

The Sovereign and the Church  
Ezra 7:11-28

- I. Review
  - A. Persian King Artaxerxes supported the worship at the Temple, probably because he knew religious observance among the people was good for his empire
  - B. But while a strong church is good for the state, state involvement in religion has rarely been good for the church
  - C. Since in America the citizens hold the sovereignty, are we as supportive of the Church as this pagan Persian king was?
  - D. Artaxerxes sent Ezra to teach the people and make sure they were following the Law of God. Are we as supportive of the ministry of Church elders, whose job it is to hold us accountable in our Christian living?
  
- II. Go further – read I Peter 2:9-25
  - A. How does Peter describe us in verse 9, and what does he say we are supposed to do?
  - B. In verses 11 and 12, how does Peter say we should behave, and what sort of impact is our behavior supposed to have on the unbelievers around us?
  - C. Looking at verses 9-12, how should the way we live support other Christians in the worship of God? How should our lives encourage unbelievers to worship God?
  - D. In verses 13-17, Peter tells us how we should live in relation to human political rulers. What does Peter say is the job of human rulers? How does our obedience to human laws bear witness to unbelievers around us?
  - E. In verse 16, how does Peter say we should use our Christian liberty? What is the relationship between Christian freedom and the Law of God?
  - F. In verses 18-20, how does Peter encourage Christian servants to treat their masters? Does the way they behave depend on how fairly they are treated?
  - G. In verses 21-23, Peter sets Jesus before us as an example. How was He treated by governing authorities, and how did He behave in response?
  
- III. Apply
  - A. Artaxerxes supported the worship of God with political freedom and financial gifts. How can we give similar support to the worship of God today?
  - B. Artaxerxes gave Ezra the authority to hold the people accountable for obeying God's law. How can we encourage our ruling elders in their ministry of accountability?
  - C. Peter says our behavior should impress unbelievers around us. In our culture, how can we demonstrate Christian character by pursuing personal purity and obedience to the laws in a way that unbelievers will find attractive instead of offputting?
  - D. How can the suffering we go through make our witness for Christ more meaningful to those around us?
  - E. What motivation for Christian living does Peter give us in verses 10 and 24? How should these verses encourage us to live more like Christ?