**Blasphemy Laws**

Blasphemy is showing irreverence toward something considered sacred. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom tells us that there are 71 countries in the world with some sort of anti-blasphemy laws. If you are a Christian, you would consider insulting the name of Jehovah a despicable act and you might be tempted to think that government prohibitions of such speech might be a good thing. The danger lies in allowing government officials to decide 1) what is sacred, and 2) what constitutes irreverence.

Christians must understand God’s word and have our senses exercised to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:12-14). We are told to expose the unfruitful deeds of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). According to 1 Corinthians 5, members of the local church are to hold one another accountable for unresolved sin, but verses 9-13 make it clear that we are to leave the judgment of unbelievers to God.

As a Christian, my focus should be, not to wish temporal punishment on the blasphemer, but to convert the person from a blasphemer of Jehovah to a worshiper of Jehovah. A person is saved, not at the point of a physical sword, but when his heart is convicted by the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Hebrews 4:12).

When the church was established, the Roman government tolerated a wide range of religious teachings and practices. The apostle Paul was allowed to speak at the Areopagus in Athens and he was not in the least concerned that the same forum was used to propagate blasphemous doctrines. The same government policies that allowed Greek philosophers to speak also afforded him the right to reach out to the souls of men with the truth of the gospel.

In fact, the Roman government didn’t run afoul of Christianity until Rome began to enforce emperor worship. They tried to decide for everyone else what was sacred and they got it wrong.

So what should be the attitude of the Christian toward government and religion? “I urge that entreaties and prayers…be made for…kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Christians cannot tolerate politicians telling them what to believe. Civil government sanction of particular religious doctrines leads to disaster. Christians are instructed to pray that officials govern in such a way that we can practice our faith in peace and freely reason with others from the pages of God’s word.

In nations that restrict the free expression of ideas, truth is always suppressed. Any religion that cannot be defended will resort to force to propagate and maintain itself. The Christian is to “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15). Who knows? Some of those blasphemers might see the light and avoid the judgment of God.

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