

What Is Partaking in the Sins of Others?

1 Timothy 5:22; Revelation 18:4

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In the previous sermons in this series, we have sought to answer the question: What is a Christian nation? Biblical principles have been laid out for the thoughtful and prayerful consideration of any who listen to these sermons. Objections have been presented and answered as well. It is now time to ask the question: How do we as Christians apply these truths concerning a Christian nation in our current situation? For it is one thing to hear the truth and agree that what has been presented is agreeable to the Word of God. It is another thing to act upon that which is faithful and true. This is usually where the rubber meets the road. For to acknowledge the truth is relatively easy—it may not exact a steep cost from anyone because in our religiously pluralistic society “agreeing to disagree” is one of the chief doctrines promoted. But for one to act upon one’s convictions and to apply the truth of biblical convictions to civil government will almost certainly take one into various kinds of conflicts. Although the faithful Christian will carefully weigh out the consequences of doing the will of God, he/she will not allow the consequences that may follow from doing the will of Christ to deter him/her from loving Christ and His Word more than loving his own life or anything else in this world. The duty is ours, the consequences are God’s.

Although we cannot be exhaustive in applying the biblical principles presented in this series of sermons, there are four applications that I would like to address in the following sermons that will affect all of you (in one way or another): (1) The first application is to that of holding an office in the civil government (whether national, state, or local government; whether executive, legislative, judicial, or law enforcement); (2) The second application is to that of voting for one who will hold an office in the civil government (in any of the above-mentioned capacities); (3) The third application is to that of serving in the military; (4) And the fourth application is to that of serving on a jury in a court of law.

For there is a common link to each of these four applications (just mentioned) which is fundamental to determining whether as Christians we can participate in them or not. That common link is the Constitution of the United States (or the federal Constitution of any nation), or the Constitution of individual States (as the case may be). As we consider civil participation in these different roles of civil government, our participation or dissent from participation will be based primarily upon the moral character of the Constitution that must be sworn in order to hold office, to vote, to serve on a jury, or to serve in the military. If the Constitution that must be sworn is immoral and contrary to the Moral Law of God as revealed in Scripture, a Christian cannot in good conscience swear such an oath. For to swear to uphold or to do what is contrary to the revealed will of God is a direct violation of God’s Moral Law (“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain” Exodus 20:7) and is also a form of idolatry in bowing to the will of man rather than bowing to the will of God, contrary to the First Commandment (“Thou shalt have no other gods before me” Exodus 20:3). If you have followed this series of sermons this far, we are about to move from the sphere of knowledge (in acquisition of the truth) to the sphere of wisdom (in applying the truth we have learned to the civil realm). For that is what godly wisdom is: faithfully applying the truth to all areas of life.

In the sermon this Lord’s Day we shall consider the following main points: (1) What Is Partaking in the Sins of Others (1 Timothy 5:22)?; (2) Another Objection Considered.

I. What Is Partaking in the Sins of Others (1 Timothy 5:22)?

A. By way of some preliminary comments in considering our text this Lord's Day, in the Epistle of 1 Timothy, Paul gives counsel and instruction to his son in the faith, Timothy, concerning various matters that relate to pastoral problems that Timothy was facing in Ephesus. One significant matter that Paul addressed was related to the call and ordination of qualified men to be bishops (i.e. pastors and teachers) and deacons (as we see in 1 Timothy 3). This same matter is raised again by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:17ff.

1. Paul realized that if a church does not have qualified men in doctrine and life to serve as pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons, that church is going to be misled into error, scandal, tyranny, toleration and compromise. Thus, Paul spends more space in this epistle (than any other) specifically stating those qualifications and requiring a time of testing before ordination in order to demonstrate that those qualifications are evident in those men who are ordained to office.

2. Dear ones, it is much easier to separate the chaff from the wheat before one is ordained than to try to do so after one is ordained. Therefore, Paul wisely counsels Timothy not to be hasty in ordaining a man to office in the church. Even the slower process in testing the qualifications of a candidate in doctrine and life will have the effect of weeding out those who are unqualified because some who simply want the prestige and power will become impatient with the process and will eventually look elsewhere. Others will be filtered out because they do not want to be scrutinized in doctrine and life. Nevertheless, as Paul states in 1 Timothy 3:10 in regard to deacons (which also includes pastors, teachers, and elders as well), "And let these also first be proved."

B. Let us now consider our text in 1 Timothy 5:22: "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure."

1. What is the significance of Paul's command, "Lay hands suddenly on no man"?

a. The "laying on of hands" (in the context of which we're now speaking) is an outward sign signifying the bestowal of office and authority. Whether one was installed into a civil office as a magistrate, or whether one was ordained into an ecclesiastical office as a minister, we see examples in Scripture of the use of laying on of hands as the outward sign used to signify the official and formal bestowal of office and authority (Numbers 27:22-23 [civil office]; Acts 6:6 [ecclesiastical office]; 1 Timothy 4:14 [ecclesiastical office]; 1 Timothy 5:22 [ecclesiastical office]).

b. Thus, Paul's command to Timothy here in 1 Timothy 5:22 is in effect, "Put no man into office hastily" (i.e. without first having tested and proven his qualifications to hold office in the church).

2. We come now to a second command of Paul in the second part of 1 Timothy 5:22: "neither be partaker of other men's sins." There is a logical and grammatical connection between what Paul here prohibits Timothy (and all other ministers and elders) from doing and what Paul commands in the first part of the same verse. In other words, those who fail to heed Paul's command ("lay hands suddenly on no man") do become "partaker of other men's sins". These are not two unrelated commands of Paul, but rather one command (i.e. "neither be partaker of other men's sins") is the consequence of failing to follow the first command ("lay hands suddenly on no man"). Paul is simply teaching by apostolic authority that we cannot excuse ourselves from sin when we hastily place a man into office (or consent to a man being placed into office), who is unqualified in doctrine and life. We, who laid our hands upon such an unqualified man (or consented to such an unqualified man), have a communion, sharing, and partaking in the sins and errors that will follow. Why? Because he would not be in that position of office and authority if we had not placed him there or consented to his being there. Now we must not understand Paul to teach that every sin or error that a minister, elder, or deacon commits is in some way the fault of those who ordained him or consented to his ordination. For some sins and errors (no matter how much or how long he was tested) may be hidden and covered, or may only come to light later.

3. The same principle of being partakers of other men's sins by way of our consent is also

illustrated in 2 John 10-11, where we become partakers of the errors of a false teacher when we consent to his ministry rather than reproofing his errors and heresies. Likewise, note how those who will not come out of Mystery Babylon (the Roman Catholic Church and her daughter churches that follow her in doctrine, worship, and government) but rather remain there, consenting to her sins and errors, become partakers of her sins and errors (Revelation 18:4).

4. Dear ones, there is an undeniable principle of individual and corporate responsibility when we place one into power by our consent, or when we vote to do that which is immoral and unbiblical in violation of God's Moral Law. In such a case, we share in the sins and errors of others, even if we did not personally do the evil act that another did. For the evil act would not have been done by one holding office if we and others had not placed him into office by our consent and vote.

5. Having established the biblical principle that we become partakers in other men's sins by placing unqualified men into office or placing men into office who do that which is immoral, unbiblical, and contrary to the Moral Law of God, let us observe how this biblical principle of shared guilt and responsibility in other men's sins applies to the civil realm.

C. There are two applications I would like to make at this point.

1. The first application is that it is a grievous sin and an express violation of God's Moral Law to swear to uphold or to do that which evil (Exodus 20:7; even swearing to do evil ignorantly is a sin according to Leviticus 5:4; how much more when one does so intentionally according to Isaiah 48:1; Jeremiah 4:2). For example, to take an oath to uphold same sex unions as lawful marriages is evil because one swears to violate the Moral Law of God which only authorizes as a lawful marriage that which consists of a consenting man and a consenting woman (Genesis 2:20-25; Deuteronomy 20:13). Likewise, to take an oath to uphold the murder of unborn children at any stage and for any reason is evil because one swears to transgress the Sixth Commandment ("Thou shalt not kill" Exodus 20:13).

a. We have demonstrated in many sermons in this series (which I encourage you to review) that it is also a moral evil to tolerate false gods, for official toleration is promotion of false gods (e.g. if this nation tolerates wholesale murder, who would deny that it also promotes wholesale murder); to tolerate false religions is to promote false religions; to tolerate heresy is to promote heresy; and to tolerate blasphemy is to promote blasphemy (whether in the church, whether in the home, or whether in the nation). For a nation and its leaders are explicitly commanded to kiss the Son of God in establishing biblical Christianity as the alone official religion within that nation (Psalm 2:10-12), and the inspired apostle teaches that civil government (as to its institution) is the ordinance of God not the ordinance of man (Romans 13:1) and that civil rulers (as to their institution) are ordained to be "the ministers of God" to do the will of God, not the ministers of the people to do the will of the majority whatever the whim of the majority might be (Romans 13:4). Thus, since the toleration of false religion is in fact the promotion of false religion (which is clearly an evil and immoral violation of the First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" Exodus 20:3), one likewise cannot lawfully swear to uphold the toleration and promotion of false gods, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy. Why? Because one cannot lawfully swear to do that which is evil.

b. But the Federal Constitution and the State Constitutions tolerate and promote every false god, every false religion, every heresy, and every blasphemy imaginable; for the First Amendment to the Constitution forbids Congress from establishing the one true religion of biblical Christianity as its alone official religion; and the Constitution (in Article 6) also forbids any religious (even scriptural) tests to be administered to those who would hold office (so that atheists, Satanists, or idolaters and blasphemers of every stripe might constitutionally hold office, from the lowest to the highest place in the civil government). There is no mention of the Triune God of Scripture as being the source of power and authority within the nation (to the contrary, "We the people of the United States" are explicitly stated to be the source of power and authority); there is no mention of Jesus Christ as the Mediatorial King of the nation; there is no mention of the

Moral Law of God as being the supreme law of the nation (to the contrary, the Constitution, the Laws of the United States, and all Treaties are “the supreme Law of the land” according to Article VI of the Constitution). As has been argued in this sermon series for these and many other reasons, the United States was not constituted as a Christian nation (even though by way of the *Solemn League and Covenant*, the United States was bound to establish itself as a Covenanted Christian nation upon an explicitly Christian Constitution). In fact, the official religion of the United States is polytheism—not biblical Christianity.

c. Therefore, I submit it is unlawful for anyone, but especially for a Christian (which is my chief concern in this sermon series), to swear an oath to uphold and defend the Federal Constitution or the State Constitutions because they are contrary to the Moral Law of God, in that they tolerate and promote every form of idolatry, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy.

2. The second application that I would like to make is more to the point of our text (in 1 Timothy 5:22) this Lord’s Day. Since it is a serious violation of God’s Law for one to swear to uphold and defend a Constitution (whether Federal or State) that officially tolerates idolatry, false religion, heresy, blasphemy and at the same time officially makes it unlawful for civil government through its civil magistrates to kiss the Son by establishing the Moral Law of God as the supreme law of the land and biblical Christianity as the only established religion in the land, then it is also a grievous sin to empower one to do what is unlawful for you to do (especially you who are Christians). If it is a grievous sin for a ministerial candidate to profess that images in worship are to be tolerated within the worship of God, then it is also a grievous sin to empower that man by way of ordination and your consent to fill the office of minister. In other words, what you yourself cannot do because it is sinful to do, you cannot empower another to do as your representative. Since a Christian ought not to swear to uphold and defend the toleration and (and by consequence) the promotion of idolatry, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy, then the Christian cannot vote for someone as his representative to do for him what he cannot do for himself. Otherwise, the Christian partakes in the sins of others i.e. he partakes in the sin of his representative who swears to uphold a polytheistic Constitution that tolerates and promotes idolatry, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy, and a Constitution that intentionally refuses to recognize the Triune God of the Bible, Jesus Christ as Mediatorial King, the Moral Law of God as the supreme law of the land, and biblical Christianity as the alone established religion in the land. The biblical examples of godly men who served in pagan governments (like Joseph under Pharaoh, Daniel under Nebuchadnezzar, and Mordecai under Ahasuerus) were not unlawful because there is no record that they had to swear to uphold and defend anything that was immoral or wicked in order to hold their civil office. And if that were the case in our present situation (namely, that no one was required to swear an oath to uphold and defend that which is a violation of God’s Moral Law or required to do that which is evil), then Christians could hold a civil office (at the present time) and Christians could vote for them as their representatives in a civil capacity (at the present time). But such is not the case.

II. Another Objection Considered.

A. The Christian tolerationist has also often appealed to a statement in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (23:4) in order to find support for his false view that people of various religions or people of no religion at all may lawfully be tolerated within a nation to espouse their differing religious or anti-religious views:

Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrate’s just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him. . . .

Here it is alleged by Christian tolerationists that even the *Westminster Confession of Faith* tolerates a magistrate within a Christian nation to be of a different religion or of no religion at all from the established

Christian religion of that nation. And it is further alleged that if the magistrate may be so tolerated, then the citizens may also be so tolerated to have different religions or no religion at all.

B. Not only is the conclusion wrong, but the arguments leading up to the conclusion are erroneous as well.

1. First, this statement in the Confession of Faith is certainly true when understood within the historical context in which it was written. So often, the Confession of Faith and the other Westminster Standards are made to say that which was never meant to be said by simply removing them from their historical context.

2. Second, the Confession of Faith is not teaching that a nation that has established biblical Christianity by law (in accordance with the Moral Law of God) and is bound by a National Covenant (as the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643) to the Reformed Religion as the most faithful expression of biblical Christianity may then officially tolerate civil magistrates (or citizens for that matter) to practice a false religion or to denounce the true religion. Such an interpretation of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) would be denying the very purpose of the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643 (the first document that was approved and sworn by the Kingdoms and Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland as a part of the covenanted uniformity in church and state).

3. The Solemn League and Covenant (1643) explicitly states in Article 2:

That we shall in like manner, WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS, endeavor the extirpation [uprooting—GLP] of Popery, Prelacy, (that is, church-government by Arch-bishops, Bishops, their Chancellors, and Commissaries, Deans, Deans and Chapters, Archdeacons, and all other ecclesiastical Officers depending on that hierarchy,) superstition, heresy, schism (i.e. denominationalism—GLP), profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness, LEST WE PARTAKE IN OTHER MEN’S SINS, and thereby be in danger to receive of their plagues; and that the Lord may be one, and his name one, in the three kingdoms.

This is hardly a document of religious pluralism or toleration of a king’s differing religion or toleration of his repudiation of all religion. This covenant states that the non-toleration of all Popery, Prelacy, superstition, heresy, and schism (i.e. differing denominations) shall be WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS (even the king’s person), because if the king is to be tolerated in practicing a different religion than the Reformed Religion or to be officially tolerated in his denouncing all religion, the *Solemn League and Covenant* states that the kingdoms who allow him to rule will PARTAKE IN HIS SINS AND BE IN DANGER OF RECEIVING OF HIS PLAGUES.

4. But also note in Article 3 of the Solemn League and Covenant that it makes clear that the three kingdoms are bound by covenant “to preserve and defend the King’s Majesty’s person and authority, IN THE PRESERVATION AND DEFENCE OF THE TRUE RELIGION, and liberties of the kingdoms.” In other words, if the king practices, promotes, or seeks an indulgence for himself or others to practice another religion than the one true religion of Reformed Christianity, his authority to rule is not to be preserved or defended. His authority to rule is only to be preserved and defended IN THE PRESERVATION AND DEFENCE OF THE TRUE RELIGION.

5. To what then does the Confession of Faith refer when it states,

“Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrate’s just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him.

It refers to a nation that is not a Covenanted nation or a nation where the light of the Gospel has not been

infused, but a nation whose magistrates rule according to the just laws found in the Law of Nature respecting the lawful rights of its citizens and neither imposing a false religion upon its citizens nor persecuting faithful Christians for practicing the one true Religion of biblical Christianity. In such cases, even though the magistrates of such nations may not be Reformed Christians, they may be submitted to as lawful magistrates who are living up to the light revealed in the Law of Nature (perhaps like a Pharaoh in Joseph's time, or a Cyrus in setting free God's people from captivity). Thus, there is nothing mentioned or maintained in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* that supports or defends the official toleration of idolatry, false religion, heresy, or blasphemy within a Covenanted Christian nation.

In conclusion, dear ones, I ask you, are you strengthening and empowering those around you to promote and stand fast for the Cause of Christ or are you strengthening and empowering those around you to be tolerant of sin and error? In your family do you strengthen and promote the gospel of Jesus Christ in your children by your example in how you, husbands and wives, treat one another, how you are quick to confess your sins to one another, and how you promote reconciliation? Or do your temper tantrums, your sharp criticisms, your vindictive speech and actions weaken the power of the gospel in your homes? Do you strengthen and empower the weak, the helpless, and the discouraged by your prayers, your phone calls, and your encouragement? Dear ones, you may rightly say, "I am not supporting an unfaithful ministry by my attendance, financial support, or consent" (which is right and good). You may say, "I do not vote to put civil rulers in power who will swear to do what is evil in tolerating idolatry, false religion, covenant breaking, Sabbath breaking, heresy, and blasphemy" (and that also is right and good). But on the positive side, what are you doing to strengthen and empower those around you to come to Christ by faith alone in His perfect righteousness, to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ in loving Him and standing for His truth and cause even when there is opposition, hostility, and ridicule? Dear ones, we not only judge our growth in grace by how we are not strengthening others to do evil, but also by how we are strengthening others to embrace Christ, to grow in Christ, and to stand for Christ by our words and our deeds. Let us as Covenanters not be simply known for how we do not support unfaithful churches or do not vote for those who will swear to do what is evil, but let us as Covenanters be known for our love for Christ, our love for His gospel and law, our love for our families, our love to help those in need, our love for the unity of Christ's Church, and our love for the appearing of the Lord.

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