



## SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING THE CHRISTIAN IN TODAY'S POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IN AMERICA



### THE PROBLEM: "BUT, JUST WHAT IS CAESAR'S?"

1. How do we ascertain where our allegiance to Caesar ends, and our allegiance to God begins?
2. What are the values which the Christian must bring ...
  - ⇒ To the voting booth?
  - ⇒ In an encounter with government authorities?
  - ⇒ In dealings with government, when that government is ungodly?
  - ⇒ In dealings with government, when that government is ineffective?
3. How do we discriminate between politicians and "statesmen?"
4. What American cultural values enhance our walk with God? Constrain our walk with God?

### THE SOLUTION: GOD'S WORD

#### ⇒ How Scripture Frames the Problem ...

##### **Luke 20:19-26**

<sup>19</sup>The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable [the vineyard tenants] against them. But they were afraid of the people.

<sup>20</sup>Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. <sup>21</sup>So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. <sup>22</sup>Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

<sup>23</sup>He saw through their duplicity and said to them, <sup>24</sup>"Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" <sup>25</sup>"Caesar's," they replied.

He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." <sup>26</sup>They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.



## A Quadratic Explication—A Better Question: JUST WHAT IS GOD’S?

Rather than focus on what belongs to the government, let us start with what God expects from us and our relationship to the government.

1. God expects the government to follow the Lord God—and, if it does not, there are severe consequences.
  - Consider Samuel’s warning: “If both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God—good! But if you do not obey the LORD, ... His hand will be against you.” [2 Samuel 12:14-15]
  - Or, Peter who identifies the purpose of government: “Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.” [2 Peter 2:13-14]
  - Paul emphasizes government as God’s servant, not ours: “For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” [Romans 13:4]
2. God expects not only obedience from “the king,” He expects obedience from His followers.
  - God is sovereign: “O Sovereign LORD, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do?” [Deuteronomy 3:23]
  - God measures our love by our obedience: “And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love.” [2 John 1:6]
  - Jesus obeyed—and expects us to obey as well: “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” [John 15:10]
3. Government authority is established by God. Regardless of a country’s “pledge of allegiance,” each and all residents are “one nation under God.”
  - Counter to the rhetorical usefulness of Jeffersonian doctrine and American culture, Paul wrote governments are instituted not for people, but for His honor and glory. [Romans 13]
    - “... authorities are **God’s** servants ...”
    - “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which **God** has established.”
    - “For he [governmental authority] is **God's** servant to do you good ...”

4. God will affect the unbelieving, pagan leader for His purposes, often to our benefit and sometimes to our chagrin, but always to His glory.

- Guess what famous leader said this about our God?

“His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’ Now I [leader’s name] praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”<sup>1</sup>

- But even presumably godly leaders ignore God. Guess what famous leader said this about our God?

“And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerve in the brain of Jupiter. But may we hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away with this artificial scaffolding, and restore to us the primitive and genuine doctrines of this most venerated reformer of human errors.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Daniel 4:34b-36, Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to John Adams, April 11, 1823; in Lester J. Cappon, ed, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters, Vol. 2*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1959).

## A QUADRATIC APPLICATION

Principal Principle	Illustrative Problem	A Godly Citizen's Response
<p>God expects the government to follow the Lord—and, if it does not, there are severe consequences.</p>	<p>Governments can wage war—some are just, and some are not. How does the Godly citizen respond? Does the Godly citizen's view of "unjust" excuse his obedience to the government? After all, Peter said, "We must obey God rather than men!"<sup>3</sup></p> <p>Or, does the Godly citizen recognize his limitations and obey the government because one can not ascertain whether the war is just or not? See Appendix B for an explication of "just war."</p>	<p>A Godly citizen studies what a government proposes to do in war. He/she recognizes war is a manifestation of original sin; i.e., both innocent and guilty die. Thus, even in a just war, a Godly citizen fights as a "mournful warrior" [Augustine]</p> <p>But when the war is unjust (i.e., ungodly), the Godly citizen does everything she/he can politically to facilitate the government's compliance with God—not only for the government's benefit, but also to protect one's family from the wrath of God's vengeance on an ungodly nation.</p> <p>Patriotism, thus, for a Godly nation is no vice. Patriotism for an ungodly nation is an abomination to God.</p>
<p>God expects not only obedience from "the king," He expects obedience from His followers.</p>	<p>Assuming God is not an "ego-maniac," (i.e., after all, God knows He is God), <u>why</u> does He expect obedience?</p>	<p>Three Alternatives Answers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God is sovereign—just as the "king" is sovereign. What He says goes, period.</li> <li>2. God is wise—wise people follow wise leaders.</li> <li>3. God is God—as God, His nature expects obedience, for His glory and pleasure.</li> </ol> <p>⇒ Intriguingly, when we do obey, His wisdom shines forth. Remember, "God is smart."<sup>4</sup></p>

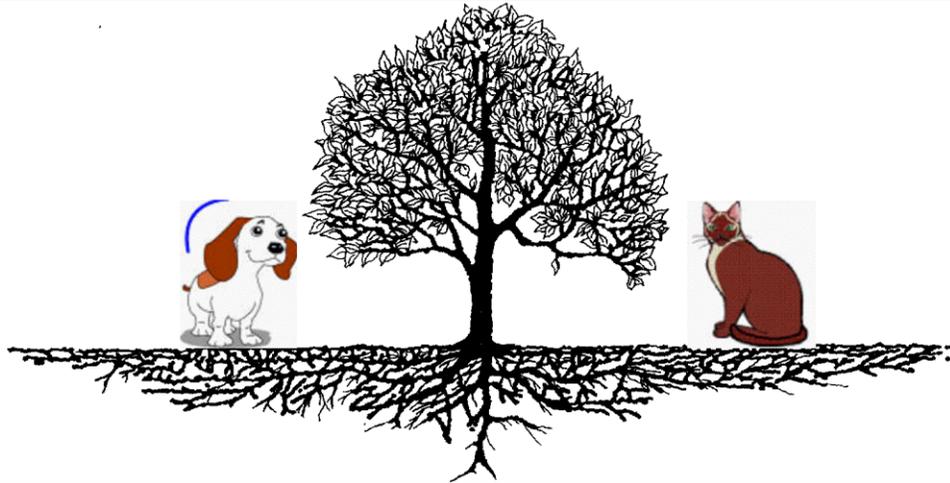
<sup>3</sup>For a more complete view of the context, see Acts 5:27-32: "Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

<sup>4</sup>Porter's First Law of Theology (see <http://TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com/?p=114>)



## THE ROOT PROBLEM: AMERICAN CULTURE CAN SEDUCE CHRISTIANS TO AVOID GOD



### How being “American” in name and culture hinders and helps the Godly citizen . . .

#### 1. Freedom of Speech—“I can speak my mind.”

- ⇒ Hinders: Galatians 1:8-9 says, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”
- ⇒ Helps: Yet, were it not for the right to free speech, a good deal of what is said and printed by Christians would not be tolerated. (Unless you refuse to shut up about following God’s word regarding baking cakes for a gay couple’s wedding; see <http://tinyurl.com/ofcuouq>).
- ⇒ Choices: Do we support “hate speech” restrictions so that persecution can ensue (James 1:2 says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials . . .”). Or, do we oppose “hate speech” so that our pulpit freedom can continue?

#### 2. Governmental participation—“I can influence the government.”

- ⇒ Hinders: Romans 13:1 says, “The authorities that exist have been established by God.” Just what has been established by God? Secession within states and churches have often centered around the nature of what constitutes “democracy” (e.g., in Christianity debates about congregational vs. presbytery vs. elder/pastor governance abound). Yet, most of us have been enculturated with the value of a “democratic” form of governance—implying participation.

Yet, our government is clearly a republic, although initially constituted only for landed Caucasian males; our government is not a democracy—even though with today’s technology, it could be. So? Christians are enculturated with values that say participation is a right, and participation is the right thing to do, yet must recognize that God, not we, calls the shots, regardless of whether a democracy ideal is realized in practice.

⇒ Helps: On the other hand, since “on paper” the sovereignty of America’s government is “We the people . . .,” we have no choice—we must participate for we are, again “on paper,” the government which has “been established by God . . . for [we] are God’s servant.”



⇒ Choices: Do we participate when the government provides no alternative to participate with honor? Or, do we make the best of a lousy situation? For example, when choosing between a candidate who wants to engage an unjust war (see Appendix B), versus a candidate who wants people to have the right to kill the unborn versus a candidate who tolerates killing the unborn by others, for whom does the Godly citizen vote?

### 3. American rebellion—“I am an individual—the government gets its power from me.”

⇒ Hinders: In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the United States of America were being formed into a nation, and Christians had to choose between their loyalty to the king and God (Romans 13), and their human need to be free from God’s established authority. About a third chose the king, the rebellious won, and God’s churches split over the issue.

⇒ Helps: In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the United States of America was re-constituted as one nation via the Civil War (known as the “War Between the States” by Southerners and the “War of Rebellion” by Northeasterners). Christians who chose to “protect the Union” argued their loyalty was God-ordained. While the treasonous rebellion was fought for many reasons beyond slavery, the issue of slavery was used as an excuse/reason for secession within many denominations—including Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches.

⇒ Implications: Americans as a cultural group take pride in the sovereignty of the individual. Thus, for example, we insist on civil control of the military, and we take breaches of civil rights as threats to our sovereignty, not just as inconveniences. For the Christian, however, there is no sovereignty but God Almighty. And, there are no individual rights save one for those in Christ Jesus—to obey the Creator of the universe, period.

Another implication: our insistence on American values can interfere with our understanding of God. One of the more common words in Scripture (NT and LXX) is δουλός (“servant” or “slave”). Lexical context often does not provide translation assistance. Given the history of the Patriarchs and the historical culture of the New Testament, the more accurate translation is “slave.” But, Western translators usually avoid the word “slave” when it comes to describing the relationship between our Lord and us—we Americans prefer “servant” which implies choice, payment for services rendered, and freedom to leave the relationship if we so desire. We don’t like being paid for, that is, “owned.”

⇒ Choices: Which honors our God more—to manifest the individuality of our American heritage, or to manifest the congregationality of our Christian heritage? Our allegiance is to the king, only after our allegiance to the Creator has been affirmed.

## SO, WHAT WE CONCLUDE, AND NOT CONCLUDE?

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- The State does not exist to meet your needs.
- The State is a tool whereby you can honor and glorify God.
- American citizens have both the blessings of an American culture and its curse.
- As Americans who can vote and influence the State, we have an obligation to follow God's purposes, not the dictates or recommendations of a party or philosophy.
- Remember, the issue is not what is Caesar's, but what is God's. When that is clarified and becomes the basis for our political action as Godly citizens, God will indeed bless America.

## APPENDIX A

### ILLUSTRATIVE SCRIPTURES AND MATERIALS REGARDING GOD, MAN, AND GOVERNMENT

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#### **Romans 13**

<sup>1</sup>Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

<sup>2</sup>Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup>For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. <sup>4</sup>For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

<sup>6</sup>This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. <sup>7</sup>Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

#### **1 Peter 2:11-21**

<sup>11</sup>Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. <sup>12</sup>Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

<sup>13</sup>Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, <sup>14</sup>or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. <sup>15</sup>For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. <sup>16</sup>Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. <sup>17</sup>Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

<sup>18</sup>Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. <sup>19</sup>For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. <sup>20</sup>But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup>To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

#### **How God's Message Can Influence Governing Leaders:**

⇒ An unbeliever, Nebuchadnezzar, said about our God:

“His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

<sup>35</sup>All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’

...  
Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” [Daniel 4:34b-36]

⇒ A presumed believer, Jefferson, said this about Jesus the Christ:

“And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerve in the brain of Jupiter. But may we hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away with this artificial scaffolding, and restore to us the primitive and genuine doctrines of this most venerated reformer of human errors.”

–Letter to John Adams, April 11, 1823  
Lester J. Cappon, ed, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, Vol. 2,  
(The University of North Carolina Press, 1959)

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## OUR CITIZENSHIP LOYALTIES ...

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### Philippians 3:17-21

“<sup>17</sup>Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. <sup>18</sup>For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. <sup>20</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

### Acts 5:27-32

<sup>27</sup>Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. <sup>28</sup>“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.” <sup>29</sup>Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! <sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

### 2 Timothy 4:3

“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

### Galatians 1:6-12

<sup>6</sup>I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or

an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! <sup>9</sup>As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

<sup>10</sup>Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

<sup>11</sup>I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.

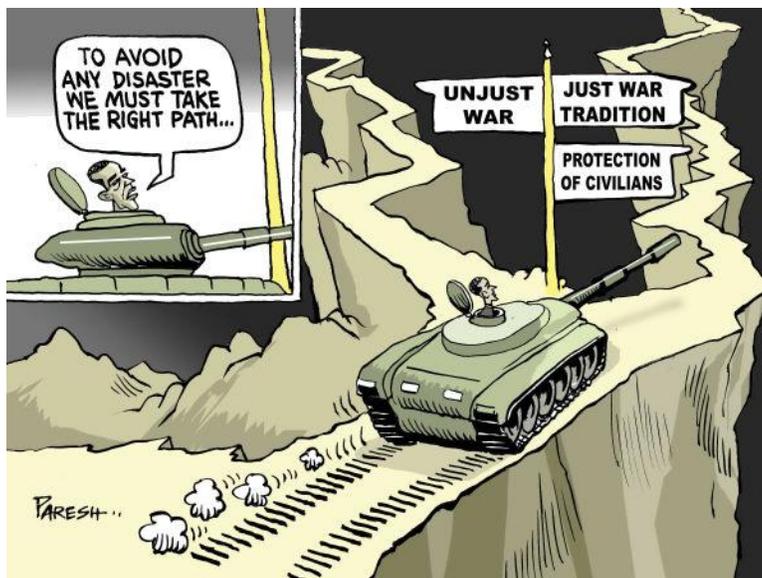
<sup>12</sup>I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Appendix B:  
SUMMARY OF DANIEL HEIMBACH'S DESCRIPTION OF A "JUST WAR"<sup>7</sup>

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The outline of just war principles that has become a cornerstone of U.S. policy, first prepared by Heimbach, enumerates the following essentials for going to war:

1. Just cause - Just causes for war may include the vindication of justice, the restoration of a just international order that has been violated, the protection of innocent human life, or the restoration of basic human rights, but not the imposition of the victor's ideals.
2. Competent authority - A just war can only be initiated by those who are invested with proper authority and responsibility.
3. Comparative justice - The moral merit on "our" side must clearly outweigh the moral merit of the other.
4. Right intention - The purpose of a just war must be limited to obtaining or restoring a just peace. Desires to punish or humiliate the enemy are not adequate intentions.
5. Last resort - All non-violent alternatives must be exhausted before resorting to war, with lethal force being seen as a tragic necessity when other approaches have failed.
6. Probability of success - No matter how just the cause, war is only justified if there is a good prospect of success.
7. Proportionality of expected results - The anticipated good must be greater than the expected costs of the war.
8. Right spirit - Even when judged to be necessary, war should be regarded as a tragic and regrettable means for obtaining or restoring a just peace.



Heimbach also lists several principles for the conduct of a just war:

- Proportionality in the use of force - No action should be taken that generates more harm than good. Deadly force should be used only to the extent needed to obtain a just objective, and no more.
- Discrimination - A distinction must be maintained between combatants and non-combatants.
- Avoidance of evil means - No matter how just the cause, the use of "evil means" is prohibited. These include actions such as executing prisoners, taking hostages, pillaging, raping women, terrorizing civilians, desecrating holy places and slaughtering non-combatants.
- Good faith - As much as possible, the enemy must be treated in good faith to keep open the possibility of reconciliation.

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<sup>7</sup>A professor of mine at seminary, Dr. Daniel Heimbach is Professor of Christian Ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. This doctrine was articulated for the Bush administration to follow during the first Gulf War. It was the explicit reason why President Bush did not devastate Iraq by a full invasion on to Baghdad (see criteria number 1 and 4).

Let's say you moved to a new country, called Susehland, and there was a revolution. One result of that revolution was that all people like you became slaves. Since you are unable to emigrate, you have to learn to live with what Providence has provided. Then there is a counter-revolution. While slavery is not abolished, the counter-revolution forms two political parties—the Cat Party, and the Dog Party. Here are the political platform planks of the two parties.

Issue	 <b>Cat Party</b>	 <b>Dog Party</b>
Who holds your title of ownership? The State, or an individual person?	An individual person.	The State.
What is the maximum penalty for a slave's (i.e., your) failure to obey? Minimum penalty?	Maximum penalty: death. Minimum penalty: fine the master.	Maximum penalty: death. Minimum penalty: guilt.
What are the consequences for a <b>master</b> , if an individual person, for failing to meet the State's standards for maintaining the health and welfare of his/her slave? If awarded compensation, does the State or the slave receive the compensation?	Consequences for an individual person as master: nothing. Compensation: the slave.	Consequences for an individual person as master: not applicable; you are owned by the State. Compensation: Since the State cannot be sued, compensation is a moot issue.
What are the consequences for the <b>State</b> , if it fails to meet its own standards for maintaining the health and welfare of a slave? Can a slave sue the State for compensation?	Consequences for the State: None. Compensation: Since the State cannot be sued, compensation is a moot issue.	Compensation: Since the State cannot be sued, compensation is a moot issue.
How often must slaves and masters meet to confer on their respective duties and responsibilities?	Once.	At least daily, but ideally—continuously.
Should there be a limit on how many assets a slave can own?	None whatsoever.	Moot: the State owns all assets.
Should slaves be allowed to have a different religion than their masters?	Of course.	The slave's beliefs must correspond to the State's beliefs.
Should slaves be marked so that they are readily distinguishable from masters?	They should appear no different than other people in Susehland.	Slaves must be distinguished very clearly as slaves in Susehland.
How many days of rest, if any, per week should slaves be allowed?	As many as they want.	17 hours per week must be devoted to the State; remainder of the time for rest and work is up to the slave's discretion.
Would slaves have to pay taxes?	Yes.	No.

Now, please answer these questions:

Which party would you want to win power in a political coup? Cat Party Dog Party

1. If the Cat Party won, and you got a chance to emigrate from Susehland, would you do so? Yes No
2. If the Dog Party won, and you got a chance to emigrate from Susehland, would you do so? Yes No
3. Regardless of who won, and if you got a chance to emigrate from Susehland, would there be anything that the government of Susehland or the masters in Susehland could do to persuade (not coerce) you to stay? If so, what?

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