

## The Statesman Looks at ‘Separation of Church and State’

We have recently been looking at the roles of Government, Religious Institution and Family in bringing God’s promised blessings to a nation. Before we move on, let us consider the concept known as “separation of Church and State”.

King Jehoshaphat, of Judah, reigned 873-949 B.C. His reign is described as follows:

*Jehoshaphat his son succeeded him as king....The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways his father David had followed. He ... sought the God of his father and followed His commands rather than the practices of Israel. The Lord established the kingdom under his control....His heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord....In the third year of his reign he sent his officials...to teach in the towns of Judah. With them were certain Levites...and the priests....They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people (2 Chronicles 17:1, 3-10; 19:8-10).*

We are told that:

*His heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord.*

But then, we are told that he sent his officials and, together with religious officials and publicly taught from the precursor to the Bible:

*he sent his officials...to teach in the towns of Judah. With them were certain Levites... and the priests....They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord.*

His officials, and certain religious leaders accompanying them, were teaching the people from the Book of the Law of the Lord. By today’s standards in many so-called “advanced” nations, Jehoshaphat went too far. However, is such a supposition really true? The concept of “separation of Church and State” is frequently appealed to. When done so, it is often done so with the weight of being considered a part of the United States Constitution. Actually, that is **NOT CORRECT**. The term “separation of Church and State” occurs nowhere in the U.S. Constitution. Rather, the term “separation of Church and State” was first used in 1801 by President Thomas Jefferson in a letter to a church congregation assuring them that the Government would not interfere with their worship of God. Hence, this first use of the term was not about protecting the State from the Church, but rather to protect the Church from the State. Church and State do represent two institutions, both accountable to the same Master, God Himself. Government and Religious Institution and Family are three clear institutions that our Creator has established to move a nation toward the blessing our Designer intends: all working in partnership to fulfill the promise:

***Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people*** (Proverbs 14:34).

Since that same Creator is the Master over all three of those institutions, we must allow Him to reign through each institution without human constraint.

Our Master’s intent is better served by us adhering to two words: **REMEMBER** and **OBEY**:

*Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God .... (Deuteronomy 9:1).*

*Therefore, love the LORD your God and always keep His mandate and His statutes, ordinances, and commands (Deuteronomy 11:1).*

Thus, we have the successor to Moses:

*Afterward, Joshua read aloud all the words of the law—the blessings as well as the curses—according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read before the entire assembly of Israel, including the women, the little children, and the foreigners who were with them (Joshua 8:34-35).*

When parents truly love their children, they are not afraid to give them their best advice, even if it is unpopular at the time. Because of the similar role that the Head of State plays in the larger, national ‘family’, he/she must do the same without concern for negative reaction. Likewise we are admonished by our Master:

*If anyone speaks, it should be as one who speaks God’s words (1 Peter 4:11).*

Hence, as those in each institution speak God’s words to each other, it brings us closer to His blessing as promised to one specific nation:

*Now if you faithfully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all His commands I am giving you today, ... All these blessings will come and overtake you, because you obey the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 28:1-2).*

Through that lens, as we return to the original account of Jehoshaphat’s actions, we learn of the result of Jehoshaphat’s actions—blessing:

*The fear of God came upon all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side (2 Chronicles 20:29-30).*

Hence, we have President Lincoln making the following proclamation during an extremely difficult time for his nation:

*Insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world....We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven....But we have forgotten God....Whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord....It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.*

Let us not allow an erroneous understanding of “separation of Church and State” to separate us from the love and blessings of our Creator and Benefactor.