

Introduction

This book is the follow-up to “Approved by God: A Case for Modern Disestablishment.” The first Ecclesiastical Law Center book, published in 2004, was the history and background of the issue of church incorporation and how a church must be solely under the Lord Jesus Christ, and not be incorporated. The first book proved that true churches down through the centuries did not believe in or practice incorporation with the government. In early America, two central figures, both Baptist preachers, declared that churches should not be incorporated with the state. These two pastors, Isaac Backus of New England, and John Leland of Virginia held to this position throughout their lives and ministries.

Backus and his influence kept the Warren Baptist Association churches in Rhode Island and Massachusetts from unincorporating for the span of his pastoral ministry. He gave Biblical and reasonable explanations for churches not incorporating with the state. He held to this view until the pastor of Haverhill Baptist Church in Massachusetts led his church into incorporation with the state. The reason Pastor Hezekiah Smith wanted his

church to incorporate was in order to be able to sue the church corporation for his salary. Backus and other pastors of the late 1700's and early 1800's believed and taught that this incorporation was "unchristian surrender to the state."

John Leland, who came from New England, settled in Orange County, Virginia. He was present in the Warren Baptist Association meeting when the question of church incorporation was voted down unanimously. Leland was a powerful figure in Virginia in convincing James Madison to write a Remonstrance for Religious Freedom. Leland wrote and preached strongly against churches being incorporated with the state. Of course it was Madison who vetoed the bill to incorporate a church in Alexandria.

Most of the pastors of Backus' and Leland's era agreed with them. Only a relative few desired to be received in the same accordance with the state churches, to be favored by the state with benefits. We are often asked the questions; "What made the change, and when did the change take place in our history?" The change came when these old "war horses" died off who lived during the state-church era, and knew instinctively from Scripture that incorporation from the state was an unbiblical position. More than that, they believed that it was simply "unchristian."

A new breed of pastor came on the scene. Those pastors who were not as familiar with state favor toward churches were trained in the colleges and were not influenced directly by the previous generation of pastors. Rather than stand against incorporation as their prede-

cessors did, they chose to accept the states' desire of giving these pastors' churches the benefits which came with incorporation.

This book takes one more step in stopping the mouths of those who argue that "incorporation" and "Lordship" are not that big of a deal. In the history of this argument, we have found that originally pastors would argue that the Bible is the only standard for their faith and practice. So, our stance during the years was to show that the Scriptures do indeed emphasize that only the Lord can be the Head of His church. Then the argument shifted by these men who demanded for us to prove that pastors through the centuries took the stand against incorporation that we take. That was the purpose of the first book, "Approved by God."

Now that history and the Scriptures have shown the truth of the matter of incorporation, another shift came in the modern pastor's argument against our position. As a leading Baptist Evangelist, who is the leader of a Christian newspaper, stated to us, "It does not matter if you are incorporated or unincorporated when it comes to legal matters, you will still lose if the government wants to get you." This book answers the question, "Does it matter?" With over two decades of handling church-state issues, we have experienced first-hand the difference standing solely under the Lordship of Jesus Christ makes. If this stand is done in a Biblical way, with Biblical Reasonableness, we know how the Lord works to receive glory for Himself in the stand of His local church.

The Authors