

Legitimacy of Civil Government and Protecting Human Life Inseparable

by Thomas W. Jacobson (22 October 2013)

Let's take a closer look at God's first command that authorized the establishment of human civil authority to do justice: "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6). Within this authorization for civil government are duties to respect and protect human life, and avenge human bloodshed.

What was the historical context and spiritual reality when God spoke these words? This Divine command came immediately after He destroyed everyone in the world because of wickedness, evil thoughts, corruption, and violence; except for Noah and his family because they were righteous in God's eyes (Genesis 6:5, 9, 11-13).

After the worldwide Flood, God did three things:

1. Reissued His first command to husbands and wives: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" as bearers of "the image of God" (Genesis 9:1, 6; 1:26-27; 5:1-2).
2. Issued His first command authorizing the formation of civil government to protect human life and execute vengeance on those who intentionally take life (Genesis 9:6).
3. Made a covenant that He would "never again" destroy "all flesh" by a global flood (Genesis 9:11).

All three actions reveal that God places high intrinsic value on human life. He wanted to repopulate the earth while protecting the people and restraining evil, and ultimately avoid destroying almost every person again. His solution was to delegate some responsibility for justice and protecting human life from Himself to a new institution: civil government.

Was civil government then to be the sole institution to restrain evil? No! Restraining evil begins within each person. But without that final human forceful restraint, wickedness can rapidly take over and destroy everything good within a community or nation – as we are increasingly witnessing in the United States and many other nations, especially in Europe – or the entire world.

Civil government is the one institution God authorized after the Flood to use force to restrain wickedness, punish evil, and provide justice, especially for the shedding of innocent blood. From its authorization, ***the legitimacy of civil government was inseparable from its duties to protect innocent human life and execute lawful justice.***

What about when civil government fails in these foremost duties, or becomes corrupt itself, as all eventually do? Then, as evil flourishes and innocent people die and the guilty go unpunished, that government undermines its legitimacy and loses the trust of the people. Obviously, efforts by civil government to protect all other inherent human rights are meaningless for those who are dead, whose most sacred right to life has been denied.