

3. Read Matthew 10:22,25 and Mark 13:12. What can we expect in this world as followers of Christ?

Matthew 10:22,25 You will be hated by all people because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the master of the house was called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

Mark 13:12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father, his child. Children will rise up against their parents and put them to death."

4. Which words in Psalm 2 tell us that we don't need to be afraid?

5. The following passages give us some truths about the kingdom of God. What can we say about God's kingdom (over against the kingdoms of this world) based on these passages?

(Ages 20-40) Luke 17:20,21 ²⁰ The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in a way you can observe, ²¹ nor will people say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'Look, there it is!' because the kingdom of God is within^[a] you."

(Ages 41-59) Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.

Matthew 13:18-23 "So listen carefully to the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the seed that was sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed that was sown on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he is not deeply rooted and does not endure. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. ²² The seed that was sown among the thorns is the one who hears the word, but the worry of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it produces no fruit. ²³ But the seed that was sown on the good ground is the one who continues to hear and understand the word. Indeed he continues to produce fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown."

(Ages 60+) *John 18:33-38; 19:8-11 Pilate went back into the Praetorium and summoned Jesus. He asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36 Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here." 37 "You are a king then?" Pilate asked. Jesus answered, "I am, as you say, a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." 38 "What is truth?" Pilate said to him. After he said this, he went out again to the Jews and told them, "I find no basis for a charge against him. 8 When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. 9 He went back inside the palace again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 So Pilate asked him, "Are you not talking to me? Don't you know that I have the authority to release you or to crucify you?"*

6. Using the following prompts, identify at least five truths about the kingdom of God.

- Regarding its existence

- Regarding its growth

- Regarding where it is found

- Regarding its view of truth

- Regarding the way its citizens view themselves

7. Summarize the purpose of the church.

8. We sometimes call the governments of this world Jesus' "other kingdom." While the people of this world deceive themselves into thinking that they are in charge, it is Christ who rules all things for the benefit of the church (Ephesians 1:19-22). What do the following passages tell us about the "other kingdom" (the state)?

(All) Romans 13:1-7 Everyone must submit to the governing authorities. For no authority exists except by God, and the authorities that do exist have been established by God. ² Therefore the one who rebels against the authority is opposing God's institution, and those who oppose will bring judgment on themselves.

³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to evil. Would you like to have no fear of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will receive praise from him, ⁴ because he is God's servant for your benefit. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because he does not carry the sword without reason. He is God's servant, a punisher to bring wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore it is necessary to submit, not only because of wrath, but also because of conscience.

⁶ For this reason you also pay taxes, because the authorities are God's ministers, who are employed to do this very thing. ⁷ Pay what you owe to all of them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed.

- ▽ To submit mean "to yield to another" or "arrange oneself under another." Give some examples of how our sinful nature resists submission.

(Ages 20-40) Isaiah 44:24-28 This is what the LORD, your Redeemer, the LORD who formed you from the womb, says. I am the LORD, the one who does all things, who stretched out the heavens by myself, who hammered out the earth. (Who was with me then?) ²⁵ I frustrate the signs of the deceivers and make fools of the fortune tellers. I overturn the wisdom of the wise and turn their knowledge into foolishness. ²⁶ He is the one who fulfills the word of his servants, who completes the plan announced by his messengers, who says about Jerusalem, "It will be inhabited," and about the cities of Judah, "They will be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins." ²⁷ He is the one who says to the deep ocean, "Dry up," the one who says, "I will dry up your rivers." ²⁸ He is the one who says about Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he will complete everything I desire." He is the one who says about Jerusalem, "It will be rebuilt," and who says to the temple, "Your foundations will be laid."

(Ages 41-59) Daniel 2 27 Daniel answered the king, "The mystery that the king is asking about, no wise men, spell casters, magicians, or diviners are able to explain it to the king. 28 However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the latter days. This is your dream; the visions in your head while you were on your bed were this: 44 In the days of those kings, the God of Heaven will establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another race of people. It will crush and put an end to all of these kingdoms, but it will stand forever,

(Ages 60+) Colossians 1:16-18 for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and all things hold together in him. 18 He is also the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all things he might have the highest rank.

- 9.** Using the prompts below, identify at least five truths about the “other kingdom” over which Christ rules.
- Regarding its existence

 - Regarding its purpose

 - Regarding its tools for establishing itself

 - Regarding its method of ruling

 - Regarding its source of truth
- 10.** Identify times in the history of the church when God has used the governments of this world to benefit his church.

11. Why must we be cautious about identifying current events as divine interventions?

12. From what we have learned so far, complete the statements below to identify the primary differences between the church (the kingdom of God) and the state (the other kingdom).

THE CHURCH	THE STATE
Established by	Established by
Governed by	Governed by
The church will last	Kingdoms of this world will
God's people distinguish themselves by	The rulers of this world seek
The church moves	The state moves

13. In the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau came up with a line of thought that sought to explain the origin of government and the obligation of subjects. Much of what they came up with can be summed up with the term *social contract*. What is meant by that term?

Abortion Then/Now: What We Can Learn From How the Early Church Dealt With Abortion & Infanticide

January 31, 2019 By James Hein

Without God and the future life? How will man be after that? It means everything is permitted now.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov (New York: Vintage, 1991), pg. 589

Communist Russia, Communist China, and Nazi Germany eliminated an incredible amount of human life. Stalin was responsible for around 20 million deaths. Mao Zedong's regime is credited with a staggering 70 million deaths. Hitler comes in third with around 10 million murders attributed to his name. The twentieth century was the world's great experiment in seeing what intentionally godless governments would produce. The end result was a century with more slaughter of human life than all other centuries combined.

Without question, the saving grace of the western world has been the presence of an inherited Christian worldview. Abraham Lincoln, William Wilberforce, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were able to make assertions about human rights and usher in civil rights reform based solely on a belief in the biblical *Imago Dei* (i.e. "the image of God") – the idea that all humans have value because God himself imbued humanity with special value.

As the faith of a nation goes, so goes its perception of personhood.

Consequently, if you've been following trends of Christian religious activity over the past 20 years, it was no surprise to you that the New York State legislature passed the Reproductive Health Act on January 22, the 46th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. The act allows abortion at any point during a pregnancy (24 weeks had been the prior limit) if it is deemed "*necessary to protect a woman's life or health.*"

If you've ever read Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker's famous article in the *NY Times* from over two decades ago, you knew this was coming. If you realized that the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) targeted New York upon its founding in 1969, you knew this was coming. If you were aware that over a quarter of all pregnancies in New York already end in abortion, you knew this was coming.

When you're raised in the United States, it's perhaps easy to forget that abortion and infanticide have been quite common in world history. The reason they have been forbidden in the West for centuries is only because Western values were shaped by Christianity. Author Benjamin Wiker makes the case in *Moral Darwinism*:

The laws against abortion and infanticide in the West are only intelligible as a result of its Christianization, and the repeal of those same laws is only intelligible in light of its de-Christianization.

Benjamin Wiker, Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), pg. 100.

A fairly apples-to-apples comparison of what we see happening today in America is what was seen in the Roman Empire. The Twelve Tables – the earliest known Roman legal code, written about 450 B.C.E. – permitted a father to expose any female infant and any deformed or weak male infant to the natural elements to let them die in the fields. Philosophers Plato and Aristotle, both recommended infanticide as legitimate state policy. (cf. Plato, *Republic* 5; Aristotle, *Politics* 2,7) Seneca regarded the drowning of children at birth as both reasonable and commonplace. Tacitus stated that the Jewish mindset: “it is a deadly sin to kill an unwanted child,” was but another of the Jews’ “sinister and revolting” teachings (cf. *The Histories* 5.5). The famous Roman medical writer, Celsus, goes into great detail in *De medicina* (cf. 7.29) about how to surgically carry out an abortion. Etc.

Some of these thoughts are new to America. But they're not technically *new*.

So, the relevant question then is: How did the early Christians, with very little political, educational, or financial clout, react to the tragedy taking place around them?

For starters, we know without question that Christians viewed abortion and infanticide as wrong. The *Didache*, a manual/catechism of church teachings written in the late first century, states in the second chapter: “Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion nor kill them when born.”

Similarly, Justin Martyr, in the middle of the second century, wrote:

We have been taught that it is wicked to expose even newly-born children... (for) we would then be murderers.

Martyr, First Apology, pgs. 27-29

While we do have some records of Christians writing letters to government officials in hopes of persuading them, this seemingly created little, if any, changes in government policy. Rather, historian Rodney Stark says that what truly influenced the Roman Empire to eventually become sympathetic to Christianity's pro-life stances was the Christians' willingness to provide relief for the poor and taking in and supporting babies which had been left to die by their pagan parents.

Historian Will Durant wrote:

Politics Is Driving Me Crazy!

In many instances, Christians rescued exposed infants, baptized them, and brought them up with the aid of community funds.

Durant, Caesar and Christ:

A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from their Beginnings to A.D. 325,
Vol. 3, pg. 598

The Roman Emperor Julian, writing in the fourth century, regretted the progress of Christianity. He saw that it was causing Roman paganism to crumble. Why? From his perspective:

[The Christian faith] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.

Letter to Arsacius, High-priest of Galatia (362), in The Works of the Emperor Julian, Volume III (1913)

And here's the main takeaway. Yes, Christians should experience righteous anger at the thought of the slaughter of more unborn innocents. Anger is a mechanism that appropriately rises to defend what is right. But when anger, even righteous anger, transforms into repaying evil with evil, we forget that God alone justly brings wrath, and that our job is simply to overcome evil with good.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:17-21

I see no allowance in here for self-righteous social media tirades. I see no godliness in calling names like "idiots" or "psychopaths." I see the Apostle Paul telling us that the path to Christlikeness is showing the same grace to enemies that God showed to us. I see Paul similarly telling the church in Corinth ***"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside" (1 Cor. 5:12-13).***

I see the Early Christian Church, with minimal resources, actually influencing their pagan society

by adopting children, providing charity to the poor, and confounding the culture by a demonstration of humble, sacrificial love.

Social media rants cost nothing and can ruin everything. On the other hand, picking up crosses to follow Christ costs dearly but helps save the world and lifts up the name of Jesus.

Interestingly, Steven Pinker cited in his *NY Times* article that *“The women who sacrifice their offspring tend to be young, poor, unmarried and socially isolated.”* If provided adequate human resources – godly men who were willing to stay with them and help them raise kids, Christian friends who encourage them towards the beauty of God’s will, a church that is willing to financially come alongside a young pregnant woman and give her grace instead of shame – many of these young, poor, unmarried, marginalized women would make different decisions. The quick jab, sanctimonious social media post doesn’t move the needle an inch. Sacrificial love brings forth life.

This is not to say that wisdom brought forward in videos like this one aren’t enormously helpful. Being able to defend your Christian values using arguments from the Natural Knowledge of God are an important part of your Christian witness as well. Former NARAL co-founder, Bernard Nathanson, became a pro-life activist upon viewing the undeniable evidence before him with the advent of the ultrasound (chronicled in educational film *The Silent Scream*). He later became a Christian. Calm, logical arguments are an essential part of the public dialogue.

But the group Steven Pinker was identifying as prime candidates for abortion is shockingly close to the group of people in society that God, throughout Scripture, is constantly compelling his nation (OT) & Church (NT) to watch out for – the widows, orphans, foreigners, and poor. The Lord does not tell his people to rage against the evils of the world, but rather to keep their own lives free from evil and be a light to the world.

Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.
Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the
poor. Do not plot evil against each other.

Zechariah 7:9-10

In the recent history of American politics, when Christians shout, the country gets angry. But historically, when God’s people calmly point to the truth and lovingly sacrifice like Christ to lift up life and personhood, the world has been changed.

The good news is that we ALL have been forgiven and saved by a child whose life was unfairly taken. It was a costly tragedy for which we’re all equally guilty. But in his infinite wisdom, God used this horror to bring forth spiritual life. He can do it again.

14. How might you address the following conflicts in the life of a Christian who has citizenship in both of these kingdoms?

- We become involved in a political discussion and want to witness to our unbelieving friends.
- Increasingly in our culture, we as Christians are defined by what we are against and not what we are for.
- We are frustrated because the state does not reflect our Christian values.

15. Read Matthew 5:41. Jesus here refers to a Roman law that empowered a Roman soldier on the march to seize someone and make that person carry the soldier's pack for one mile. Jesus says, "Do it...and go with him an extra mile as well!" Why would a Christian be willing to do this?

Matthew 5:41 Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

16. How could we reflect this "go the extra mile" love in our citizenship?

17. Agree or Disagree: Seeking to get the government to reflect Christian values so we can live a life free of persecution is actually another form of the prosperity gospel.

18. What comfort do you find in what you've learned about church and state so far?

2 Chronicles 20:6 LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God in heaven? You are ruling over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might. There is no one who can stand up against you.



The Imperfect State

Introduction

In view of the differences between the church and the state, with one or two sentences, explain why it is wiser to look to the church rather than the state for our security.

Read Psalm 146.

Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD, O my soul. ²I will praise the LORD as long as I live. I will make music to my God as long as I exist.

³Do not trust in human helpers, in a mortal man who cannot save you. ⁴His spirit departs. He returns to the ground he came from. On that day, his plans have perished.

⁵Blessed is everyone who has the God of Jacob as his help. His hope is in the LORD his God, ⁶ the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything which is in them. He is the one who stays faithful forever. ⁷He obtains justice for the oppressed. He gives food to the hungry. The LORD releases prisoners. ⁸The LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down. The LORD loves the righteous. ⁹The LORD watches over the aliens. The fatherless and the widow he sustains, but he turns aside the way of the wicked.

¹⁰The LORD reigns forever. Your God, O Zion, rules for all generations. Praise the LORD.

1. Why are we not able to trust in the state and its leaders?
2. Why should we put our trust in God?
3. What are the things that God is concerned about?
4. What are some ways God accomplishes his purposes?

5. The state, which God has instituted, has a dual personality. The state does good work when it protects and provides for its citizens, but the state is an ally of Satan when it works to destroy the faith of God's people. How do the following passages describe the state as an agent of God or an agent of evil?

(Ages 20-49) *Acts 2:22-29 They were listening to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices, shouting, "Rid the earth of this fellow, for he is not fit to live!"²³ When they started shouting and throwing off their cloaks and throwing dust into the air,²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be brought into the barracks. He directed that Paul be interrogated by whipping, in order to learn why the people were shouting at him like this.²⁵ As they stretched him for the whipping, Paul asked the centurion standing by, "Is it legal for you to whip a man who is a Roman citizen and who has not been found guilty by a proper trial?"²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and said, "What are you about to do? This man is a Roman citizen!"²⁷ The commander came and asked him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" He answered, "Yes."²⁸ Then the commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship for a large sum of money." Paul said, "But I was born a citizen."²⁹ Immediately, those who were about to interrogate him moved away from him. The commander was also alarmed when he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen, because he had tied him up.*

Philippians 1:12-18 I want you to know, brothers, that the things which happened to me actually took place to advance the gospel.¹³ And so it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to all the rest, that I am in chains because of Christ.¹⁴ And, through my chains, the majority of the brothers in the Lord have become much more confident about daring to speak the word of God fearlessly.¹⁵ Some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, and others out of good will.¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel.¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking they can cause trouble for me while I am in chains.¹⁸ What does it matter? Only this, that in every way, whether for outward appearance or for the truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

Agent of God –

Agent of evil –

(Ages 50-66) *Luke 2:1-7 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ And everyone went to register, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the town of Nazareth, into Judea, to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was from the house and family line of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was pledged to him in marriage and was expecting a child. ⁶ And so it was that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Matthew 2:13-16 After the Wise Men were gone, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to Joseph in a dream. He said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, because Herod will search for the child in order to kill him." ¹⁴ Joseph got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵ He stayed there until the death of Herod. This happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." ¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Wise Men, he was furious. He issued orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding countryside, from two years old and under. This was in keeping with the exact time he had learned from the Wise Men.

Agent of God –

Agent of evil –

(Ages 67+) *Ezra 1:1-4 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD given through the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia. Cyrus circulated a proclamation throughout his kingdom and recorded it in a written document. ² This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: The LORD, the God of Heaven, has given all the kingdoms of the earth to me. He has appointed me to build a house for him in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³ From all his people, whoever among you is willing (may the LORD his God be with him) is permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah. He may build the House of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴ Any of the exiles who have survived, in any place where they are living as resident aliens, may receive support from the people of that place: silver, gold, goods, and livestock, along with their voluntary contributions for the House of the God who is in Jerusalem.*

Daniel 3 King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue. It was ninety feet tall and nine feet wide. He set it up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers,

the judges, the magistrates, and all of the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up... The herald called out loudly, "To you peoples, nations, and languages, this command is given: ⁵ When you hear the sound of the horn, the flute, the lyre, the harp, the triangular harp, the drum, and all kinds of musical instruments, you will fall down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into the blazing fiery furnace... There are Jews whom you appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely, Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego. These men do not pay attention to you, Your Majesty. They do not serve your gods, and they do not worship the gold statue that you set up."

Agent of God –

Agent of evil –

6. How has God's agenda (that is, his desire to save us) been evident throughout the centuries even when governments persecuted the church? Give examples.

7. Read Acts 4:16-20. These verses clearly show us that when the state tells us to do wrong or forbids us to proclaim the gospel, we ought to obey God rather than man. Discuss which of the following would fall under that category.

Acts 4:16-20 They asked, "What should we do with these men? To be sure, it is evident to all who live in Jerusalem that a miraculous sign has been done through them, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ However, in order that this may spread no further among the people, let us give them a strict warning not to speak any longer to anyone in this name."

¹⁸ Then they summoned them and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Decide whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God. ²⁰ For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

- In your role as a public school teacher, you are required to teach evolution. Can you do this, or should you refuse?
 - The state might say you must offer your services (like baking a wedding cake) to people regardless of their lifestyles or sexual identification. Can you do this, or should you refuse?
 - Your local parent-teacher organization wants your public school to begin its day with prayer. On which side of the fence would you fall?
 - You are an official in the government office charged with issuing wedding licenses. A gay couple comes to you for a license. Should you oblige or refuse to provide the license?
 - Present day examples right now: mask wearing; not meeting together in church; other.
8. The book of Daniel gives us excellent examples of how God's people act when their government oppresses them or forces them to act against their consciences. In each story, tell what the faithful did not do and what they did do.
- *(men)* Daniel 1
 - *(women)* Daniel 3
 - *(pastor)* Daniel 6

- 9.** Some religious leaders call the United States a “Christian” country. They argue that since our nation’s God is the God of the Bible (based on the mistaken assumption that the faith of all our founding fathers was Christian), our government needs to operate on Christian principles, or God will bring judgment down on the United States. Evaluate that opinion.
- 10.** There is a deep divide in our political discourse today. We are subjected to false information, exaggerations, and angry rhetoric. What will guide a Christian’s actions and speech in regard to political discourse?



The Separation of Church and State

Introduction

God's purposes are best served when the church and the state remain separate. The church should not interfere with the state, nor should the state interfere with the church. When the church tries to function as the state, it forsakes the gospel in favor of the sword. When the state tries to function as the church, it uses the sword to do what only the gospel can accomplish. Christians in our culture who are active in the political world have to be especially careful to remember this.

Read Proverbs 28:2-12.

A rebellious land has many rulers, but one man with understanding and knowledge provides stability. ³A poor man who oppresses the poor is a driving rain that leaves no food. ⁴Those who abandon the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law oppose them. ⁵Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand everything. ⁶Better a poor person who walks in his integrity than a rich person who is hypocritical. ⁷The son who keeps the law has understanding, but a companion of gluttons brings shame upon his father. ⁸A person who increases his wealth by piling up interest gathers it for someone who is generous to the needy. ⁹A person who turns his ear away from the law—even his prayer is an abomination. ¹⁰A person who leads the upright along an evil way will fall into his own pit, but people of integrity will inherit good. ¹¹A wealthy person is wise in his own eyes, but a needy person with understanding will expose him. ¹²When the righteous triumph, there is much celebration, but when the wicked rise to power, people hide.

1. As you read Proverbs 28, pick out traits of a “bad government” and a “good government”?

Bad government –

Good government –

2. The state operates by means of natural law and human reason. But the difference between good and bad governments generally involves more than a lack of wisdom or common sense among its leaders. When do rulers and governments go rogue? Give examples.

3. Unfortunately, governments acting in the name of religion can be just as corrupt and misguided. They often persecute those who obey the Lord. Give examples.

Jesus taught a separation of church and state - Read Matthew 22:15-22.

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and plotted together how to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are truthful and teach the way of God in accord with the truth. You are not concerned about gaining anyone's approval because you are not swayed by appearances. ¹⁷ So tell us, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸ But Jesus knew their evil purpose and said, "Why are you testing me, hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for the tax." They brought him a denarius. ²⁰ He asked them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" ²¹ "Caesar's," they replied to him. Then he said to them, "Therefore give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. Then they left him and went away.

4. The inscription on the coin would have said that Caesar was a god. How did the enemies of Jesus plan to trap him with their question?

5. Why was Jesus' answer the perfect answer?

6. What do we owe to God and to those who govern us?

7. What danger exists when people don't recognize the separation of church and state or confuse the distinction between the two?

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7.

First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all those who are in authority, in order that we might live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷For this testimony, I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I speak the truth; I am not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

11. Paul urges us to pray for those who are ruling over us. He said this even though the Roman government was evil and anti-Christian. What should we ask for in our prayers for the government?

12. How does a stable government aid in the proclamation of the gospel?

The state and the church can work toward common goals

Although the United States Constitution attempts to separate church and state, it is impossible to separate them completely. Consider some of these areas where the two seem to mix.

13. In Wisconsin, the state has a voucher system through which children of low-income families can receive reimbursement for private education, including parochial schools. Is that a blurring of church and state? What may be some things to be concerned about? (You could make the same argument for lunch programs, transportation, etc.)

14. Churches enjoy huge tax advantages in our country. They don't pay income tax or, in most cases, property tax. Is the church in danger of being too connected to the state? Why or why not?

15. You are at the local caucus of the party of your choice. Certain issues arise. How might you...

∇ argue the case for making abortion illegal?

∇ argue against a homosexuality marriage being equal to a one man, one woman marriage?

∇ argue the case for making assisted suicide illegal?

16. A congresswoman asks to hold a political rally at your church. How would you respond to her?

Read John 17:15-18.

¹⁵I am not asking that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the Evil One. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

¹⁷“Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world.

17. What did Jesus mean when he said that his believers are “not of the world”?

18. Although we are “not of the world,” Jesus emphasizes that he has sent us into the world and that he does not want his Father to take us out of the world. Would Jesus want us to set up a separate Christian society apart from the worldly culture in which we find ourselves? Would Jesus want us simply to tolerate our earthly citizenship and stay out of government affairs?

19. If we decide to get involved in political activities ourselves, what mustn't be our goal?

20. Agree or Disagree: The church has a responsibility to tell its members which political candidates they should vote for.

21. Agree or Disagree: The church needs to, in fact must, speak out against the evils of society.

22. How can we ensure that we honor the separation of church and state while still recognizing the appropriate connections that exist?

For Next Time: Read the book of Nehemiah



Our Messy Political World

Lessons from Nehemiah

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11.

In the month of Kislev of the twentieth year, I was in Susa, the citadel. ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came to me with men from Judah. I asked them about the remnant of the Jews, who had survived the captivity and had escaped from it, and about Jerusalem.

³ They said to me, "The survivors from the captivity who are there in the province are in great misery and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned."

⁴ When I heard about these things, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of Heaven. ⁵ I said: Please, LORD, the God of Heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God, who preserves the covenant and faithfulness for those who love him and keep his commands: ⁶ Let your ear be attentive and your eyes be open as you hear the prayer of your servant today, which I am now praying before you day and night, concerning the Israelites, who are your servants. I am also confessing the sins of the people of Israel that we committed against you. I and my father's house have also sinned. ⁷ We have acted very corruptly against you, and we have not kept the commands, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances that you commanded Moses your servant.

⁸ Please remember the command you gave to Moses your servant when you said, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. ⁹ But when you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, even if you have been scattered to the end of heaven, from there I will gather them, and I will bring them to the place where I have chosen to make my name dwell." ¹⁰ They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed with your great power and your mighty hand.

¹¹ Please, my Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayers of your servants who are delighted to revere your name. Make your servant successful today, and give him mercy in this man's presence.

I was cupbearer to the king.

1. What was the problem presented to Nehemiah?

2. What was the first thing he did about it?

3. What kind of prayer agenda might the Christian have who is involved in government or politics? (c.f. 1 Timothy 2:1,2; Acts 4:23-30)

Read Nehemiah 2:1-9.

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, wine was being served to the king, and I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad in his presence, ² so the king said to me, "Why do you look sad, since you are not sick? This must be sadness in your heart."

Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why shouldn't I look sad when the city, the place of my ancestors' tombs, lies in ruins, and its gates have been consumed by fire?" ⁴ Then the king said to me, "What do you want?" So I prayed to the God of Heaven, ⁵ and I said to the king, "If it seems good to the king, and if you look upon your servant with favor, then send me to Judah, to the city where my ancestors' tombs are, and let me rebuild it."

⁶ The king said to me, while the queen was sitting next to him, "How long will your journey be and when will you return?" The king was pleased to send me, so I gave him a definite time. ⁷ I also said to the king, "If it seems good to the king, please give me letters for the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will grant me safe passage through that province until I come to Judah, ⁸ also a letter to Asaph, superintendent of the king's forest, so that he will give me lumber to lay beams for the gates of the citadel of the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." The king gave them to me, because the good hand of my God was upon me.

⁹ Then I came to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, and I gave them the king's letters. The king had sent army officers and cavalry with me.

4. It is obvious that the king highly respected his advisor. What characteristics do we find in Nehemiah that stand as examples for believers who serve in government positions?

Read Nehemiah 6:1-15.

When it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and there was no breach left in it (although at that time I had not installed doors in the gates),² Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me: "Come, let's meet together in Kephirim in the Plain of Ono." (However, they were planning to harm me.)

³ So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am working on an important project, and I am not able to come down. Why should the project stop while I leave it and come down to you?"⁴ They sent messages like this to me four times, and I answered them that same way each time.

⁵ Then Sanballat sent his servant to me with a message like this for a fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. ⁶ In it was written, "It is rumored among the nations, and Gashmu also says that you and the Jews are planning to rebel. This is the reason you are building the wall. According to these reports, you will be their king. ⁷ You have also set up prophets to make a proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'A king is in Judah.' Now reports like these will be heard by the king. So now come, let us consult with one another."

⁸ So I sent a reply to him: "These things that you are saying have not been done, since you are simply making them up."⁹ So all of them were trying to intimidate us, thinking, "Their hands will grow weary of the work, and it will not be finished." So now, strengthen my hands!

¹⁰ Then I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel. (He was restricted.) He said, "Let's meet at the house of God in the middle of the temple. Let's close the doors of the temple, since they are coming to kill you—at night they are coming to kill you."

¹¹ I said, "Should a man like me flee? Should someone like me go to the temple to save my life? I won't go!"¹² I realized that God had not sent him, but he had spoken the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ For this purpose he was hired—to make me afraid so that I would do this and sin. Then they would have given me a bad reputation, so that they could discredit me. ¹⁴ My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat in light of these actions and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who were trying to intimidate me. ¹⁵ So the wall was finished in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth of Elul.

5. How do some people today, including some government leaders, use a similar tactic to undermine the work and message of Christians?

6. Why will Christians always be attacked and undermined by some in government?

7. Following Nehemiah's example, list at least three things you can do when you are attacked for being a Christian.

Read Nehemiah 13:15-22.

¹⁵ In those days I saw in Judah some people who were treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, and figs and all kinds of loads, and then bringing them to Jerusalem on the Sabbath. So I warned them on the day when they were selling food. ¹⁶ Moreover, some people from Tyre lived in the city. They were bringing fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling it on the Sabbath to the Jews—even in Jerusalem! ¹⁷ So I accused the Judean nobles and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, by which you are profaning the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Didn't your ancestors do this, and as a result our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? You are adding more to his wrath by profaning the Sabbath."

¹⁹ As it began to grow dark within the gates of Jerusalem before the beginning of the Sabbath, I gave orders to close the doors and not to open them until after the Sabbath. I also stationed some of my servants at the gates to ensure that no load would come in on the Sabbath day. ²⁰ Once or twice the merchants and those who sell all kinds of merchandise spent the night outside of Jerusalem. ²¹ However, I warned them and said to them, "Why are you spending the night next to the wall? If you do this again, I will use force against you." From that time onward they did not come on the Sabbath. ²² Then I told the Levites that they should purify themselves and come to guard the gates in order to sanctify the Sabbath day.

8. We see that after the walls of Jerusalem were built, the merchants were not respecting the Sabbath. What has been the cause(s) of the erosion in our culture when it comes to keeping the day of worship sacred?

9. We do not live in a theocracy as Nehemiah did. What can Christians do to proactively influence the culture in which we live?

10. Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, even when (and, perhaps, *especially* when) they are involved in government and politics. List things Christians today should beware of and be careful about regarding their activity within the political field. Especially...

∇ in regard to so-called facts:

∇ in regard to our attitude toward those with whom we may disagree:

∇ in regard to our attitude toward all who are in authority over us:

11. How might we apply Matthew 10:16 to Christians who are active in politics?

¹⁶ "Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Read 2 Timothy 1:8; 2:15; 4:2.

⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Instead, join with me in suffering for the gospel while relying on the power of God.

¹⁵ Make every effort to present yourself to God as one who is approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, correctly handling the word of truth.

² Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not.^[a] Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching

12. According to these passages, how should Christians carry on their work when they face frustrating conditions or when it seems as if the Word is not working?

Read 1 Peter 2:13

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the king as the supreme authority

13. Explain how the phrase “because of the Lord” helps us deal with such objections as “but my government is run by evil men” or “but my leaders don’t deserve my respect”?

14. Getting involved in politics is not a bad thing. It is a good area where Christians can be salt and light because they respect the boundaries between church and state. It is also a wonderful place where Christians can show that they love their neighbors. Evaluate the following statement made by a Christian friend with liberal leanings: “It might be a powerful witness to non-Christians if they saw in political discourse and action how much Christians love their neighbor. I know many Christians show this love as individuals, but from my perspective, that doesn’t come through in conservative political messaging.” What do you think?