylon the Great”, there is a mystery concealed and yet revealed.

a. Dear ones, you will recall how the parables of Christ (which were called “mysteries of the kingdom”) were intended to conceal the truth from the masses, but to reveal the truth to the faithful who had eyes to see the truth (Matthew 13:10,11,16).

b. So likewise here in Revelation 17:5, the Lord uses the term “mystery” to alert us to the fact that in the name “Babylon the Great” is concealed and revealed truth about this Great Harlot. Like ancient Babylon she is a world empire that has led into bondage the nations of the world by her idolatry, blasphemy, tyranny. She proclaims herself to be a Christian Church, but she is a spiritual Babylon that has led billions of souls worldwide into spiritual captivity. She is not a faithful wife to Christ, but is actually a harlot and a mother of harlot churches who have likewise adulterated their doctrine, worship, and government with that which was received from Rome: uninspired hymns, instruments in worship, holy days (like Christmas etc.), justification by faith + works, Manhattan Declaration (which has Evangelical Protestants signing a document with Roman Catholics which lays out common ground for belief and working together). As Jesus said to His disciples concerning the “mysteries” of the kingdom, so He says to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear concerning “Mystery” Babylon: “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”

6. Also note concerning this Great Harlot that is revealed in Revelation 17 that she is “drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6). I submit there is no ecclesiastical institution that has more blood of faithful Christians upon its hands throughout the ages than that of the hierarchy of the Church of Rome. It is stated by historians that literally millions of Christians have died by the complicity of the Pope and hierarchy of Rome with the civil Beast to eliminate faithful witnesses who stood against the idolatry, superstition, tyranny, and usurpation of Christ’s titles and honor promoted by the Great Whore of Rome.

a. And observe what the Apostle John states in Revelation 17:6, “And when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.” The way this is worded may seem a little strange to our ears. A better translation would be, “And when I saw her, I wondered with great wonder” (or I was astonished with great astonishment).

b. Preterists believe that apostate Israel in the first century is described by John here as Babylon the Great. Other interpreters have considered that pagan Rome is here in view in the title Babylon the Great. However, if apostate Israel is here in view or if pagan Rome is in view why would the slaying of Christians by either of these entities cause John to be completely astonished as he saw the blood of the martyrs shed by them? John already knew for a fact how Christ and the apostles had been persecuted and slain by both the Jews and by pagan Rome (in fact he had been banished to the Isle of Patmos by pagan Rome under Emperor Domitian). This would not be an astonishment to him at all. However, what would be a complete and total surprise causing the most extreme astonishment would be a professing Christian Church, a harlot Church, filled with the blood of the martyrs and witnesses of Christ, namely, the Church of Rome.

7. This Great Whore also is said to sit upon seven mountains or hills (Revelation 17:9). Rome (at the time of the Apostle John) was identified in secular history as the city built upon seven hills by various ancient sources. Thus, this Great Whore has a specific relationship to the city of Rome, and can be none other than the Roman Catholic Church and her clergy. In fact, her headquarters are located in “that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:18), which once again identifies this harlot Church with the city of Rome and its vast empire. This harlot Church is not apostate Israel (as supposed by Preterists) for Israel is not built upon the seven hills of Rome (Revelation 17:9) nor is Jerusalem that “great city that reigneth over the kings of the earth”; nor is this harlot Church pagan Rome for pagan Rome cannot be described as a harlot since it was never married to the Lord nor fell away from the Lord into spiritual adultery and harlotry. The only worldwide Church that meets all of the qualifications given here in Revelation 17 by the Holy Spirit is specifically the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, we have identified the “whore” that is mentioned in our text in Revelation 17:16.

D. Now we come to the second main character that is mentioned in Revelation 17:16: the ten horns.

1. The Holy Spirit gives us the following interpretation of “the ten horns” in Revelation 17:12: “And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.”

2. I cannot rehearse all of the details associated with these ten kings. But let the following truths be noted from this text.

a. First, these are civil kings and kingdoms that are in view (for they are kings/kingdoms that are found upon the civil beast of Rome, Revelation 17:2-3). These are not ecclesiastical kings or rulers that have access to Church censures in order to suppress false religion, idolatry, and blasphemy that spring up within the Church. Clearly, we are dealing with political rulers and nations when we consider “the ten horns” (they are called “kings of the earth” in Revelation 17:2; they are kings that shall have “kingdoms” according to Revelation 17:12; they are kings that shall make war as noted in Revelation 17:14).

b. Second, these “ten horns” are not kings or kingdoms that were ruling in the first century at the time this Revelation was given to the Apostle John. For according to Revelation 17:12, they had “received no kingdom as yet.” These political rulers and the kingdoms over which they rule had not yet come into existence and would not do so for hundreds of years yet into the future from the time of John. This eliminates a first century fulfillment that most Preterists demand from the prophecies found in Revelation (see the sermon series I preached from Revelation against Preterism where a detailed exposition is given of these matters).

c. Third, when these ten horns or ten kings received their kingdoms, they settled in what became known as the Holy Roman Empire of Europe (established under Charlemagne in 800 a.d.). It is through the union of these kings and kingdoms of Europe that the false religion, idolatry, and tyranny of the Romish Church has been promoted in warring against the Lamb and against those faithful Christians and Churches that have followed Christ (Revelation 17:14). I grant that the European kingdoms are not presently the same tools of the Church of Rome in promoting to the same degree the false religion, idolatry, and tyranny of the Romish Church that was the case 1000 years ago (or even 100 years ago). But that could certainly change in the near future as European nations begin to realize how Islam has taken control of so much of Europe. As European nations begin to fight for their very existence against Shariah law and against the downfall of western civilization, Europe may turn its attention once again to the antecedents of the Holy Roman Empire and closer contact and alliances with the Church of Rome. After all, if the European nations begin to push back against Islam, what historic religion will likely fill the void? The Roman Catholic Church! And the Church of Rome together with the European nations will war against Christ and the faithful saints who understand her to be the Great Harlot of Revelation, even if she has deceived the whole world by her lying signs and wonders.

d. Fourth, something marvelous and wonderful will happen in the future among the European nations that were allied to the Church of Rome (Revelation 17:16). These nations that previously joined with Rome to war against Christ and against His faithful saints, will be converted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and will turn in hatred against the whore (i.e. the false religion of Rome), and by the use of compulsory power (i.e. the sword given to the civil magistrate by God), these kings and kingdoms will suppress and restrain the false religion of Rome, will strip her of her places of influence and power within their kingdoms, will like vultures eat her flesh in judgment, and burn and destroy her religion within all of the borders of their nations. If this is not the language of the destruction of false religion, idolatry, and tyranny (as exhibited in the Roman Catholic Church), then I fail to see how much more explicit language could be used than this in order to communicate the use of compulsory power to suppress false religion. The Lord could not be more graphic in the use of language to teach us how Christian nations will suppress false religion in the future.

e. Dear ones, here is a prophecy given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit wherein the alleged religious rights of conscience are not promoted as a cherished civil right granted by God to every man. No, the false religion of the whore of Rome will be hated, made desolate and naked, eaten, and burnt by the converted nations of the former Holy Roman Empire and with God's full approval. For whereas these nations were united with the whore of Rome in fighting against Christ and His faithful saints, the very ground of their suppression and restraint of the false religion of Rome must be that they will have turned in faith to Jesus Christ, have "kissed the Son" (Psalm 2:12), have covenanted as nations to be joined to the Lord (Zechariah 2:11), and have established God's moral law and biblical Christianity (within their respective nations). Here once again, the supreme rights of God almighty are presented as the basis for a true, biblical, and legitimate understanding of the liberty of conscience. Liberty of conscience (or religious liberty) is not the alleged right to practice a false religion according to one's own conscience, but the gracious right to practice the one true religion of biblical Christianity (through an enlightened conscience) as revealed in Scripture (and as summarized in faithful Confessions of Faith and Covenants).

II. Two Pragmatic Arguments against the Establishment of a National Church.

A. In past historical debates within the United States wherein state-sponsored religion was criticized as something detrimental to religion itself, some of the founding fathers argued that a state- sponsorship of religion makes for a very weak religion rather than a strong, vital religion. If the state must be the alleged crutch upon which religion leans for its support, then that religion must be very weak indeed not

to be able to stand alone upon its own two feet. In fact, it was argued that if you want to trivialize religion and tear out the very heart from within it, then have the state prop it up and support it.

1. First, such a pragmatic argument might sound good to the person who is not guided by biblical revelation, but such an argument cannot stand in the face of Holy Scripture. We, therefore, must establish from the outset that our primary concern is with what God declares in the pages of Holy Writ. In this argument, it is simply asserted (not proven) that when the state establishes a national religion that such a religion must be weak. If such an assertion is considered to be a strong argument against the national establishment of biblical Christianity, then I can simply assert to the contrary that the state-establishment of biblical Christianity does not mean at all that biblical Christianity is weak. Biblical Christianity is not weakened or strengthened in its essence (in its doctrine, worship, and church government)—whether it is established or not established. It is the same biblical Christianity whether it is established or not established. Nothing as to the doctrine, worship, or government of biblical Christianity is altered by constitutionally establishing it as the official religion of a nation. The official establishment of biblical Christianity is extrinsic (not intrinsic) to biblical Christianity. Thus, if biblical Christianity is the only true religion revealed in Scripture, it cannot become intrinsically weak (as if it became a less true religion) simply by the external circumstance of a nation establishing it to be its official religion. So this argument proceeds upon a false premise which leads to a false conclusion.

2. Second, if state-sponsorship of religion necessarily implies the weakening of the true religion, then how do we explain that God Himself revealed it to be His will that the true religion be established as the official religion of a nation to the suppression and restraint of all other religions (which are false religions)? For this we read is the duty of every magistrate and civil government that is enlightened by the Word of God in Scripture (Psalm 2:10-12; Psalm 33:12; Psalm 9:17; Deuteronomy 17:2-7). We cannot accuse the Triune God of the Bible of destroying or weakening His one true religion revealed to man by requiring civil magistrates to establish it as the official religion of a nation. Civil government is God's ordinance (Romans 13:1), the civil magistrate by office is God's minister (Romans 13:4), and as such God wills it in His Word that a nation officially kiss the Son and establish biblical Christianity. Biblical Christianity glorifies God, and it suppresses all manner of evil and wickedness, which in turn promotes the well-being and blessing of a nation.

B. A second pragmatic argument used by some founding fathers was presented in this way: The best way to make the true religion strong within a nation is to give it no special advantage at all over false religion (i.e. religious pluralism). Then the true religion will necessarily have to put forward the best arguments as to why it is right and why other religions are wrong. The truth of a religion (like everything else) is best exposed in a free exchange of ideas where religious propositions are examined in light of one another rather than simply ending such discussion by saying the privileged state-religion has spoken—end of discussion.

1. First, I submit that this argument (like the previous one) proceeds upon a false premise: namely, when all religions are granted equal protection under the law that the people of a nation will have the spiritual illumination to be able to distinguish what is false in religion from what is true in religion. That is simply not true—it is the lie of the enemy. Unenlightened man will not come to the knowledge of the truth apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit and apart from the Word of God. In fact, this argument does not assume that religion ought to be judged by the revelation of God's Word alone, but rather by the mere rational judgments of each man's conscience, contrary to God's Word (Isaiah 8:20; Timothy 3:16-17).

2. Second, if all religions (both true and false) ought to be equally protected under the law, and people simply allowed to hear the case for all religions in a free market exchange of ideas, then why does God specifically prohibit the spread of false teaching and error in the church as well as in the state (contrary to Romans 16:17; Deuteronomy 17:2-7)?

3. Third, what about the biblical principle that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6). If this argument of the founding fathers is true, then we as parents ought not to train our children in the truth, but ought to present all errors and truth to our children allowing them to decide which according to their own minds have the strongest case to be made (so much for a Christian education). That would be like saying, let’s not distinguish at all between pure food and contaminated food that is allowed to be sold in stores. Let all foods (whether contaminated or pure) be equally protected under the law so that people can test for themselves what is healthy and what is poisonous. Sure many may perish in the process, but those few who survive will at least have used their own judgment to make such decisions.

4. Fourth, why should only different religions be on the table for equal protection under the law for every person to decide what he deems to be the strongest arguments presented by one religion as opposed to another? Why shouldn’t different views on every other moral issue be equally allowed within a nation so that people can follow wherever their consciences lead them in matters of mass murder, abortion, incest, polygamy, same sex marriage, child molestation, identity theft, slander and libel? In other words, if violations of God’s Moral Law that address sins against God should be equally protected under the laws of a nation so that the people may choose which argument they find to be the most compelling according to their own conscience, then why not violations of God’s Moral Law that address sins against our neighbor? And if it be suggested that false religions don’t hurt or harm our neighbor like mass murder, abortion, incest, polygamy, same sex marriage, child molestation, identity theft, slander, and libel, let God be true and every man a liar (Romans 3:4; 2 Kings 17:15-18,23). It is false religion, idolatry, heresy, and blasphemy (i.e. wanton violation of the First Table Commandments, sins against God) that lead to murder, immorality, theft, and slander (i.e. wanton violation of the Second Table Commandments, sins against our neighbor).

5. Fifth, the right position to argue here is not that the official religion of biblical Christianity has the final say in matters of religion (end of discussion), but rather that God speaking in His Moral Law as revealed in the Bible has the final word (end of discussion): Deuteronomy 17:18-20.

As one might expect from founding fathers who promoted the protection of religious pluralism, their arguments proceed from a false premise that false religion within a nation is not hazardous or dangerous in incurring the righteous wrath of a holy God against that nation and its leaders. In other words, tolerating thieves and murderers is detrimental to the well-being of a nation, but not so with tolerating false religion. You see, the foundational error in all of their arguments is that they did not begin with biblical revelation as the very rock upon which to build their government, their institutions, or their laws. They began and ended with the mere reason of man. And so, dear ones, will we likewise find that we have built our house, our lives, and our families upon sand if we build upon the vain philosophy of man’s worldly wisdom rather than upon the unshakeable foundation of God’s infallible Word. All such vain arguments will be swept away by the Lord in the day of His visitation (which is happening before our very eyes). Our confidence is not in the economy, the Republican Party, the Tea Party, or the pro-life movement, our trust is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. He is our portion, and if we have Him, we have all that we need in this life. We need fear no man (Hebrews 13:5-6).

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