

THE PILGRIM POLITICS OF A CHRISTIAN VOTER

by David Lee Burris

111 THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME
 Arr. by A. E. B. Arr. Albert E. Brumley

1. This world is not my home, I'm just a pass - ing thru, My treas - ures
 2. They're all ex - pect - ing me, and that's one thing I know, My Sav - iour
 3. I have a lov - ing moth - er up in glo - ry land, I don't ex -
 4. Just up in glo - ry land we'll live e - ter - nal - ly, The saints on

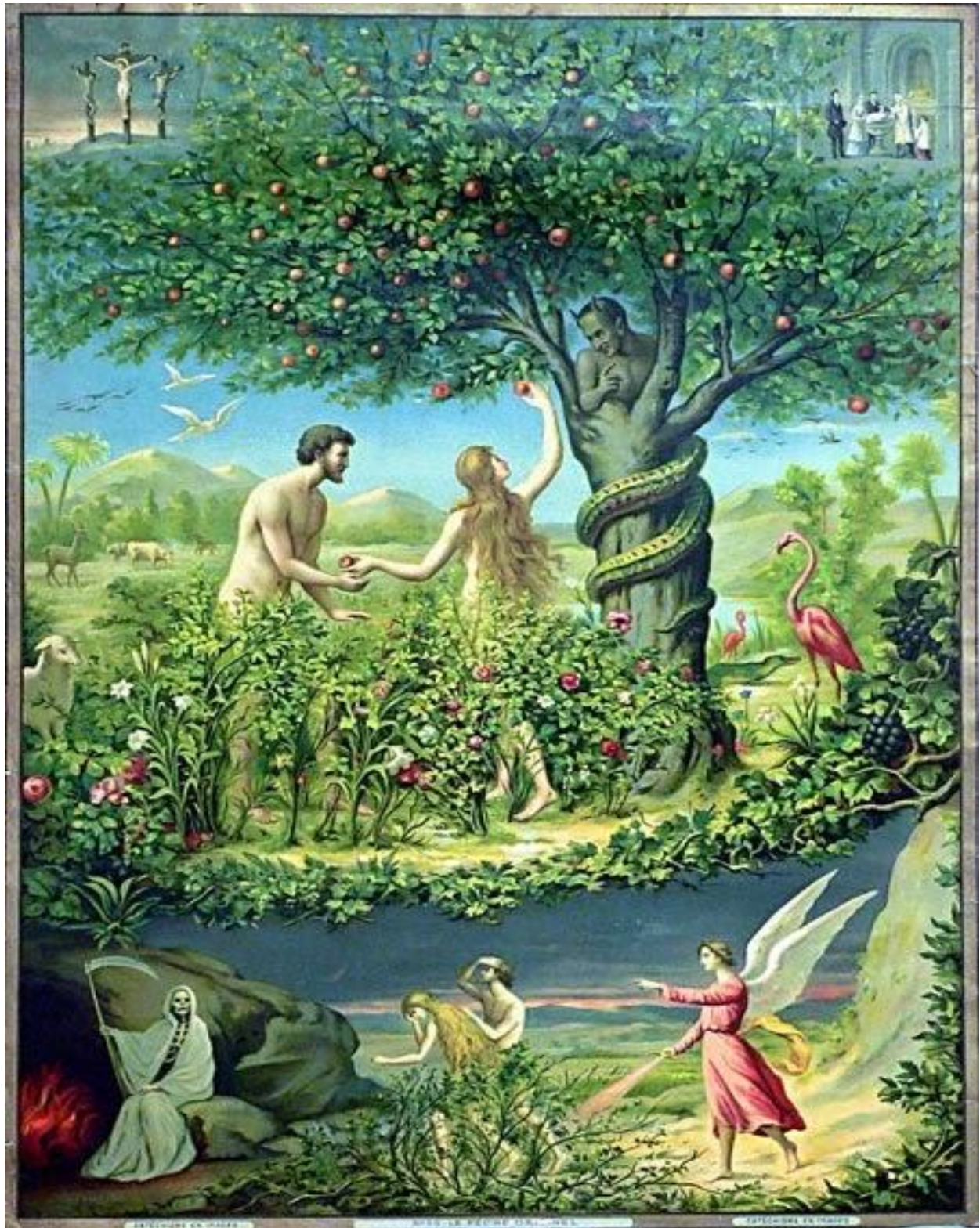
are laid up some where be - yond the blue; The an - gels beck - on me from
 pardoned me and now I on - ward go; I know He'll take me thru tho
 pect to stop un - til I shake her hand; She's wait - ing now for me in
 ev - 'ry hand are shout ing vic - to - ry, Their song of sweet - est praise drift

Fine.
 heav - en's o - pen door,
 I am weak and poor And I can't feel at home in this world an - y - more.
 heav - en's o - pen door
 back from heav - en's shore

CHORUS
 O Lord, you know I have no friend like you, If heav - en's not my home then

D. S.
 Lord what will I do; The an - gels beck - on me from heav - en's o - pen door,

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During the 1990's when I was very politically active heading up state-wide campaign and issue advocacy organizations I was often asked to include among my newspaper editorial columns advice for Christian voters. Once I had gone on record disagreeing with the block voting candidate endorsement strategy of the Christian Coalition many wondered as to my personal philosophy. Now that I am in retirement and no longer considered by any stretch of the imagination a political influencer - I think the timing is much more appropriate in order to address this subject. For what it's worth - I will use this format to share my thoughts going into this historic November 2020 election. However, if the reader expects me to conclude in any sort of recommendation as to who is the better choice between Donald Trump and Joe Biden they will be sorely disappointed and should probably stop reading right now.

Subject Introduction. Let me start by sharing a story about my father David Paul Burris. From my earliest memories my dad's favorite selection of song when leading congregational singing was "This World Is Not My Home, I'm Just a Passing Through." This song summed up his worldview/life-view and was fittingly sung at his funeral. This sojourner motif determined his decisions and served as background to his personal perspective. As his son, I have shared in his Pilgrim Perspective by way of prioritizing my issues and picking my fights - including those viewed as political.

Eden-to-Eden - Garden-to-Garden - Tree-of-Life-to-Tree-of-Life

Human History is from Eden to Exile. According to the Bible this alienation from home in paradise is the human condition. Furthermore, the New Testament teaches us that Jesus Christ came to share this exile in order to show us the true way home.

EXILES, SOJOURNERS & DUAL CITIZENSHIP

מִקְדָּם (*mikedem*) at the east (3:23)

After God expelled Adam from the Garden of Eden he placed the Cherubim and the revolving flaming sword in a place מִקְדָּם of the Garden of Eden. What does מִקְדָּם mean?

The most common translation of the word מִקְדָּם is—**east**, namely, the Cherubim were placed to the east of the Garden of Eden. However, in Hebrew this word also has another meaning, which makes it even more interesting—קֹדֶם (*kodem*) **before, prior to**.

Here is an example of the use of the word מִקְדָּם in Isaiah 51:9:

← עוֹרֵי כִימֵי קֶדֶם דְּרוֹת עוֹלָמִים
→ *uri kimey kedem dorot olamim*
awake, as in the days of old, the generations of ancient times

The word מִקְדָּם (*kedem*) here means the days which were before.

Therefore, we may understand our verse in a slightly different way: God placed the Cherubim in a place that preceded the time when the Garden of Eden was created.

We should mention here that the Garden of Eden was created after God created Adam (see Genesis 2:7–8) This means that the entire world already existed, whereas the Garden of Eden was created during the final stages of the Creation.

Consequently, the first translation of the verse shows that the Cherubim were in a GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION in relation to the Garden of Eden, and the second translation indicates to us a PLACE CONNECTED WITH TIME—a place that existed before God created the Garden of Eden.

We've written that מִקְדָּם means east—but how do we learn this?

In Hebrew, the word for east is מִזְרָח (*mizrach*). As we frequently point out, the Hebrew language is constructed layer upon layer, and this is beautifully demonstrated in this case, too.

First of all, let us look at the word מִזְרָח. The word comes from the word זְרִיחָה (*zricha*) **sunrise**. As we all know the sun rises in the east.

Now the word מִקְדָּם. This word, as we have said, indicates something that is early, before.

The **earliest** (מִקְדָּם—*mukdam*) thing we see in daytime is the sun. This is how the words מִקְדָּם and מִזְרָח come to have an identical meaning.¹

¹ Tzadka, Y., Herman, D., & Kihaly, O. (Eds.). (n.d.). [Choice Words from the Story of Exile from the Garden of Eden](#) (pp. 16–17). Jerusalem: Good Times Ltd.

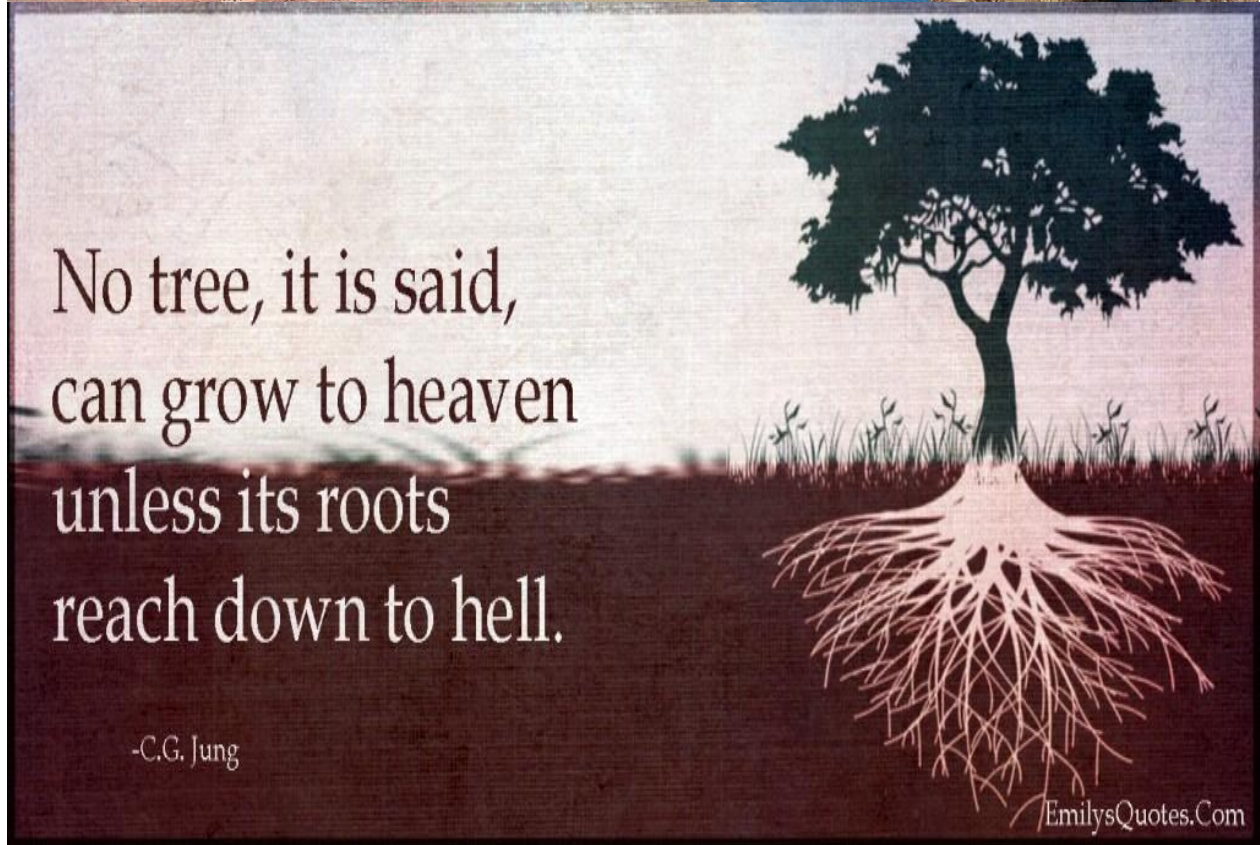
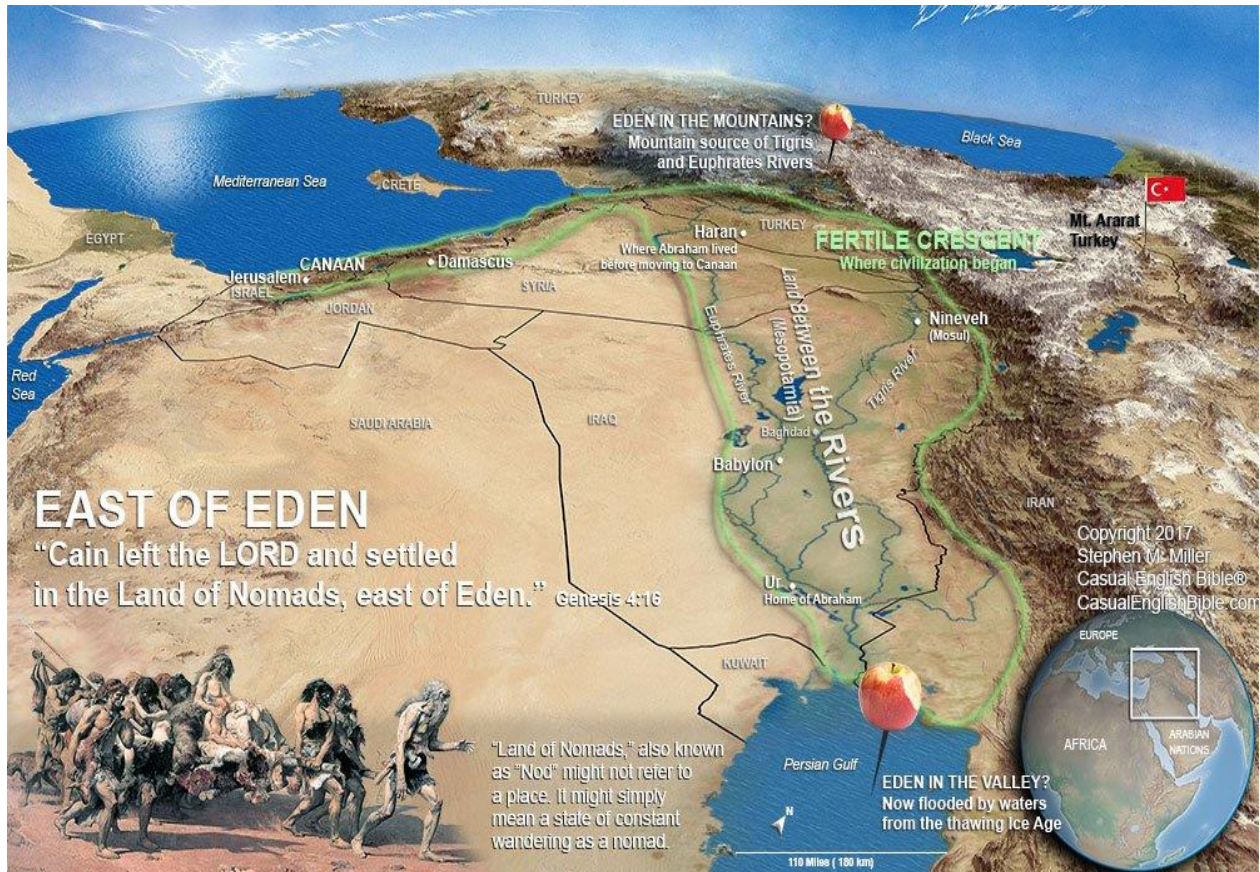
No longer innocent, after not only reaching for and eating the ripe, luscious, forbidden fruit, but after covering up their sin and hiding from God, Adam and Eve were in danger of living in permanent separation from their Creator. When they exiled God from their hearts, God, as an act of great grace and mercy, drove them—the word means thrust, hurled, expelled—from the garden of Eden. Though God had not withheld the fruit of the Tree of Life, now (lest they eat from that tree and live forever in their state of death) God cast them out. It sounds rough, harsh, and judgmental, but this exile would mean Adam and Eve’s salvation. Their physical exile became a tangible reminder of their spiritual self-exile—forever they would remember Eden. The smell of rich earth, a flash of a bird’s wing, a glimpse of a certain color, would pull them back to that place of perfection, back to the cause of their exile. Adam and Eve also saw in the very next act of creation—their physical union and the birth of their first two children—the outworking of their exile. The consequences for choosing to live in separation from God meant suffering for their own children. The first Adam would go down in history as the one who exiled an entire world from God and set in motion a life of seeking and wandering for the entire human race.²

² Rubietta, J. (2014). [*Finding life: from eden to gethsemane - the garden restored*](#). Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House.

A Theological Framework

Jesus of Nazareth came to reveal God's unrealized intentions for this world. What Jesus was sent by his Father to teach us was that God had originally intended human relationships to flourish as they were watered by a divine ethic of unconditional love, unending mercy, limitless charity, bottomless generosity, and perpetual peacefulness. To this end, all human beings, without exception, are distinguished from other living creatures by their possession of the image of God, the *imago Dei* (Gen. 1:26–27). Nowhere in Scripture are we ever told that humanity's possession of God's image has been lost, altered, or diminished in any way by the introduction of sin into God's universe. Genesis 3 tells that part of the tale of how God's good creation has "fallen" via the introduction of sin, abandoning the Creator's intentions, even as the image of God continues unchanged within us. Human beings now exist as divine image-bearers who are also burdened by the distorting corruption of sin. Human society actively cultivates the same sinful rebelliousness demonstrated by our first parents when they chose to ignore God's one and only command: "Everything in this world is for you, except this one tree; don't eat from it" (Gen. 2:16–17). Preferring to focus on the one thing they were forbidden to do, rather than the many things they were encouraged to do, the first human beings passed on their newly warped inclinations to everyone who came after. Deviating from God's design became forever preferable to following God's instructions. Simultaneously, God's image continues to shine within every human being, frequently revealing itself through a humanitarian conscience and tender acts of mercy in men and women who prove that God's creation is still a good place, where sin has not destroyed everything.³

³ Crump, D., & Rah, S.-C. (2018). [*Pledge allegiance: a believer's guide to kingdom citizenship in twenty-first-century america*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.



Longing for Home: The Life of a Sojourner

by Jeremy Lallier

What does it mean to be a sojourner in this physical, temporary life—and why does it matter where we call home?

Sojourning from home

Followers of God have a long history of not quite fitting in. Of not quite *belonging*. When Abraham entered the Promised Land, he did so as “a sojourner and foreigner” (Genesis 23:4, English Standard Version). Centuries later, God led Abraham’s descendants, the nation of Israel, out of slavery and into that same Promised Land, but with a reminder: “The land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me” (Leviticus 25:23). A few *more* centuries later, one of the nation’s greatest kings would admit to God, “I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were” (Psalm 39:12).

That’s an interesting word—*sojourner*. It’s an old one, and we don’t use it much anymore. A sojourner is simply someone who lives away from home. It makes sense why Abraham would call himself a sojourner. When God called him to go to the Promised Land, he left his familial home behind and became something of a wanderer. But what about Israel, the nation that inherited and lived in the land God promised Abraham? And what about David, a king of Israel who lived in a palace among God’s chosen people? How could *they* be sojourners in their own land—in their own homes?

Seeking a homeland

The author of Hebrews spends some time talking about men and women of faith—followers of God who stayed true to their calling, even when times got tough.

Abraham was one of those people. So was his wife, Sarah. So was Moses, who led the Israelites to the Promised Land. So was King David, whom God called a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22).

These heroes of the Bible “all died in faith ... and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

Strangers and pilgrims. Sojourners *on the earth*. That’s the key to this puzzle. Most sojourners have their home in a different town, a different state, a different country. The sojourners of Hebrews 11 had their home in a different *world*—a Kingdom yet to come to this earth. They viewed their time here as time away from their true home. But why?

The passage continues: “For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (verses 14-16).

When the author of Hebrews wrote about “a homeland,” he used the Greek word *patris*, which refers to a “fatherland” or “native place.” To put it another way, the men and women of Hebrews 11 weren’t just looking for some place to call home. They were looking for something specific. They were looking for *their* homeland, *their* native place—the place they could plant their flags and say, “This is where I belong.”

Embracing the dichotomy

Being a Christian means coming to terms with a peculiar dichotomy:

This world isn't your home.

This world isn't your home. You were born in this world, you live in this world and, barring significant advances in space travel, you are going to die in this world.

But it isn't *home*. It isn't the place to plant your flag.

Homecoming

Abraham, Moses, David and the other heroes of faith all died without setting foot in the home they were marching toward—but they died “in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

Our time here in this world—this society, this age of human misrule—is temporary. It's a sojourn, whether we like it or not—and eventually, that sojourn will end. If we're willing to accept that—to wait, as Abraham did, “for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (verse 10) and to follow God and do His will—then you and I will join the ranks of those faithful heroes who came before us, waiting on the promises. Waiting on their home.

Living as Strangers in a Foreign Land

The existential tension inherent in being a resident alien is another way of describing the personal implications of citizenship in an already/not yet kingdom, as these New Testament verses show (all from the NIV version):

Philippians 3:19–20: “Their mind [i.e. those who are enemies of the cross] is on earthly things. But our citizenship is *in heaven*. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Hebrews 11:13–16: “They admitted [i.e., the Old Testament saints living by faith] that they were *aliens and strangers* on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own . . . they are longing for a better country—a heavenly one.”

1 Peter 1:1: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God’s elect, *strangers* in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.”

1 Peter 1:17: “Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live your lives as *strangers* here in reverent fear.”

1 Peter 2:11–12: “Dear friends, I urge you, as *aliens and strangers* in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 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.”

These verses highlight two important points. First, all followers of Jesus are aliens in this present age. It does not provide them with their true home, nor is it their final destination. The word translated as “alien” in these texts typically refers to those who are “strangers,” “foreigners,” or generally thought of as “other.” They are people “who are not at home, or who lack native roots, in the language, customs, culture, or political, social, and religious allegiances of the people among whom they dwell.”⁶ The Old Testament precedent for this alien-stranger metaphor comes from the book of Exodus, where the alien nation, Israel, is liberated by God from Egyptian slavery and led out toward the Promised Land of Canaan. Identifying God’s people as aliens and strangers in Hebrews and 1 Peter implies that the other features of Israel’s story are also in play. These blessed aliens (followers of Jesus) must be moving out of an inhospitable land of servitude (this present age) and traveling toward a Promised Land of blessing and salvation (the new heaven and the new earth).

Second, the crucial piece of evidence demonstrating a disciple’s kingdom citizenship is a noticeably different lifestyle, a lifestyle that sometimes will prove offensive to the powers that be. The principal demonstration of the kingdom’s real presence is not miracles, signs, and wonders, success in electoral politics, or shaping the terms of public debate, but the transformation of repentant sinners who are now living godly lives, women and men who implement the ethics of reversal because they want to be like Jesus. By following the upside-down direction of Jesus’s kingdom ethics, disciples are expressing the *already* presence of God’s heavenly kingdom in this fallen world that is *not yet* fully conquered by God’s redemptive reign.

This is why Christians will (or, at least, should) appear out of place in society. Kingdom citizens are not only designated as strangers and aliens in the here and now; they will live a quality of life that makes them very strange strangers, sometimes becoming as alienating as they are alien, pilgrims with no place to lay their heads, social and cultural oddballs who simply will not play by the generally accepted rules in this world's game of life.

A significant extrabiblical witness to the transformational power of Jesus's kingdom ethics appears in a document known as the Letter to Diognetus.⁸ Throughout the letter this writer explains that the church's faithful, gracious ways of living were a major factor in his own decision to follow Jesus:

While dwelling in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot is cast, and adhering to the local customs in both dress and diet and the rest of life, they show forth the remarkable and confessedly paradoxical character of their own citizenship. They live in their own homelands, but as resident aliens; they participate in all things as citizens, but endure all things as strangers. Every foreign country is their homeland but every homeland is a foreign country. . . . They spend time on earth, but they have their citizenship in heaven. . . . They love everyone, but are persecuted by everyone. . . . They are extremely poor, but they make many rich. . . . They are reviled, but they bless. They are insulted, but they show honor. . . . When they are punished they rejoice as those who are made alive. (5.4–16)

The author is a Christian who firmly grasps the believer's existential paradox of being a resident alien poised between heaven and earth, living as a citizen of God's already/not yet kingdom. This makes the church a **"third race," as Christians were sometimes called in the ancient world**. They are neither Greek nor barbarian, although they live among both of these groups. While a cynic might suggest that this idealistic description of the early Christian church was nothing more than the overwrought exaggerations of a fan cheering for his home team, multiple pieces of evidence from the ancient world tell us that such a church—such collections of faithful, loving, self-sacrificial people—actually existed.

The exemplary description of practical Christianity found in the Letter to Diognetus is fleshed out by the allusions he makes to a number of New Testament texts drawn from both the synoptic Gospels, with their references to showing mercy while suffering for the kingdom ("they are reviled, but they bless," Matt. 5:10–11, 44; Luke 6:22, 28), and various New Testament Epistles, with their references to the next life ("their citizenship is in heaven," Phil. 3:20). This association provides substantiating evidence for the thematic connection I am suggesting between (a) Jesus's kingdom teaching and (b) the description of God's people as aliens, strangers, sojourners, and citizens of heaven. The kingdom is serving as a determinative concept without being mentioned explicitly. And even though it may happen in fits and starts, Jesus's followers make heavenly, eschatological life an earthly, temporal reality as they reproduce the exemplary kingdom lifestyle modeled for them by their crucified and resurrected Lord and Savior.⁴

⁴ Crump, D., & Rah, S.-C. (2018). [*Pledge allegiance: a believer's guide to kingdom citizenship in twenty-first-century america*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Descriptive Terms of Christians Pilgrims, Sojourners, Strangers

By Mike Willis

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11).

On several occasions, the New Testament uses the words “stranger,” “sojourner,” and “pilgrim” as descriptive names for Christians. For many of us; our acquaintance with the idea of “pilgrim” is largely derived from the usage of the word to describe the Pilgrim fathers who founded Plymouth Colony in 1620. Some would also think of a pilgrim as one who takes a “pilgrimage,” i.e., a journey to some distant sacred place. But neither of these ideas is an accurate usage of the New Testament meaning of the words.

Definition of Terms

The New Testament words for “pilgrim,” “sojourner,” and “stranger” are *parepidemos* and *parolkos*. However, the meaning of these words are related to the Old Testament usage of *gur* and *ger*. The verb *gur* means “sojourn . . . dwell for a (definite or indef.) time, dwell as a new-comer (cf. *ger*) without original rights” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 157). Its noun cognate *ger* means “sojourner . . . temporary dweller, new-comer (no inherited rights)” (*ibid.*, p. 158). These words are used to describe Abraham’s stay in Egypt to escape the effects of the famine in Canaan (Gen. 12:10), Lot’s stay in Sodom (Gen. 19:9), and a non-citizen dwelling in a foreign country (Ex. 12:48-49).

Parepidemos has a similar meaning. Thayer defines the word as follows: “Prop. one who comes from a foreign country into a city of land to reside there by the side of the natives; hence stranger; sojourning in a strange place, a foreigner, . . . in the N. T. metaph. in ref. to heaven as the native country, one who sojourns on earth; so of Christians in 1 Pet. i.1. . .” (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 488). The word is used in Acts 2:10 to describe the Jews from Rome who were visiting in Jerusalem to observe the day of Pentecost and in Acts 17:21 to denote the visitors to the city of Athens who spent their time in “nothing other than telling or hearing something new.” Parotkos is defined similarly as witnessed by Thayer: “1. in class. Grk. dwelling near, neighboring. 2. in the Scriptures a stranger, foreigner, one who lives in a place without the right of citizenship . . .a” (Ibid., p. 490). It is used to describe the patriarch’s sojourn in Canaan, a land in which they had no citizenship (Acts 7:6; Heb. 11:9), Israel’s stay for 400 years in Egypt (Acts 13:17), and Moses’ flight and subsequent stay in Midian after he had killed an Egyptian (Acts 7:29).

Although these terms are translated by the English word “pilgrim” in some places, this translation is poor. The primary meaning of “pilgrim” is “to travel.” “Both the Heb (see Ger) and Gr words contain the idea of foreign residence. but it is the residence and not travel that is implied. Consequently, ‘pilgrim’ is a poor tr, and ,sojourner’ should have been used throughout” (“Pilgrim, Pilgrimage,” International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, P. 2398).

Ideas Denoted By These Words

In Eph. 2:19, Paul said, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.” Earlier in this passage, Paul had declared that we Gentiles had formerly been separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in this world.

Fortunately, Christ came, broke down the barrier of the dividing wall—the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, and made possible the reconciliation to God of both Jew and Gentile in one body, the church. William Barclay's comments on v. 19 are especially pertinent:

“Paul used the word *xenos* for foreigner. In every Greek city there were *xenoi*, and their life was not easy. A man who was a stranger in a strange city writes home: ‘It is better for you to be in your homes, whatever they may be like, than to be in a strange land.’ The foreigner was always regarded with suspicion and dislike. Paul used the word *paroikos* for sojourner. The *paroikos* was one step further on. He was a resident alien; he was a man who had come to stay in a place but who had never become a naturalized citizen; he paid a tax for the privilege of existing in a land which was not his own. He might stay there and he might work there, but he was a stranger and an outsider whose home was somewhere else. Both the *xenos* and *paroikos* were where they were on sufferance; they were always on the fringe. “So, Paul says to the Gentiles: ‘You are no longer in the Church and among God’s people on sufferance. You are real citizens of the society of God. You are full members of the family of God’ ” (The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, P. 138, emphasis mine).

A second idea, derived from the first, is that since our citizenship is in heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20), we are strangers and sojourners on this earth, i.e., we are resident aliens, non-citizens. Jacob described his life as pilgrimage when he stood before Pharaoh (Gen. 47:9).

The idea of the sojourning of the wandering patriarchs is discussed in Heb. 11:8-16 as follows: “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who promised; therefore also there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed, if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them” (Heb. 11:8-16).

Thus; when the inspired writers use *parepidimos* and *parotkos* to describe the Christian, the idea that is conveyed to us should be the same as the one expressed in the words on this song:

“This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through.

My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.

The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door,

And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.

“O Lord, you know I have no friend like you,

If heaven’s not my home then Lord what will I do;

The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door,

And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.” -Albert E. Brumley

Effects On One's Life

If one has the proper disposition toward his life on this earth as a sojourner (cf. 1 Pet. 1:17), some of the major decisions we face would immediately become infinitely small. One such decision might easily relate to his job in a situation like this one: A relative of mine was offered a promotion and a raise in pay if he would relocate in a city in which no conservative congregation existed. He moved there and then cried for help saying, "What am I going to do? There is no conservative brethren within driving distance." He knew that when he moved there! If he did not know that, he should have checked before moving. Suppose the decision became your own in the situation that your employer offered you the same terms, what would you do? On one occasion, Dale Winegar was reported to say, "If your job interferes with your service as a Christian, quit it. I'll guarantee you that you will get a better job." Before you become critical of our brother for promising things which he cannot guarantee will occur, I should add that he said, "Oh, it might not pay as much but it will be a better job!" About the only measure we Americans use to determine whether a job is a good or bad one is the take-home pay and fringe benefits. (One could almost conclude that a casual relationship exists between this fact and the unhappiness most have with their present jobs. Ask any factory worker how well he likes his work.)

On one occasion, Jesus said, ". . . the sons-of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light" (Lk. 16:8). I could not keep from thinking of that passage as I listened to a radio interview of a movie star who was giving advice to young people about how to become a movie star. The star commented about how slim a chance an individual has to make it to stardom and, therefore, advised anyone aspiring to become a movie star to get some training which qualified him to get a good paying job. Then, the individual should take a job and work at it, taking studio performances as they came. Then, she advised that if an opportunity to perform should present itself, however small the role

might be (one never knows what might be just the break he needs), take it, even if it means giving up the job which the person has. The reasoning behind this advice was as follows: Your primary goal is to reach stardom; always keep that first in importance; make everything fit around it. This is exactly the attitude the Christian should have toward his service to God! My service to God is the most important part of my life; everything else-job, recreation, house, car, etc.-must be fitted around that goal.

I should think that if my citizenship were in heaven that I would want to read about that place, think about it frequently, and prepare to go there. Like David, I should be saying, "I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Thy commandments from me.... Thy statutes are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (Psa. 119:19, 54). **Another song we often sing is "Here We're But Straying Pilgrims."** Can you truly sing that about yourself?

Here We Are But Straying Pilgrims 213

G-4-DO C-12, H-2
 I. N. Carman W. O. Perkins
And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Heb. 11:13

Unison

1. Here we are but stray - ing pil - grims; Here our path is oft - en dim;
 2. Here our feet are oft - en wea - ry On the hills that throng our way;
 3. Here our souls are oft - en fear - ful Of the pil - grim's lurk - ing foe;

But to cheer us on our jour - ney, Still we sing this way - side hymn:
 Here the tem - pest dark - ly gath - ers, But our hearts with - in us say:
 But the Lord is our de - fend - er, And He tells us we may know:

CHORUS

Yon - der o - ver the roll - ing riv - er, Where the shin - ing
 man - sions rise, Soon will be our home for ev - er, And the
 smile of the bless - ed Giv - er Glad - dens all our long - ing eyes.

Living with Dual Citizenship

For any disciple of Jesus Christ, the place to begin such deliberations is in remembering that we all have dual citizenship. We are not only citizens of a nation-state, we are citizens of the kingdom of God. The Christian's kingdom citizenship takes priority over all other allegiances and responsibilities, so that any discussion of social, political, or civil responsibility must occur under the umbrella of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings now reigning over God's kingdom and every single one of its citizens.

Knowing how to respond to the practical problems that arise when the separate demands of our dual citizenship come into conflict with each other is not always easy. Various solutions have been proposed for such challenges throughout church history. Since we do not have time or space to explore them all in this study, I will simply lay out my starting points for the discussion, building on the groundwork already established. So far our look at the kingdom of God in Jesus's teaching has led us to two conclusions.

First, every Christian must begin by remembering that our citizenship in the kingdom of God takes priority over any other claim to our loyalty, obedience, deference, or consideration. The issue is not that the believer has two allegiances of equal significance, making simultaneous claims on the disciple's life. Living the Christian life is not like ordering from a menu, selecting a few decisions from column A (God's kingdom) and a few alternative actions from column B (the earthly domain)—all according to one's personal preferences.

Kingdom citizenship does not work that way. The apostle Paul reminded the church in the Roman city of Philippi: "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). Paul is rhetorically motivating his Philippian readers to think of themselves not as citizens of Rome but as citizens of God's kingdom.

As far as the apostle was concerned, Christians have only one citizenship that matters. Citizenship “in heaven” was Paul’s way of referring to membership in God’s kingdom, which will be fully and finally established once Christ returns from heaven for his people. **The apostle emphasizes the priority of his heavenly citizenship as a man who was never shy about appealing to his Roman citizenship whenever it could advance his apostolic mission (Acts 16:37–38; 22:25–29; 23:27). But when it came down to the things that truly mattered in life, Roman citizenship—something that Paul’s peers would have paid dearly to acquire—counted for nothing in his estimation. In fact, as far as Paul was concerned, it was not even worth mentioning.**

Second, prioritizing God’s kingdom in this way means that some degree of friction will inevitably develop between the competing demands of the disciple’s dual citizenship. Whenever that conflict occurs, it must always be resolved in favor of God’s kingdom, whatever the consequences may be, including punishment for breaking the law. The bloody heritage of ancient Christian martyrs offers dramatic evidence of how seriously the early church took this principle of obeying Christ in opposition to Caesar. Disobedience toward earthly authorities is sometimes an unavoidable component of faithful kingdom citizenship.

Two passages in the New Testament specifically address the problem of competing allegiances and how disciples are to negotiate the tensions between earthly and heavenly citizenship. The first text concerns Jesus’s answer to a question about paying tribute to Caesar (Matt. 22:15–22//Mark 12:13–17//Luke 20:20–26). The second is Paul’s controversial discussion of the believer’s relationship to the Roman government (Rom. 13:1–7).⁵

⁵ Crump, D., & Rah, S.-C. (2018). [*Pledge allegiance: a believer’s guide to kingdom citizenship in twenty-first-century america*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Paying Tribute to Caesar

The simple but crucial lesson is that everyone belongs—lock, stock, and barrel—to their Creator. All that we have, all that we are, all that we achieve, all of our time, gifts, strengths, abilities—all of it belongs ineluctably to the Lord, and so, by further implication, all of it should be “given back” in service as repayment. We could call it the spiritual tribute owed to our one true king. The juxtaposition between what is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God is stark. Though Jesus did not come out and say it directly—another example of his subtlety in evading traps set by opponents—the lesson was plain. God is owed everything. Caesar is owed almost nothing. In fact, once the disciple had offered up everything that was owed to the Lord, exactly what was left for the emperor, other than the small, blasphemous denarius?

That particular question was like the elephant in the room at the end of this exchange. Jesus did not provide a direct answer to the implied question. He left his listeners to calculate their own solution to this equation of moral and spiritual algebra. But the implied answer is: “Nothing. There is nothing left for Caesar after the denarius.” Far from teaching a two-realms doctrine that distinguishes secular from sacred, Jesus was implying his ever-present, universal kingdom-of-God doctrine whereby the Father’s sovereignty swallows up everything in life.

This observation on God’s sovereignty may help to explain a unique feature of Luke’s trial scene, when Jesus appeared before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. In Luke 23:2, Jesus’s accusers produced witnesses who charged him with insurrection. They insisted: “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar.”¹⁶ Yet we search in vain for any Gospel text where Jesus ever said any such thing. Are these accusers simply lying?

There may be another answer. Perhaps a few perceptive listeners to Jesus’s instruction about paying tribute to Caesar caught the spiritual drift of what it means “to give back to God the things that are God’s,” while intentionally forgetting the material significance of “returning to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” Prejudice can easily edit memory; the false accusations made against Jesus in Luke 23:2 may confirm the implication Jesus left hovering over his audience: once we have diligently offered up everything we owe to God, little if anything remains for Caesar.

In any event, as is often the case in such encounters, Jesus did not press his argument home. He left it to the audience to draw their own conclusions, while remembering, he hoped, that one day they all must give an accounting to the one whose image they bore. How many will be surprised to discover that they have shortchanged their Creator?⁶

⁶ Crump, D., & Rah, S.-C. (2018). [*Pledge allegiance: a believer’s guide to kingdom citizenship in twenty-first-century america*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

ISSUES OF DUAL CITIZENSHIP

FROM TWO SPIRITUAL REALMS TO TWO TEMPORAL SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

When reading the Bible, it is always important to remember that it is a collection of ancient books written in situations very different from our own. This makes understanding the historical context of each passage crucial to accurate interpretation. Jesus's encounter with a duplicitous delegation of Pharisees and Herodians, who ply him with a question about paying taxes to Caesar, is an excellent example of how important the historical context can be (Mark 12:13–17).

This passage has often been read as Jesus's brief disquisition on political theology, explaining, as Wayne Grudem says, "that there are to be two different spheres of influence, one for the government and one for the religious life of the people of God."⁸ Grudem then elaborates by asserting that neither of these spheres of influence—governmental authority and religious obligation—is to meddle in the responsibilities of the other. Aside from the fact that both Jesus and Caesar would have been shocked to learn that civil government and an individual's religious life were not to intersect with one another, anachronistic theological interpretations such as this are not reading the Bible as much as they are importing foreign ideological concepts and imposing them on the text. Attentiveness to historical detail will demonstrate just how wrong such two-realm, dualistic—civil/religious, government/church, and so on—interpretations have always been.

To begin with, Jesus was not asked about the propriety of government taxation per se. He was asked a specific question about whether or not the nation of Israel, God's covenant people living in the holy land, should pay tribute—also known as the poll tax—to a pagan, idolatrous conqueror, Tiberius Caesar.¹⁰ The Roman *tributum capitis* was a tax levied on the male population of all conquered territories. Tribute was paid in silver denarii, a coin minted by Rome for that very purpose. This is why Jesus specifically asks his questioners to bring him, not just any coin, but a denarius.¹² Quirinius ordered a new census to be taken of Syria and Judea in AD 6 in order to recalculate the tribute owed to Rome. This order triggered a popular revolt that was led by Judas of Galilee, a man claiming to be the messiah and insisting that payment of tribute to Caesar was the equivalent of blasphemy and thus utterly impermissible for God's covenant people. Though Judas was eventually killed and his revolt suppressed, the fervent religious nationalism motivating his grassroots resistance movement was never fully eliminated. In fact, the Jewish historian Josephus attributes the devastating Jewish Revolt launched in AD 66 to the simmering influence of Judas's rebellion against paying tribute. The historical Jesus stood midway between these two uprisings.⁷

⁷ Crump, D., & Rah, S.-C. (2018). [*Pledge allegiance: a believer's guide to kingdom citizenship in twenty-first-century america*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Observing God's Order

Several details in Romans 13 need elaboration for Paul's ethical instruction to become clear for the modern reader. The chapter's opening sentences twice affirm that government authority is put in place by God (v. 1).²¹ God has established a hierarchy of civil authority to regulate the otherwise strong tendency toward unruliness in human society. Anyone who rebels against this ordering of authority, therefore, is rebelling against God's design (v. 2). Paul's vocabulary clarifies his point. Paul describes civil authority as part of the way God "orders" the world. This idea of God's ordering, organizing, appointing or arranging is central to the passage, with several derivatives of the verbal root "to order" appearing five times in three verses (vv. 1 [twice], 2 [twice], 5 [once]). It is clearly Paul's key concept. God "establishes/orders/institutes governing authorities" (v. 1) not by bringing any particular leader to power—though he may at times also do that—but by providentially creating structures of governing authority that exercise responsibilities delegated by God. When Paul says that "there is no authority except that which God has established" (v. 1), he is not claiming that divine providence places all rulers in their specific positions of power. He is saying that the various stations of authority that make up civil government are put in place by God's providential ordering of human society.²³

Understanding Paul's use of "ordering" vocabulary helps to answer long-standing questions about Christian obedience to tyrannical rulers. The problematic logic, based on Romans 13, usually goes like this: If every governing authority is put in place by God, so that disobeying the authority is the equivalent of disobeying God, then even a man must have been put in place by God, and disobeying becomes the equivalent of disobeying God. Paul's emphasis on *ordering* rather than *personnel* makes it clear that God establishes positions of authority, positions that are occupied at different times by different leaders of greater or lesser ability, wisdom, and moral fiber. Paul does not make God responsible for ordaining every leader who ever fills an office. Christians are obligated to respect the role of government per se in their lives, but that is a far cry from being obligated to obey, much less enthusiastically endorse, every wretched leader braying for national allegiance to his every foolish decision.⁸

⁸ Crump, D., & Rah, S.-C. (2018). [*Pledge allegiance: a believer's guide to kingdom citizenship in twenty-first-century america*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Subordination vs. Obedience

A second—equally important—matter of vocabulary arises once we notice that Paul does not command believers always “to obey” the governing authorities (Rom.13:1). Translations that render Romans 13:1 along the lines of “obey the government” (Living Bible, Contemporary English Version, Good News Translation, Worldwide English) seriously misrepresent Paul’s words. Instead of commanding obedience, Paul tells the church “to be subject/to submit” to the way God has “ordered” governing authority. If Paul had intended for the church always to obey the government, he could have used the common word *hupokouō* (obey) to make his point. But he doesn’t do that; instead, Paul stays with the “order” word group and directs believers to be “subordinate” (vv. 1, 5) to the authorities that “have been ordered” by God. In effect, he is reiterating the need for believers to cooperate with God’s design in ordering human society.

Following the logic of verse 3 is crucial for understanding the full significance of Paul’s refusal to tell the church that they must always obey the government. Notice that Paul’s description of civil authority is utterly idealistic, in so far as he assumes that the church can always count on the government to faithfully enforce God’s expectations. “Rulers are not a terror to those who do what is right but to those who do wrong. If you don’t want to be afraid of the one in authority, *do what is right* and the authority will praise you” (my translation). Had Paul intended to deliver a lesson on Christian obedience, he missed a perfect opportunity to do so. Notice that he does not say, “Shed your fear of authority by doing what you are told; be obedient.” Instead, Paul counsels the church to free itself from any fear of authority by always “doing what is right.”

At least two assumptions are at work in this statement. First, Paul’s argument assumes that government authorities will never be corrupt. Their judgments will always faithfully reflect God’s judgments concerning what is good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust. But we all know better. The claim that “rulers are not a terror to those who do what is right but to those who do wrong” is not always true, and Paul knew it. It is no secret to us or to Paul that rulers can easily reward those who do wrong and become a terror to those who do what is right, but Paul is describing the ideal, the way things are supposed to be, for the sake of his argument.

Paul’s second assumption is that when government functions as it should, citizens never need to be afraid about doing what is right because “the right” is

always what governing authorities will want from their citizens. Those who do what is right can be confident in their Christian obedience because they are simultaneously being submissive to authority, as God requires. In an ideal world, a believer's act of submission will be synonymous with obedience because the perfect, incorruptible government will never ask its citizens to disobey God. Unpacking these assumptions at the root of Paul's idealization of earthly authority also exposes the prick hidden in his argument. Paul knows that the Roman government does not measure up to this ideal. He cannot possibly instruct the Roman church always to obey a government that made public sacrifice to the Roman pantheon a civic responsibility; but he can tell them always to do what is right.

When Christians act on what they know is right and those actions coincide with the government's expectations, Paul's argument predicts the happy outcome—"do what is right and the authorities will praise you." But when doing what is right puts the believer on a collision course with government expectations, Paul's instructions take on even greater significance: "*Still* do what is right." As long as Jesus's disciples live in this world, however, they must anticipate times when the governing authorities will not praise them for doing what they believe is right in the sight of God.

Christians are not commanded always to obey their government or its laws. The church is told to be submissive and always do what is right. Obedience is one way of showing submission to authority, but submission and obedience are not synonymous. In some circumstances the submission God requires will work itself out as disobedience to governing authority. When a government expects believers to do things that the latter believe are wrong, things that will compromise their relationship with Christ, things that will violate their kingdom citizenship, then godly adherence to what is right demands conscientious disobedience against the government. At that point, faithful disciples remain submissive to misguided governmental authority, not by compromising their Christian conscience, but by freely submitting themselves to whatever punishment the authorities threaten to impose for disobedience. Living out the values of the kingdom of God always comes first for the followers of Jesus.⁹

⁹ Crump, D., & Rah, S.-C. (2018). [*Pledge allegiance: a believer's guide to kingdom citizenship in twenty-first-century america*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

“Some attempt to make much of the fact that nowhere in the NT writings are Christians ever urged to actively participate in politics, or to seek public office. The *assumption* some men draw from this fact is that such silence is thereby *prohibitive*. However, our integrity to Scripture, and to the principles of biblical interpretation, demand that we also acknowledge as fact that nowhere in the NT writings is such involvement and participation *condemned* or *discouraged*. Thus, to assume that such silence is necessarily prohibitive, is probably to assume far more than is exegetically warranted. Indeed, there is evidence that Christians *should* take an interest in ennobling the societies in which they live!

One of the most compelling passages with regard to involvement of Christians in the political process, however, is without a doubt Romans 16:23. Here Paul is sending greetings *to* and conveying greetings *from* various Christian men and women. “Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, *the city treasurer* greets you, and Quartus, a brother.” The NIV translates the passage this way: “Erastus, who is *the city’s director of public works...*” The Greek word used is “*oikonomos*,” which, when used politically, referred to a “manager, steward, treasurer.” Thus, Erastus was an official of the city of Corinth (from which this powerful epistle to the Romans was written in late February or early March of 58 A.D., near the end of Paul’s third missionary journey). Greek scholars differ as to the exact position held by Erastus. “Denney defines Erastus’ position as city treasurer; Vincent, probably the administrator of the city lands; Robertson, the city manager” [Dr. Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, vol. 1, “Romans,” p. 265]. David Lipscomb, who, as previously noted, was greatly opposed to Christians involving themselves in the affairs of state, suggested Erastus was simply the *church* treasurer, and not the *city* treasurer [A *Commentary on Romans*, p. 279].

This, in my view, is little more than textual manipulation and misrepresentation for the purpose of trying to validate an untenable theory. By the way, this man mentioned in Romans 16:23 is “*not to be identified with the Erastus of Acts 19:22 and 2 Timothy 4:20*” [*The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 18, “Romans,” p. 457].

“Erastus was the treasurer of the city of Corinth and attended to its affairs of property. He was a person of consequence in the city” [R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, p. 925]. He was “a notable figure because of his public office” [*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, p. 169]. “He may well have been a high-ranking and influential government leader – the city treasurer. If so, he would have political power, prestige, and probably some wealth” [*Holman Bible Dictionary*, p. 431]. It just so happens that scholars know for a fact, from archaeological discoveries in Corinth, that during this very time there was indeed a city official named Erastus. “A paving block preserves an inscription, stating that the pavement was laid at the expense of Erastus,” and it states he was the “Commissioner of Public Works” [Oscar Broneer, *The Biblical Archaeologist*, December, 1951]. From Romans 16:23, therefore, we know that Paul sends greetings to the saints in Rome from a city official in Corinth who holds an elected office, one invested with great responsibility and authority. Erastus is a Christian. Paul nowhere condemns his service to the city of Corinth, nor does Paul condemn his participation in the political affairs of his community. It is not even suggested he should abandon that involvement. Indeed, one may even imagine Paul is somewhat pleased that a Christian is in that position of responsibility, for, after all, Paul *makes a point of mentioning* (and *not disapprovingly*) the political position of Erastus. And after all, isn’t it far better to have a Christian in such a position than a non-Christian? If not, *why not?*” – *The Christian & Politics*

THE ERWIN LUTZER'S SERMON SERIES ON THE CHRISTIAN'S DUAL CITIZENSHIP

Augustine said that really in order to understand this we must see that there are two cities. There is the City of Man, and the City of Man goes by man's rules. The City of Man lives according to man's standards, and as far as The City of Man is concerned it is what men build. It is the art and the buildings and the paintings and the sculptures. That is the City of Man. But there is another city. It is called the City of God. The City of God is the God of the apostles. It is the God of the prophets. It is the God of all those who trust Christ, and it is His city, and we seek that city whose builder and foundation is God. And of course, because there are two cities, there are also two different kinds of citizens.

I don't need to tell you today that in America there is increasing antagonism between the City of Man and the City of God. They are in conflict. Today in America the City of Man is based on self-absorption, radical individualism - the idea that I have the right to create my own truth, to have my own standards, to make actually ex nihilo – my own religion by combining whatever bits and pieces of other religions that I care to, or to believe nothing at all. Everyone is into his or her rights and into their freedoms.

The City of Man in America is based on human nature, the desires of human nature, doing your own thing. And then, of course, it is based on the lie of Eden, that basically you shall be your own god.

The Christian Church today is not facing any challenge that the Church in the past has not faced. True Christianity has always been a minority. It has never usually been a friend to government, and government has never been a friend to it. There has always been this clash. And as a result of that I want you to know that God is able to work in and through us. And yes, perhaps in His grace, things can still be turned around, but the question is how and what are we to be doing?

I want you to take your Bibles and turn to Philippians 3 for just a moment. The Apostle Paul is sitting in jail in Rome & he does not have a righteous ruler in Rome. As a matter of fact, did you know that as Paul was sitting there penning this epistle in Rome, sitting in jail, Nero was ruling?

Nero, after all, was the man who had his own mother murdered. Nero was the one who, when Rome burned, blamed it on the Christians. It is said that Christians lit his palace as they had pitch poured on them and they were lighted, and there they burned. He was an evil, evil ruler. We've not seen the likes of him in this country.

And the Apostle Paul now is talking about the two different cities. And you'll notice in chapter 3 (we pick it up in verse 18) he is speaking about the fact that our citizenship – our polis (that's the Greek word), our politics (verse 20) is in heaven. That's the City of God. Our politics is in heaven.

And very briefly there are five contrasts between the City of Man and the City of God as outlined in these verses. **First of all, notice that Paul says we walk in different directions.** "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ." True believers walk toward the cross. We submit to the cross and we love the cross. God forbid that we should glory except in the cross of Jesus Christ. But those who are enemies are not walking with the cross. Now I want you to know that very probably Paul was not talking about the pagans here. He was talking about the Judaizers who were filled with legalism. Did you know that you don't have to be a pagan to be an enemy of the cross? All that you need to do is to distort the cross, add to the cross, think of the cross as not sufficient for salvation, and in other ways distort its message, and you become an enemy of the cross of Christ. Notice the contrast though. The City of God – we love the cross. The City of Man despises the cross.

The second contrast is we have different appetites. "Their end is destruction, their god is their belly (their appetite)." In other words, "Whatever desires I have in the body I shall fulfill. Whatever I want to do, I will do. What seems good in my sight is sufficient for me." They know nothing about the fact that there is meat to eat that they know not of, and that "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." They do not understand that because they are headed for destruction. Different appetites!

And then I want you to notice that we have a different language. It says, “They glory in their shame,” and what a commentary on our trash talk shows today. People should be embarrassed to let anybody know what they have done, but they are gloating about it on national television. Their glory is in their shame, they set their minds on earthly things, and that’s all that they can talk about - those earthly things. And what about us? Well, we have a different language. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and we talk about the glories of Christ. We talk about His wonders. We love God and we confess our love to Him.

And then notice another contrast. We live by different aspirations. “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” We want Him to return because we love Him. But over and above all things we desire His appearing because we are anxious to see Him as He is. And I hope that if you are a part of the City of God that that is your desire, that that is your aspiration. That’s not what the world is looking forward to. They are looking for one more opportunity to make more money so that they can live comfortably, so that they can live isolated from the traumas of life, and somehow eke out just a little bit more pleasure in the years that they might happen to have.

And then of course there’s a different destination. You’ll notice it says that “he will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” And what about the end of those who know not God? Well, pick it up there in verse 19. “Their end is destruction.”

Now, said Augustine, “The City of Man and the City of God interact. In eternity past there was only the City of God. Because of the fall of man, now there is the City of God and the City of Man, and we are citizens of both realms. **And in the future, they shall be separated again forever, one to everlasting destruction, and the other to everlasting bliss.**

But the challenge before you and me is this present moment. **It is their interaction**, and the question that is before us is, how shall the City of God live in the midst of The City of Man? What is our agenda at this very critical moment of history?

Well, do we withdraw? After the Scopes Trial in America, fundamentalism tended to withdraw from culture. It had its Bible studies. It preached its sermons, largely though to itself. There was really no bridge to culture because the world was deemed to be evil, and the best way that you separate yourself from the world is to be isolated from it.

Well, that does not seem to be the problem today. There's another extreme that people are falling into, and that is to say, "Let's do this. Let's capture the City of Man. Let's take it over. Let's elect a Congress that is distinctively Christian. Let us elect a president who is distinctively Christian. Let us make sure that our judges of the land become Christian, and then we will be in charge, and you will see the changes that will be made, and America will be great again. Maybe if we can capture the City of Man, we can turn it into a paradise."

Those kinds of changes do not change and transform the human heart.

There are three lines of argument, three propositions to share with you today about what we do.

Number one, we choose the right battle. Let me ask you today, what is the focus of the great battle in America today? Is it family values? Is that really the issue, or is it something much more fundamental that lies behind what we generally call (quote) family values? Is it political? Is it moral? Is it social? Is it a clash of cultures? Or is the matter deeper? I am here to affirm to you today that I believe very deeply that the issue that is at stake is distinctly and uniquely spiritual. That's the issue. Do you know what the great issue in America is today? It is namely how sinners get to God. Is Christ the only way or are there other options? That's the number one issue that lies at the heart of what our debate, as believers, should be all about. That's the issue.

What good does it do to get people to pray a prayer in school that they don't believe? People are out there trying to get prayers back into the schools. I have a better idea. Let's get prayer back into our churches. Let's get prayer back into our homes. That's what we have to do.

The issue today is not political. The issue today, as always, is spiritual. And I believe that the Church has largely lost its confidence in the ability of God to save sinners, even big ones. Number one, choose your right target.

Number two, use the right weapons. And now because you clapped a few minutes ago, you gave me the courage to just keep plowing on. We have in America what is called the Christian Coalition – the Christian Coalition that works with Protestants and Catholics and Jews and Mormons, and anyone else that will join to get across the (quote) Christian agenda. Conservative Coalition perhaps would be a better term, but Christian Coalition? Really?

Of course, there's a place for political involvement. All good citizens should be involved. They should vote. I believe that Christians should run for office, but I'm very wary about an organization that says this is the Christian view, or this is the Christian party. We need to think these things through, don't we? We need to use the right weapon. And what is the right weapon? It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are few things that I would ever die for. I think I'd find it difficult to die for my country. I've never been asked to do that. I think I'd find it difficult to die for a lot of different things, but there's one thing I'd be willing to go to the stake for by God's grace, and I hope that I would march there triumphantly, and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the distinctive message of today, and the only message that is the power of God.

Third, we fight with the right attitude. We fight with humility. We don't come to the political process thinking that we have all the right answers, and that if we did all the right things, everything would come out nicely. Perhaps you disagree with Luther, but at least some of us maybe have the humility to admit that he was right when he said, "I would rather be governed by a wise Turk than a stupid Christian."

And we're not so foolish to think that just because a Christian is in power that somehow that's going to reverse everything that's wrong with America. Of course, politics is important, and I'll comment more on that next week, but it is not America's great hope.

Somebody says, "Well, there are so many people with whom I work who are so hard to the Gospel. They are cynical." Yes, and the way in which that is broken down scripturally, as we shall see in this series, is through living lives of humility and service and brokenness and integrity in the presence of the watching world. And that's the way we impact culture.

Is there an answer for us? I want you to know today that when the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Philippians there was no Christian even represented on the Roman Senate where Nero ruled. There was no possibility of appealing special rights, or appealing for your own rights as a Christian in the Roman Empire. No, the Christians got burned at the stake. That's what happened. They had none of that. And yet about them it is said that they turned the world upside down. Why? It was unshakable confidence that they had a message that could explode in the lives of the most wicked person and transform him into someone who would love God, and whose life would be changed from the inside out.

I conclude by saying simply this: Our problems in America are far too deep to think that they can be changed by a change of administrations in Washington. Certainly, we should vote for the person who is best, for the person who represents those values that we hold dear, but at the end of the day, America needs something much more drastic. What we need is a message that can come to men and women as members of the City of God reaching out in the arts, in our businesses, in our relationships, in our families, reaching out to the City of Man and showing them the beauty and the love and the service and the compassion and the wonder of Christ. That's what we need in America. And therefore, I want you to know today that the destiny of this great country rests not in Washington but in all the cities where the Gospel is preached and where men and women gather together in the name of Christ, and are willing to be witnesses wherever God has planted them.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE WHEN NOT ENOUGH THEOCRATIC

Dominionism is the theocratic idea that regardless of theological camp, means, or timetable, God has called conservative Christians to exercise dominion over society by taking control of political and cultural institutions. The term describes a broad tendency across a wide swath of American Christianity. People who embrace this idea are referred to as dominionists. Although Chip Berlet, then of Political Research Associates defined and popularized the term for many in the 1990s, in fact it had (along with the term dominion theology) been in use by both evangelical proponents and critics for many years.

DOMINIONISM DEFINED

Dominionism is the theocratic idea that regardless of theological view, means, or timetable, Christians are called by God to exercise dominion over every aspect of society by taking control of political and cultural institutions.

Analyst Chip Berlet has suggested that there is a dominionist spectrum running from soft to hard as a way of making some broad distinctions among dominionists without getting mired in theological minutiae. But the researchers agree that:

1. **Dominionists celebrate Christian nationalism**, in that they believe that the United States once was, and should once again be, a Christian nation. In this way, they deny the Enlightenment roots of American democracy.
2. **Dominionists promote religious supremacy**, insofar as they generally do not respect the equality of other religions, or even other versions of Christianity.
3. **Dominionists endorse theocratic visions**, insofar as they believe that the Ten Commandments, or “biblical law,” should be the foundation of American law, and that the U.S. Constitution should be seen as a vehicle for implementing biblical principles.

The Dominion Mandate and the Christian Reconstruction Movement

by Bob DeWaay

A recent theological movement known as Christian Reconstruction has made a significant impact on American Christianity in the past several decades. It is based on a Calvinistic view of theology with some significant twists. The most prominent one is the conviction that the Scripture gives the church mandate to take dominion over this world socially and culturally before the bodily return of Jesus Christ. This teaching is known as the “dominion mandate.” Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 9:1-5 and Matthew 28:18-20 are the principal Biblical passages used to prove the validity of this mandate. The key question to be answered is whether these passages teach the dominion mandate as understood by Christian Reconstructionism. The thesis of this article is that these Biblical passages do not teach a social or cultural domination of the world by Christians before the bodily return of Christ. This issue is important because one's understanding of the Great Commission is at stake. This paper will exegetically examine these passages to prove this thesis.

I. Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

A. Christian Reconstructionism's Understanding of Genesis 1:26-28.

Christian Reconstructionists often cite this passage as a proof text for the “dominion mandate,” also called the “dominion covenant.” Christian Reconstructionist Gary North, the son-in-law of R. J. Rushdoony who is considered the founder of the movement, wrote a book entitled The Dominion Covenant, which is the first in what he hopes will be a multi-volume, economic commentary of the Bible.² He states, “This is why **Genesis 1:26-28** is truly a covenant: it establishes the basis of the relationship between God and man . . . Man is actually defined by God in terms of this dominion covenant, or what is sometimes called the cultural mandate. This covenant governs all four God-mandated human governments: individual, family, church and civil.”³ The range of dominion then, includes dominion over other humans and human institutions.

Reconstructionists contend that Adam lost this dominion when he sinned:

The church is Christ's instrument of rule. More than that, the church actually participates in Christ's rule over the nations. The ascension of Christ thus marks a transition in *our* relationship to God's dominion over the world. Man was created to rule the earth, as a subject of the heavenly King (**Genesis 1:28**). When Adam sinned he lost dominion.⁴

This shows the idea that certain humans (here Christians) are to have dominion and that this dominion extends over other humans. It is claimed to have been lost by Adam and regained for us by Christ. Unfortunately, according to Christian Reconstruction, thus far through church history we have not properly used this regained dominion. Gary North clarifies the Reconstructionist understanding of dominion:

The way to regain the ground we have lost is by becoming knowledgeable and involved in the ordering of earth's governments, including *civil* government . . . Since the Lord has given us the task of holding "dominion . . . over all the earth" (**Genesis 1:26**), we are not taking up our assigned role as stewards if we refuse to become involved in the activities of governing. I further point out: How can we discipline the earth if we are not involved in running it?⁵

The means of dominion for Reconstructionists is law. The idea of "**theonomy**," which simply means "God's law," is that the laws of the Bible (particularly the Old Testament Laws) are given by God to His people for the purpose of sanctification and for their implementation to take dominion over the nations and institutions of the world. Gary North states, "God has placed on His people the moral requirement of transforming the world through the preaching of the gospel. He has also given mankind the tools of dominion, His laws."⁶ Reconstructionist Greg Bahnsen gives this definition of theonomy: "By 'theonomy' I will mean that verbalized law of God which is imposed from outside man and revealed authoritatively in the words of Scripture."⁷ Bahnsen's scholarly work delves into theonomy in great detail, relying heavily on a particular interpretation of **Matthew 5:17** as the basis of his theology of dominion through law.⁸ If **Genesis 1:26-28** is not about dominion over other people or over cultural and sociological structures, then theonomy has no relevance to the passage. Beasts, birds, fish, minerals and plants do not respond to verbal moral and judicial laws! Therefore, the validity of the dominion mandate is essential for the concept of theonomy to have the purpose and application it is given by Reconstructionists.

Reconstructionists are correct in identifying autonomy as the key human problem. Gary North discusses sin and autonomy: "Sin, however, is not limited to the attempted rejections of the covenant of dominion. It is very much in evidence in the attempts of self-proclaimed autonomous men to exercise humanistic dominion apart from God or God's law-order." This is a good statement about the need to exercise dominion as God's imagers in a manner in keeping with submission to God. The problem is the presupposition that this includes some humans exercising dominion over others by a **Genesis 1:26-28** mandate. This is not demonstrated in the text of **Genesis 1:26-28**.

B. Non-reconstructionist views of Genesis 1:26-28.

Leonard Verduin, who is not writing particularly about Christian Reconstructionism, but against the justification of slave holding (slavery under certain circumstances is endorsed by reconstructionists) by some Christians in South Africa states, “In the Christian vision all men are in the image of god and are, for that reason, intended for dominion-having; every man is the subject of the transaction and no man is the object of it.”¹¹ He also asserts, “Slavery happens if and when, and only if and when, men lengthen the Biblical catalog of the to-be-subdued so that now it includes also human beings.”¹² Christian Reconstruction makes the error of lengthening the list. Clearly other humans, fallen or not, are not included in the **Genesis 1:26-28** list.

Dave Hunt cites **Genesis 1:26-28** as, “The few verses from which the new dominion teaching is derived.”¹³ He understands the passage as follows: “God is stating in clear language nothing more nor less than the simple fact that man, as a higher order of creation made in His image, has been given dominion over the earth and everything upon it - the trees, herbs, fish, fowls, animals, and all other life-forms.”¹⁴ He sees Reconstructionists making four false inferences that include: (1) ruling over other humans, (2) that dominion was lost by Adam, (3) that Christ died and was raised to restore this lost dominion, and (4) that the Great Commission of **Matthew 28** is a restatement of the Genesis “dominion mandate.”¹⁵ He concludes, “Upon this faulty foundation, the entire Reconstruction movement has been erected.”¹⁶ He is right that Reconstructionists teach these things. The Biblical evidence suggests that he is right that they are a faulty foundation. It is remarkable how much emphasis is placed on **Genesis 1:26-28** as being a mandate to rule over cultures and human institutions in a fallen world when at the time that Adam was given this mandate, no such cultures existed and the world was not fallen. The text says nothing about cultures or subjugating other people.

H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice argue that whatever dominion humans were given was not lost at the fall, because **Psalms 8:6-8** understands it still to exist.¹⁷ They cite “Calvinist John Robbins” who says, “The Dominion Mandate clearly gives mankind dominion over the animals and the earth. It does not give men dominion over men.”¹⁸ It should be pointed out that the Genesis text under consideration says “let them rule,” which included man and woman. One was not given dominion over the other, man and woman were equally given dominion over the non-human creation. If there are social priorities (such as submission in marriage - **Ephesians 5:22** or submission to civil rulers - **Romans 13:1**), **Genesis 1:26-28** is not discussing them. All humans were given dominion over the rest of the creation and no amount of massaging the text will make it state that some humans have a mandate to subjugate other humans.

This major exegetical flaw gets the Christian Reconstruction movement off the ground on a foundation that will not hold it up. All the brilliant Biblical work and logical reasoning such as can be found in Bahnsen's [Theonomy In Christian Ethics](#) goes to naught if the dominion mandate that Reconstructionism presupposes does not exist. The issues of law and grace are yet subject to debate and interpretation; but if the agenda of Christianizing the world through the forced application of Old Testament law is removed, the debate takes on a different urgency.

II. Genesis 9:1-6

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

A. Christian Reconstructionism's Understanding of Genesis 9:1-6.

The instructions God gave to Noah clearly echo those given to Adam. Reconstructionists see this as an extension and reiteration of a dominion mandate that includes cultural domination. Gary North, in a written polemic against Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, states:

What he conveniently neglects - and he could not conceivably be ignorant of the passage - is that God gave the same cultural mandate to Noah, after the Flood (**Gen 9:1-7**). It should be obvious why Dr. Lloyd-Jones conveniently neglects this passage: *it spells the doom of his entire misinterpretation of the Bible*. We cannot escape the moral burden of the cultural mandate - what I have called the dominion covenant - just because of man's ethical rebellion. We are the sons of Noah.¹⁹

North reasons that since the **Genesis 9** mandate succeeded the Fall, the Fall must not have invalidated the mandate given to Adam. The problem is that Reconstructionism's understanding of **Genesis 9** is derived from their understanding of **Genesis 1**. If there were no “cultural” dominion mandate given to Adam, then **Genesis 9** could not have reiterated it. **Genesis 9** is clearly about beasts, birds, fish, insects and plants. It says nothing about culture other than the prohibition of murder. Human beings are created in God's image and this image still exists after the fall. This is the reason that one cannot shed the blood of humans without impunity. The contrast in the passage is between humans and the rest of creation. One human cannot take another's life (like he or she might kill a beast) because humans are imagers of God.

Greg Bahnsen does a good job of handling verses five and six of **Genesis 9**. He states in reference to **Genesis 9:5f** and **Romans 13:1-4**, “The man created in God's image who has the responsibility of rule in human government (not citizens, not the church) is required to punish violators of God's law for the welfare of his country; he has the right to do this because he is the imager of God and has God's law to direct him.”²⁰ His argument is carried on in his following pages to the effect that magistrates, whoever they are, are imagers of God. He does not argue from **Genesis 9** that the church must dominate the world for God's laws (particularly the punishment of murderers) to be executed by civil governments. Bahnsen's use of **Genesis 9** and **Romans 13** would fit with many non-Reconstructionist understandings of theology. All humans are imagers of God, therefore it is not just Christians who can be providentially used by God to enforce law.

Are they teaching that humans in general as imagers of God have always run civil governments and enforced law as indicated in **Romans 13** as a fulfillment of **Genesis 9:1ff**? Or, do they claim that “redeemed man” must dominate society before the **Genesis 9** mandate is to be considered operational? On the same page Bahnsen and Gentry cite **Psalm 8** as being a repetition of the “Creation Mandate,” which would indicate all humans as the subject of it. **Psalm 8** does not speak of one class of humans subjugating another class of humans. The Reconstructionist position seems inconsistent at this point.

The same difficulty can be seen in Gary North's writing on this issue. He states that humans bearing God's image have a special place in creation by linking **Genesis 1:26** and **Psalm 8:5**²² and then seems to suggest that this image bearing extends to all people. However, he chides Christians for not teaching the “cultural mandate” that obviously must include more than having dominion over the non-human creation:

Ruling the human world by using law is not the same as ruling the non-human world in a lawful manner, in keeping with good stewardship. If all bear the image of God and therefore have dominion, who is to be subjugated by others? On pages 45 - 47 of [Backward Christian Soldiers](#) North links **Genesis 1:28; 9:1, Matthew 28:18-20** and **I Corinthians 15:24,25** and draws some conclusions about the failures of modern Christians:

*God said . . . but modern Christians prefer not to listen. They do not want to hear about their comprehensive responsibility to master the word of God, and to apply His standards in every area of life, bringing the whole world under the reign of Jesus Christ. They prefer to minimize their responsibility, calling men out of the world, rather than calling them to rule over the world under the authority of Jesus Christ.*²⁴

If one gets the impression that he is merely speaking of using good ecological stewardship, what follows corrects it. Speaking of Americans, “Today, they are glumly reconciled to seeing the loss of American power, American honor, and the American dollar. Men without hope are ripe for defeat by men who have hope.”²⁵ He gives an “encouraging” example of what he means on the same page, “We must not forget what happened to the Roman Empire. Rome fell to Jesus Christ.”²⁶ Dominion by humans as imagers of God over the creation has somehow become dominion (“defeat”) by some humans over other humans in the name of Christianity!

Elsewhere, other Reconstructionists (DeMar & Leithart) teach that dominion will be achieved not by power, but by service. “But the exercise of dominion is ethical. It does not come automatically, nor is it imposed top-down by a political regime or by an army of Christians working frantically to overthrow the governments of the world.”²⁷ They encourage godly Christian service working for the benefit of others as a means of dominion. [This toned-down version of dominion seems more palatable than North's vitriolic rendering, but nevertheless still presupposes that dominion is for some humans \(Christians\) and not others. “The dominion of Christians is a benefit to the world only because Christ works in and through them.”](#)²⁸ It is this point that seems to be a departure from what can be properly taught from **Genesis 1 & 9** and **Psalm 8**.

B. Non-reconstructionist views of Genesis 9:1-6.

Opponents of Reconstructionism also see the **Genesis 9** passage as reiterating the command that was given to Adam in **Genesis 1**. The difference is that they do not see the “Cultural Mandate” particularly granted to Christians in either passage. House and Ice affirm, “The Cultural Mandate has not been withdrawn since its giving and restatement as the Noahic Covenant in **Genesis (1:28-30; 9:1-3)**. The Cultural Mandate was given to Adam and to all of humanity, whether redeemed or unregenerate.”²⁹ Dave Hunt contends,

And why does North apply dominion only to “His people,” when it was given to all men? Its exercise is an innate characteristic of our humanness that results from the very fact that mankind, saved or unsaved, is a higher order of creature than the animals, birds, fish, and insects. To make anything more out of dominion is to be guilty of manipulating the Word of God and doing violence to common sense.³⁰

Keil and Delitzsch in their Commentary on the Old Testament see dominion over animals given to all humans in **Genesis 9:1-4**.³¹ They provide a comment on verses five & six that does concern humans relating to other humans:

Hence the command does not sanction revenge, but lays the foundation for the judicial rights of the divinely appointed “powers that be” (Rom. xiii. 1) . . . If murder was to be punished with death because it destroyed the image of God in man, it is evident that the infliction of the punishment was not to be left to the caprice of individuals, but belonged to those alone who represent the authority and majesty of God, i.e. the divinely appointed rulers, who for that very reason are called *Elohim* in Ps. lxxxii. 6. This command then laid the foundation for all civil government, and formed a necessary complement to that unalterable continuance of the order of nature which had been promised to the human race for its further development.³²

There is no hint here that a certain group of persons was to seek dominion over others through whatever process. They understood the civil authorities to have been appointed and put in place by God as shown by the reference to **Romans 13:1**. This was given to the “human race” and not just certain classes of people. The use of civil law to punish murder has been the case throughout history in most cultures and does not await a future, post-millennial domination of the world's cultures by Christians to take effect. Also, in context the contrast is between animals and humans. Animals can be killed for food, but the blood is not to be eaten. Human blood is not to be shed because humans are created in God's image (in contrast with animals which are not). If anything, the passage thereby forbids a certain type of dominion taking (shedding blood) as it might erroneously be conceived to apply to humans.

Christian Reconstructionism strains to find its dominion mandate in the passages we have considered from the book of Genesis. Their basic presuppositions seem to have been read into the passages. Dave Hunt states tersely about the attempt to make the rest of the Bible fit the view they claim to have gotten from Genesis, “However, the dominion mentioned in **Genesis 1:26-29** has absolutely nothing to do with the church, the Great Commission, Christianizing the world, or taking over institutions or nations. Such theories are pure fabrications for which those who promote them will have to answer to God.”³³

III. Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

A. Christian Reconstruction Understanding of Matthew 28:18-20.

Christian Reconstructionists consistently tie the dominion mandate to Matthew's account of the Great Commission. In it they see the call of God for the church to “disciple” the “nations.” This they understand (along with the usual understanding of preaching the gospel) to be teaching God's law (theonomy) to geo-political, social institutions for the purpose of Christianizing the world and creating a post-millennial, golden age before the bodily return of Jesus Christ.

Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. has produced a 184 page book that attempts to show how this understanding can be exegetically found in **Matthew 18**.³⁴ He reiterates the arguments of Reconstructionism about the Genesis dominion mandate.³⁵ He argues that because God spoke the mandate to Adam and that Adam had “federal” headship of the race, that the Great Commission must be an extension of the mandate because Christ spoke it and He is the “federal” head of the new creation race.³⁶ He claims that the Genesis and Matthew mandates cover the same task, “Both the Creation and New Creation Mandates are designed for the subduing of the earth to the glory of God.”³⁷

He pulls together several brief quotations from commentators to the effect that the authority that Christ said was His was delegated to the church for the purpose of dominion.³⁸ The church is to use this authority as follows:

...militancy characterizes her [*the Church's*] energies . . . for a very important purpose the Church is “in the world” (**John 17:15**): to go forth with kingly authority to confront the nations with the demands of God. Thus, the Commission makes reference to His authority over “the earth” (**v. 18b**) and our obligation to enforce that authority over the nations (**v. 19a**).³⁹

He argues for the definition of *ethne* in verse 19 as “nations” or “men as individuals united together in all their socio-cultural labors and relations.”⁴⁰ This is a defensible definition of the Greek word. The goal of discipling these nations is, “*As the numbers of converts increase - this providentially leads to the subsuming under the authority of Christ whole institutions, cultures, societies, governments.*”⁴¹ It remains to be seen whether the apostles understood Christ to mean this when He told them to “make disciples of all the nations.” So far it has not happened, but Reconstructionists conceive of history lasting as long as necessary for this to happen. Gary North states, “**God will not pull the plug on history until the whole world is brought under His institutional sovereignty.** There is hope for the kingdom of God on earth, precisely because there is *no* hope for God's people to escape the sting of death.”⁴² They claim that those who look for a “rapture” are pessimistic about history and tend to waste their lives looking for an escape from dominion responsibilities.

According to Gentry, the world as a systemized whole, including all cultural units, will be “saved.” This he sees taught in such passages as **John 3:16,17**; **1John 4:14**, and **John 1:29**.⁴³ He concludes about these verses, “Thus, in each of the passages passing under our scrutiny, we have reference to the aim of full and free salvation of the *kosmos*, the world as a system.”⁴⁴ He evidently disregards the qualifying statement of **John 3:16**, “that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Reconstructionists claim not to believe that every individual has to be saved for their golden age to be valid. How then can **John 3:16** be used to teach a fully “saved” world when according to the text only those who believe will be saved? **Logic would demand that he either use the text different or endorse universalism (that everyone in the world is going to believe in Him).**

Elsewhere he and other Reconstructionists eschew universalism as understood by liberals and teach personal repentance and faith for salvation. Yet, Kenneth Gentry claims, “Salvation is designed for the ‘world as a system’ (*kosmos*) involving men in their cultural relations (*ethnos*).”⁴⁵ Accordingly, we are sent to save the world and we do so by teaching the nations as cultural entities to obey the laws of God, including the laws of the Old Covenant in “exhaustive” detail. This does not exclude personal salvation which is a step toward this larger goal.

In dealing with baptism, Gentry makes a strong connection between the idea of covenant and family solidarity. While holding to individual conversion and repentance, he also teaches infant baptism and family solidarity.⁴⁶ A number of Christian denominations would go along with this practice, but it seems to present a problem - it does not go far enough to fit Reconstructionism's own understanding of **Matthew 28**. In every other application of the passage (nations are disciplined, nations are taught, nations are subjugated to Christ's authority) a broader scope is given. **Why then are not nations “baptized”? In a later chapter he will claim that they are.** Even granting the argument that the process of world “salvation” happens partly through mass conversions,⁴⁷ individual by individual, the result is supposedly a “disciplined” nation as a cultural unit. It would seem that the same unit ought to be baptized if the grammar of **Matthew 28** is applied consistently. How is it that Christ, in the middle of a sentence and with no warning or indication, ceased speaking of nations and began speaking of families? It seems logical that those disciplined, baptized, and taught (“them” in verses 19 and 20) are the same group of persons.

In a later chapter he rectifies this problem by teaching that indeed “nations” will be baptized. He states, “The nations are expected to become Christians by discipleship and to be marked out as under God's rule by baptism.”⁴⁸ The problem is that he never explains how one baptizes a tribal unit, geo-political entity, or a culture. Saying that the church is to “baptize” nations as cultural units in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit seems quite implausible. It has not happened yet in church history. If the point is that we disciple individuals from the various nations, baptizing and teaching them, then the only argument between Reconstructionists and non-Reconstructionists is the expected numbers of people who will respond. Clearly there is more than this involved. They argue that cultures are to be saved and disciplined - “I will select two classes of evidence for the disciplining and baptizing - the Christianization - of the world,”⁴⁹ says Gentry. He then refers back to the earlier argument about a completely saved *kosmos*. Greg Bahnsen also understands **Matthew 28** like this, “The great commission will one day be fulfilled, a day in which all nations (not just representative individuals in them) shall have been disciplined.”⁵⁰

B. Non-reconstructionist views of Matthew 28:18-20.

The more traditional understanding of the Great Commission is that individuals from all of the nations (some would translate *ethne* as “Gentiles” though this translation is not crucial to the argument) are to be disciplined, which includes baptism that follows personal faith and repentance. Those who respond in this manner are taught the Word of God. This accords well with the accounts of the Great Commission found in **Luke 24:47** and **Mark 16:15,16**. Hal Lindsey states,

Nothing in these great commission passages [**Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8 & Matthew 28:18-20**] implies that we will convert the world and take dominion over it. We are commanded to go out in the power of the Holy Spirit and to proclaim the Gospel. We are told to make disciples from out of all the Gentiles. You don't disciple nations, you disciple individuals, so the Greek word translated *nations* should be understood in its most frequently used sense - *Gentiles*.⁵¹

Ice and House state about this issue as it relates to the **Matthew 28** passage, “The Reconstructionist implication that discipleship includes a social and political aspect of running things is not supported by biblical usage.”⁵² Dave Hunt comments on the Reconstructionist connection between the “dominion mandate” of Genesis and the Great Commission, “**Most evangelicals, of which Gentry is one, would be appalled by an interpretation that would turn Christ's command `that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations' (Luke 24:47) into an assignment to subdue the earth and domesticate lower creatures!** Nor is it honest to suggest that the dominion given to Adam is now restated in the Great Commission and involves `cultural Christianization.’”⁵³ Dave Hunt concludes, “Without any exegetical basis whatsoever, dominion theology is simply imposed upon **Matthew 28:18.**”

A detailed, scholarly analysis of **Matthew 28:16-20** is offered by Robert D. Culver.⁵⁴ He analyzes the grammar of the Greek text, showing that the imperative verb in the passage is *mathe teusate* (second person plural, aorist imperative active). The words for “go, baptize” and “teach” are all participles. He cites a number of scholars and shows how they have agreed or disagreed on the meaning of the Greek text. He gives the following summary of the work of scholarly commentators over the last century:

(1) It is presupposed that disciples carrying out this commission will be deployed upon the scene of doing so - among the nations. (2) The commission is to make disciples of all the nations. This is the single command and is comprehensive. (3) The command to make disciples is carried out in two activities, baptizing and teaching. (4) The teaching is of an evangelistic sort preliminary to baptism, leading to decision, and of an edifying sort after baptism.⁵⁵

It seems clear that the participle “going” is not the command. It is corollary to the main verb and could be rendered “having gone, disciple.”⁵⁶ The participles “baptizing” and “teaching” receive an imperative force by their relationship to *mathe teusate*.⁵⁷ As we go we are to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing and teaching them. Culver states, “Make disciples in the particular nation among whom you dwell. You need not go somewhere else to operate on the great commission program!”⁵⁸

After extended technical discussion of the Greek words of the passage, he offers the following in paraphrase of verse 19:

As ye go, therefore, and wherever you may be, as my disciples (**Mark 16:20; Acts 2:9-11; 8:1**, etc.) in this world, make disciples of all the nations, for I have authority among them all. You are to begin making disciples by instructing (not excluding witnessing, preaching, and evangelizing) men. Men thus informed by you and convinced by the Holy Spirit of the truth as it is in Christ and who wish openly to confess their submission to the Lordship of the Triune God are to be baptized in the name of the Father, and (in the name) of the Son, and (in the name) of the Holy Ghost. After baptism they are further to be instructed in all the teachings of Christianity. They should guard these truths in their own lives.⁵⁹

This seems to fit what happened in the books of Acts (other than the triune baptismal formula). It seems that Reconstructionism has imported its presuppositions into the passage. Trying to think of discipling cultural units of various types through baptizing and teaching them seems confusing. You can only literally baptize one person at a time. Comparing various accounts of the Great Commission (if **Mark 16** is allowed in spite of its textual uncertainty) shows the arena of the gospel. Matthew speaks of the *ethne* as does **Luke** in **24:47**. Mark has us going into the *kosmos* and preaching to all the *ktisei*. Luke in Acts mentions Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the extremity of the *ges*. The commission then involves the nations, world, creation, and earth.

Wherever humans may be and in whatever social configuration, we are to preach the gospel to them with all of its attendant claims. The idea of ruling over them in their social and cultural aggregate and coercing (or at least convincing them by very persuasive means) them to obey the Old Testament law in full detail (excluding ceremonial laws) does not clearly appear in any of these passages. It is fair to ask if anyone who had not presupposed Reconstructionism's version of post-millennialism would understand any of the Great Commission passages, including Matthew's, in this manner.

This is true of infant baptism, church liturgy, and many other modern issues some are wont to find in **Matthew 28**. Culver notices how commentators find their own denomination's views in the passage. "The author [Lenski] sees fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of Christ's universal kingdom in 'all the nations' (standard amillennialism) and proof that Jesus foresaw the baptism of infants before catechism." He quotes other commentators who agree on the basic meaning of the Greek but somehow see modern ecclesiastical matters in the text. He makes a poignant comment about how **Matthew 28** as it has been handled over the years, "Everyone seems to bring all his own soteriology and ecclesiology to the passage and leave again with all his baggage intact."⁶

The conclusion that follows from the Biblical texts themselves is that Reconstructionists have read their own presuppositions into the passages in which they "find" their agenda. As shown, Genesis 1:26-28 and 9:1-6 do not teach or imply the rulership of Christians over the world system or other people of any sort. Matthew 28:18-20 is not a reiteration of these Genesis passages. The Great Commission of Matthew 28 does not teach the cultural Christianization of the world before Christ's return.



SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE WHEN IT'S EXCESSIVE TYRANNICAL

HITLER DID NOT discourage people from attending church. He was a baptized Catholic who had long since abandoned his faith, but he did not mind if others continued to attend church as long as it did not affect the way they lived or the values they held. In fact, he explicitly said that he would not interfere with the specific doctrines of the church, just as long as the churches were teaching those things that were in harmony with the good of the German people. He called this “Positive Christianity.”

So, right from the beginning Hitler sought to marginalize the church to guarantee that no Christian influence would be allowed to inform government policy. Worship would have to be a private matter between a man and his God; at all costs the official state policy would have to be based on humanistic principles to give Hitler the freedom to do what was “best” for Germany. He said that the churches must be “forbidden from interfering with temporal matters.” *The state would have to be scrubbed clean of all Christian convictions and values.*

Of course, Hitler’s real intentions were not immediately revealed. Soon after he was sworn in as chancellor, he paid tribute to Christianity as an “essential element for safeguarding the soul of the German people” and promised to respect the rights of the churches. He declared his ambition to have “a peaceful accord between Church and State.” He also distributed a picture of himself coming out the door of a church to show that he had religious sympathies.

He was willing to give the churches freedom, he said, “as long as they did not do anything subversive to the state.” Of course, behind that promise lay his own definition of what might be subversive. But this guarded promise, as well as a concordat with the Vatican that appeared to guarantee freedom for the Catholic Church, was welcomed.

Article 24 of the party platform demanded, “liberty for all religious denominations in the State so far as they are not a danger ... to the moral feelings of the German race.” Hitler spoke approvingly of his “Positive Christianity” that would contribute to the German struggle. He won some goodwill by appearing to be conciliatory; the churches liked his use of the words *freedom* and *tolerance*. He assured them that he was doing what was best for Germany. Of course, what was “best” would be defined by him, not by the churches, not by the Bible, not even by natural law.

The Germans had become accustomed to the doctrine of the “two spheres,” which was interpreted to mean that Christ is Lord of the church, but the Kaiser (or Caesar) is, after a manner of speaking, lord over the political sphere. Allegiance to the political sphere was as high and honorable a duty as was one’s allegiance to God. Indeed, allegiance to God was best demonstrated by allegiance to the State.

These pious Christians thought that if they left Hitler alone, he would leave them alone. But they discovered that was not possible. Hitler also put pressure on them to have their children indoctrinated in the state schools and, thanks to the cultural pressure, their churches were not equipping members to stand against the abuses that were developing around them.

USING THE RECOGNIZED & OFFICIAL CHURCHES

Before Hitler moved to destroy the church, he decided to make peace with it and use it for his own ends. On March 21, 1933, he arranged an impressive spectacle for the opening of the new session of the Reichstag (German Parliament) in the Garrison Church in Potsdam. With pomp and ceremony he sought to assure the nation that he could follow a conservative path and seek harmony with the churches. Despite his conciliatory beginning, Hitler would later try to obliterate the church. In the end, he wanted to transform the church so thoroughly that every vestige of Christianity would be smashed. **There was not enough room in the churches for both the cross and the swastika.** As he himself mused, “One god must dominate another.” Given the weaknesses of the church, his goal appeared to be within reach, though it would not be as easy as he thought.

NIEMOLLER MEETS HITLER

Martin Niemoller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer gathered opposition to Hitler's intrusion into the affairs of the church. When Hitler heard that there might be a church split because some pastors objected to his agenda, he summoned the leaders of the churches to a personal conference to which Niemoller was included on January 25, 1934. Niemoller and other members of the clergy walked past the SS guards to the Reich Chancellery in Berlin and soon were ushered into Hitler's study. Hitler began by reproaching his guests, treating them to a tirade about how he was misunderstood. "Peace," he said, is all that he wanted. "Peace between Church and state." He blamed them for obstructing him, sabotaging his efforts to achieve it.

"YOU CONFINE YOURSELF TO THE CHURCH. I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE GERMAN PEOPLE."

—HITLER

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES AND ASK: "WHAT WOULD I HAVE DONE?"

A railroad track ran behind our small church and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars!

Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews in route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us.

We knew the time the train was coming and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.

Years have passed and no one talks about it anymore. But I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me; forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians yet did nothing to intervene.

Niemoller was later imprisoned for what we today call “hate speech” because he dared criticize the regime within his church. Specifically, the charges against him were “abuse of pulpit” and he was charged with speaking “with malicious and provocative criticism ... of a kind calculated to undermine the confidence of the People in their political leaders.” He had involved himself with matters that “were of concern only to the state.” He had violated a new law for the “Prevention of Treacherous Attacks on State and Party.” For speaking out—his crime was simply preaching what he believed his people should hear—he was sentenced to prison and then confined to concentration camps, ending up in Dachau where he remained until liberated by Allied troops.

Hitler always said that the best way to conquer your enemies is to divide them. He encouraged a movement simply called “God Believers” (he was willing to use the word *God* as long as it was emptied of all essential meaning), a policy designed to persuade individuals to withdraw from the churches. The sales pitch was that there was an alternative to the church; the state could have a ceremony to dedicate infants; the state could have its own holidays without the need to celebrate the Christian ones. Marriages, for those who wished, could also be performed by the state.

And so it was that secularism was imposed on the German people. The role of the church was minimized by privatizing faith and instituting laws about what could or could not be said from a pulpit. Religious leaders who opposed the secular steamroller were intimidated by threats to them and their families. With God and religion removed from government, the values of Hitler’s socialism filled the vacuum. Keep in mind that all of this happened under code words such as *freedom*, *peace*, and *fairness*. The people were assured that these changes were made with their best interests in mind. The Greater Good of Germany eclipsed individual freedoms and the right to opposition. Everyone was expected to be in sync with the accepted cultural values and goals. Those who opposed the regime paid a price.¹⁰

¹⁰ Lutzer, E. W., & Metaxas, E. (2015). [*When a nation forgets god: 7 lessons we must learn from nazi germany*](#). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

Theological Roots

Germany was (and still is) the hotbed of liberal scholarship that stripped Christianity of its uniqueness. An influential theologian named Ludwig Feuerbach would have agreed with the New Agers of today that the doctrine of God should be more properly interpreted as the doctrine of man. The Incarnation, he said, teaches us that the Being who was worshiped as God is now recognized as a man. Man must no longer be second in religion; he is first. According to Feuerbach, that man is God is the highest ethic and the turning point of world history. *If Christ was divine, it was only because all of us are.*

German scholars “demythologized” the New Testament, that is, stripped it of its myths so that a kernel of truth could be found. Some theologians openly stated that the miracles of the New Testament should be forgotten and the attention of the masses fixed on the miracle of the rise of Germany to its place of leadership in the world. Little wonder that they were willing to hide the cross of Christ within the swastika.

Along with the humanization of God came the deification of man. In Weimar, Goethe had eloquently argued that man must replace God as the center of art, philosophy, and history. As a child of the Enlightenment, he believed that religion had to be rethought and made to glorify man rather than God. He could never have dreamed, however, that in exalting man he was opening the door to unrestrained evil. It is not a historical accident that Buchenwald, one of the Nazi concentration camps, was only six miles from Weimar, the seat of the Enlightenment. Hitler had, I am told, perverted delight in setting up a death camp near the city that prided itself in tolerance and the glory of man.

If, as Frankl said, the ovens of Auschwitz were prepared in the lecture halls of Europe, we can also say that those ovens were fueled by liberal scholarship that glorified man and declared God to be irrelevant. Such doctrines undercut the ability of the church to stand against the atrocities of the Third Reich. Substituting human ideas for the revelation of God, *the Third Reich reinterpreted the Cross of Christ to advance a pagan agenda.*¹¹

¹¹ Lutzer, E. W., & Metaxas, E. (2015). [*When a nation forgets god: 7 lessons we must learn from nazi germany*](#). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

With a thicket of swastika flags surrounding the altar of the Magdeburg Cathedral, the dean, Dr. Martin, declared in 1933, “Whoever reviles this symbol of ours is reviling our Germany ... the swastika flags around the altar radiate hope; hope that that day is at last about to dawn.”¹

Adoration for Hitler poured forth from pulpits of Germany. Pastor Siegfried Leffler proclaimed, “In the pitch-black night of church history, Hitler became, as it were, the wonderful transparency for our time, the window of our age, through which light fell on the history of Christianity. Through him we were able to see the Savior in the history of the Germans.”

On August 30, 1933, Pastor Julius Leutherser gushed, “Christ has come to us through Hitler ... Through his honesty, his faith and his idealism, the Redeemer found us. ... We know today the Savior has come ... we have only one task, be German, not Christian.”³ Clearly, even at this early point in the struggle, the swastika meant more to some pastors than did the Cross.

The church that was called by God to stand against the evils of the Nazi regime came to embrace it. Swastikas, with the cross of Christ sometimes neatly woven in the center, adorned the churches. The broken cross of the political savior and the cross of the spiritual Savior would unite to lead Germany out of its abyss to the glorious heights of self-respect and unify the German-speaking areas of Europe. The Fatherland had been resurrected; the Germans could smile again.

Today pictures of this “holy union” startle us, but in Hitler’s day being a good Christian involved being a good German nationalist. **God and country were practically one and the same.**

Even for those who called themselves Christians, a strong Germany was more highly valued than a strong gospel witness, unless the gospel, as was often the case, was reinterpreted to be a plea for loyalty to the German cause.

Although it was grudgingly acknowledged that Jesus was a Jew, it was also asserted that “occasionally a flower did grow in a dung heap.”

Germany was about one-third Catholic and two-thirds Protestant. To its credit, the Catholic church stood against Hitler with a greater solidarity than the Protestants. Hitler knew that the Catholic church had an organizational network in many countries, so he preferred to maintain goodwill with the Vatican for as long as possible. In fact, a concordat was signed with the Vatican that guaranteed freedom of religion in exchange for political support.

Hitler spoke of both Protestants and Catholics with contempt, convinced that all Christians would betray their God when they were forced to choose between the swastika and the Cross: “Do you really believe the masses will be Christian again? Nonsense! Never again. That tale is finished. No one will listen to it again. But we can hasten matters. The parsons will dig their own graves. They will betray their God to us. They will betray anything for the sake of their miserable jobs and incomes.”⁵

“They will betray their God to us.” In the end both Catholics and Protestants found themselves powerless to stop the Nazi steamroller.

In a mood of worshipful euphoria, Professor Adam, a theologian of Tübingen, hailed Hitler as the one who had opened the eyes of the German people, united them, and freed them:

Now he stands before us; he whom the voices of our poets and sages have summoned, the liberator of the German genius. He had removed the blindfold from our eyes, and through all political, economic and social and confessional covers has enabled us to see and love again the one essential thing—our unity of blood, our German self, the homo germanus.

So it was that professors chimed in with the common man to sing Hitler’s praises. The church was carried along by his growing popularity, a giddy hilarity that previously seemed so rare among sober-minded Germans. Large crowds flocked to Hitler’s birthplace. Worshipers even journeyed by bus to honor the birthplace of his mother in Spittal.

They descended on the farmhouse where Hitler spent his summers as a boy. John Toland writes, “They climbed on the roof to take pictures, found their way into the courtyard to wash at the wooden trough as if it contained holy water and chipped pieces from the large stones supporting the barn.”⁷ They painted swastikas on the cows and paraded around singing Hitler songs.

LIBERALISM

The church, for the most part, had abandoned the historic Christian faith and had opted for theological liberalism; that is, they read the Bible trying to separate the true from the false, denying the uniqueness of Christ. Without a clear message of repentance and faith in Christ alone as the Son of God, the churches substituted the proud banner of a Christianized nationalism for the meekness and humility of Christ.

Since all German infants were baptized into the church, little was said about the need for individual, adult conversion to Christ. The fact that one’s name was on a church roll was proof enough that one was a Christian. All that was expected of good Christians was to help Germany become great. Christians of all kinds were deceived by Hitler, at least initially. The liberals, however, who were “tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine” found themselves particularly vulnerable to the vortex of the Nazi whirlwind. Even when Hitler’s agenda finally became clear, they were not willing to suffer for a gospel that they had long since abandoned. They were more interested in the miracles of a revived Germany than in the miracles on the pages of the New Testament. Salvation in this world was more important than salvation in an unseen life to come.

THE TWO SPHERES

We have been introduced to the doctrine of the “two spheres,” which, popularly interpreted, means that Christ is Lord of the church, but the Kaiser (or the Führer) is, in a manner of speaking, lord over the political sphere. Allegiance to the political sphere was a high and honorable duty just as was allegiance to God. And allegiance to God was best demonstrated by allegiance to the state. Thus, the private values of honesty, sobriety, and compassion were not translated into public values. And with the fervent belief that obedience to the state would produce a new society, Germans were willing to do whatever their Führer demanded. Their duty to God was spiritual; their duty to the state was political. German children were taught prompt, explicit obedience to parents, teachers, and the nation’s military commanders. Respect for *Ordnung* (order) was taught by ritual and threat of punishment. Everyone was to keep pace with the nation and its highest good. Romans 13:1–2 was often quoted: “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

Hitler would soon try to force the church to adopt what he called “positive Christianity” that was more radical than even the most nationalistic churches had anticipated. His plan, as it would later be unveiled, called for the obliteration of the church. In the end, he wanted to transform the church so thoroughly that every vestige of Christianity would be smashed. There was not enough room in the church for both the Cross and the swastika. As he himself mused, “One god must dominate another.” Given the weaknesses of the church, his goal appeared to be within reach, though it would not be as easy as he thought.

THE LAWS OF THE STATE

Laws always reflect a nation’s priorities, agenda, and values. In Nazi Germany laws were no longer seen as resting on a theistic, much less a Christian, view of the world; indeed **not even natural law was recognized**. When Hitler got the Reichstag to give him the power to make the laws, the laws he made were arbitrary, drafted to fulfill the goals of the state. The Nazis proclaimed, “Hitler is the law!” As Göring put it, “The law and the will of the Führer are one.” *Right and wrong was whatever Hitler said it was.*

The Nuremberg laws of September 15, 1935, deprived Jews of German citizenship, confining them to the status of **“subjects.”**

There were also laws against treason. Treason was defined as anything that was contrary to the will and the purposes of the Reich. **Criticism was treason**; freedom of the press was treason; **a failure to further the agenda of the Reich was treason**. Once again, treason was whatever Hitler said it was.

In 1936, the **People’s Court was established** to try acts of treason. Five judges were appointed to each court, three of whom were always appointed by Hitler or one of his associates “because of their special knowledge in the defense against subversive activities or because they are more intimately connected with the political trends of the nation.”

The proceedings were secret, the punishment severe. Crimson red posters announced the names of those who died under the ax of the executioner.

The experience of Nazi Germany reminds us that **whoever controls a nation's laws controls a nation's agenda and values.**

With his place as dictator assured, Hitler could make whatever laws he wished and mock his seemingly powerless opposition. He had always regarded Protestants with contempt, saying of them, "You can do anything you want with them. ... They will submit ... they are insignificant little people, submissive as dogs, and they sweat with embarrassment when you talk to them." He knew that resistance to his agenda came only from a small minority of Protestant leaders.

THE LORD OF THE STATE

Hitler began with *lies*; they were reflected in his *laws*, and finally he emerged as *lord*. He had achieved the near absolute control his demented heart desired.

If we ask why Hitler saw Christianity (even the nationalized German variety) as a threat, the answer was given in a television interview I saw with a man who was a contemporary of the Führer. In response to the question as to why Hitler felt such a need to destroy Christianity, the man said simply, "In any conflict among gods, one must dominate another."

"SHOW ME YOUR LAWS AND I WILL SHOW YOU YOUR GOD!"

Before we turn to look at the struggle that took place within the church, we must understand what Hitler's ultimate goal was for the National Reich Church that he attempted to organize.

I am reproducing part of a thirty-point program drawn up by Hitler's good friend Alfred Rosenberg, who blasphemed Christ and insisted that the church replace Christianity with the paganism of the Nazi movement. Here is highlighted a sampling of this program of de-Christianization:

1. The National Reich Church of Germany categorically claims the exclusive right and the exclusive power to control all churches within the borders of the Reich; it declares these to be national churches of the German Reich.

.....

13. The National Church demands immediate cessation of the publishing and dissemination of the Bible in Germany.

.....

14. The National Church declares that to it, and therefore to the German nation, it has been decided that the Führer's Mein Kampf is the greatest of all documents. It ... not only contains the greatest but it embodies the purest and truest ethics for the present and future life of our nation.

.....

18. The National Church will clear away from its altars all crucifixes, Bibles, and pictures of saints.

.....

19. On the altars there must be nothing but Mein Kampf [to the German nation and therefore to God the most sacred book] and to the left of the altar a sword.

.....

30. On the day of its foundation, the Christian Cross must be removed from all churches, cathedrals and chapels ... and it must be superseded by the only unconquerable symbol, the swastika.

.....

Please note that it was not enough that the swastika be alongside the cross; it had to completely replace it. The Bible could not be laid alongside of *Mein Kampf*, but the Nazi bible had to be on the altar by itself. In short, the God of heaven had to be removed to make way for the god of national socialism.

Early in 1934, Martin Niemöller mounted the pulpit of his church in the Berlin suburb of Dahlem and prophetically declared God's purpose in the trials that faced the German church:

We have all of us—the whole Church and the whole community—we've been thrown into the Tempter's sieve, and he is shaking and the wind is blowing, and it must now become manifest whether we are wheat or chaff! Verily, a time of sifting has come upon us, and even the most indolent and peaceful person among us must see that the calm of a meditative Christianity is at an end. ...

It is now springtime for the hopeful and expectant Christian Church—it is testing time, and God is giving Satan a free hand, so he may shake us up and so that it may be seen what manner of men we are! ...

Satan swings his sieve and Christianity is thrown hither and thither; and he who is not ready to suffer, he who called himself a Christian only because he thereby hoped to gain something good for his race and his nation is blown away like chaff by the wind of this time.

God let Satan loose to shake the whole German church to separate the wheat from the chaff. Christ did not abandon His people; if they would trust Him with their eternal souls, He would walk with them through the fire of affliction. Christ had promised that He would build His church and "the gates of Hades would not prevail against it." The church, however small or humanly weak, would prevail.

We should not be surprised that God often judges the church severely. To the church at Ephesus that had lost its first love Christ sent a warning, "Repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent" (Revelation 2:5). The "lampstand" in the German church was, for the most part, wrested from its setting when the Cross before which all men should bow was exchanged for the cross by which proud men marched.

In the summer of 1938, the head of the Gestapo could say in his annual report, “The situation in the Churches is characterized by weariness with the struggle, by uncertainty of purpose and by lack of courage.” Hitler had managed to marginalize the church, to reduce its flame to a flicker. The Protestant “dogs,” as he called them, were for the most part submissive.

THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE

What did the rest of Germany think of the news that eight hundred pastors were arrested and imprisoned for not accepting the Nazification of their churches? What was the response to the fact that thousands of pastors had sworn personal allegiance to Hitler? The people were apathetic.

William Shirer, in his monumental *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, gives one of the most chilling assessments of the values Germans held dear. Though this paragraph is long, I encourage you to read every word. Shirer writes:

It would be misleading to give the impression that the persecution of Protestants and Catholics by the Nazi State tore the German people asunder or even greatly aroused the vast majority of them. It did not. **A people who had so lightly given up their political and cultural and economic freedoms were not, except for a relatively few, going to die or even risk imprisonment to preserve freedom of worship.** What really aroused the Germans in the Thirties were the glittering successes of Hitler in providing jobs, creating prosperity, restoring Germany’s military might, and moving from one triumph to another in his foreign policy. Not many Germans lost much sleep over the arrests of a few thousand pastors and priests or over the quarreling of the various Protestant sects. And even fewer paused to reflect that under the leadership of Rosenberg, Bormann, and Himmler, who were backed by Hitler, the Nazi regime intended eventually to destroy Christianity in Germany, if it could, and substitute the old paganism of the early tribal Germanic gods and the new paganism of the Nazi extremists. **As Bormann, one of the men closest to Hitler, said publicly in 1941, “National socialism and Christianity are irreconcilable.”**¹⁰

So, there you have it. The majority of the people, including the professing Christians, no longer believed that Christianity was worth suffering for, much less dying for. They were willing to substitute *Mein Kampf* for the Bible in exchange for jobs and the greater glory of Germany. Yet those who saved their lives lost them, and those who lost their lives saved them.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

In April 1945, amid the ruins of a defeated Germany, Helmut Thielicke, a German theologian and pastor, spoke movingly to his congregation in Stuttgart about the meaning of all that had happened. In a message that surely must have left his congregation spellbound, he in effect said that the nation got what it deserved because it had “repudiated forgiveness and kicked down the cross of the Lord.” In his powerful critique of what had gone wrong in a nation that was “Christian,” Thielicke said that the cross of Christ had been neglected and thus the church was blinded. The church had overlooked its greatest danger, namely, that in gaining the whole world it might “lose its own soul.” Wherein was the failure? Thielicke lists the mistakes:

- That this people would think they themselves are making history ... whereas they are only blind horses led of God.
- That this people should consider itself a chosen people, whereas the fist of God has already raised to dash it to the ground.
- That in its temporal tasks the church should disregard the Eternal and in its faith in itself fail to see its guilt and need for forgiveness.
- That this people should imagine that it believes in God, whereas they are the victim of the devil and his shimmering soap bubbles.
- That this people should proceed with fanatical energy to solve economic, social, and political problems, and in solving these problems overlook or simply ignore the fact that first and foremost we need a Redeemer, who would set straight the deepest basis of our personal lives.
- **That we were unaware of the dangers on which we have been shipwrecked—shipwrecked by being blind to the most terrible danger: namely, there is a devil who can lead a man about by the nose in the midst of all his idealism,**

and there is a God upon whom we can wreck ourselves because “He is not mocked.”

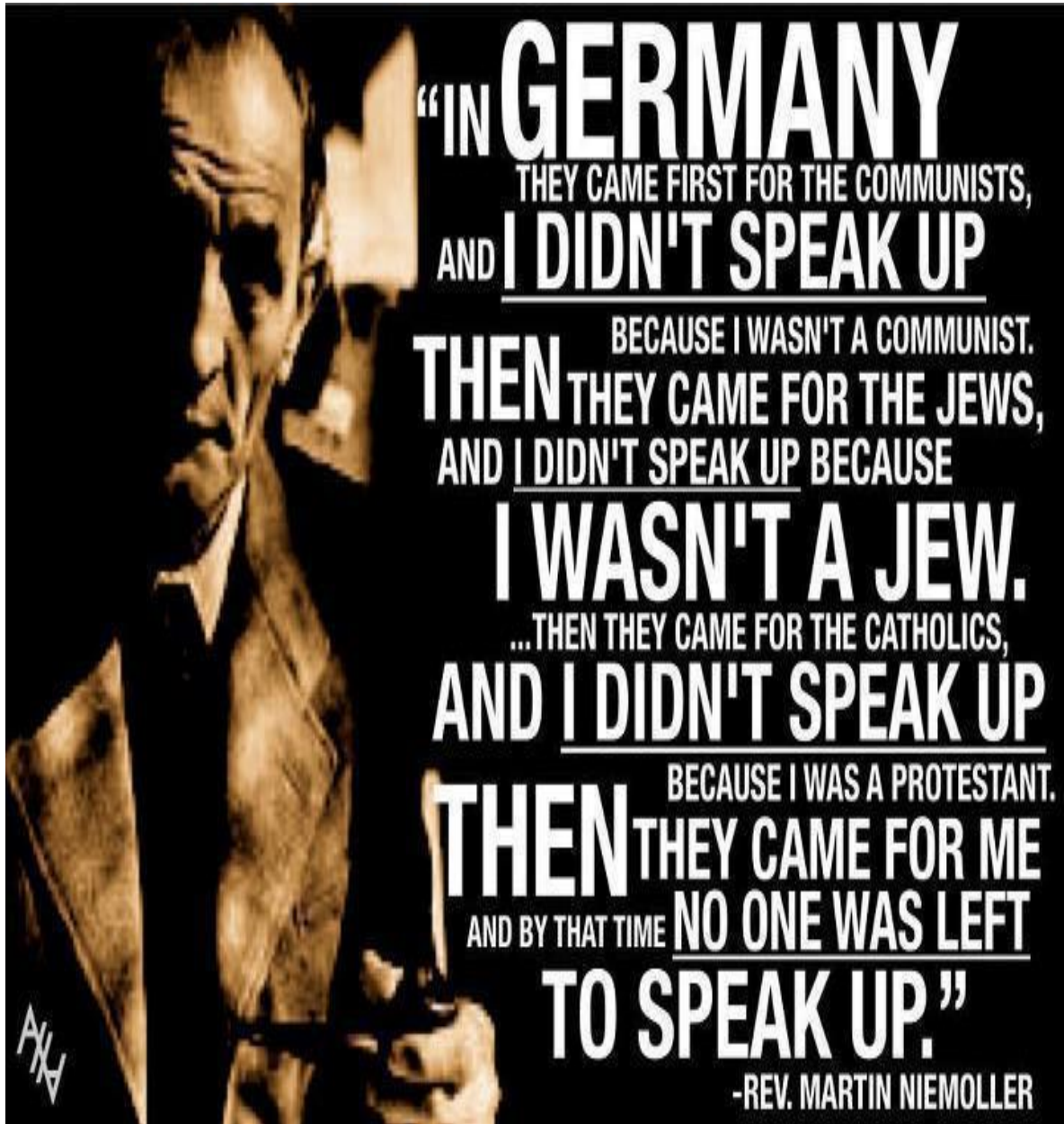
- That we did not calculate the factor that is called “God” in our plans and therefore fell victims to megalomania.
- That we violated God’s commandments and got tangled in our own unpredictable and brutal instincts.
- That we ignored that monumental call, “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me,” and hence landed in a giddy ecstasy of power worship that brought the whole world against us.
- That we ceased to trust ourselves to the miracle of God’s guidance, and therefore we put our faith instead in miracle weapons that never came.
- **That we no longer knew that God is in heaven and man is on earth, and thus we lost all sense of the proportions of life and consequently were stricken with blindness in purely external political and military relationships.**

Thielicke then came to the heart of the matter: “Denying God and casting down the cross is never a merely private decision that concerns only my own inner life and my **personal salvation**, but this denial immediately brings the most brutal consequences for the whole of historical life and especially for our own people. ‘God is not mocked.’ The history of the world can tell us terrible tales based on that text.”

In history, he says, the invisible is mightier and more creative and destructive than the visible. Anybody who still had not grasped that Germany with its program “was wrecked precisely on this dangerous rock called ‘God’ and nothing else has no eyes to see. Because he sees only individual catastrophes he no longer sees the basic, cardinal catastrophe behind them all.”

Finally, he reminded his listeners that “the worship of success is generally the form of idol worship the devil cultivates most assiduously. ... We could observe in the first years after 1933 the almost suggestive compulsion that emanates from great successes and how under the influence of these successes even Christians stopped asking in whose name and at what price they were achieved. ... Success is the greatest narcotic of all.” Casting down the cross of Christ! Intoxicated with success! Substituting the temporary for the permanent! Thus, was the church and the entire country crushed, crushed on the rock called God “who is not mocked.”¹²

¹² Lutzer, E., & Zacharias, R. (2012). [*Hitler’s cross: how the cross of christ was used to promote the nazi agenda*](#). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.



The Restoration Movement: An American Theology

- ✦ “From the early to mid-1800’s, the Restoration Movement became the fastest growing religion on the American frontier & remained one of America’s largest indigenous religious movements. While many factors contributed to its success, one of the most important was a shift in the way Americans were coming to understand the nature of man and his relation to God. This new attitude is most succinctly put forward in the Declaration of Independence and helps explain the movement’s growth. Written only 25 years before the American Restoration Movement, the Declaration of Independence was a theological document as well as political.”

The Restoration Movement: An American Theology

- ✦ “More than announcing separation from England, it offers a theological justification for rejecting the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. This was a theory that certain kings were chosen by God to rule & that they were accountable to no person except God. Rebellion against England’s King George meant that the American colonies would be arrayed against divinely appointed government. The American leaders, however, understood a different principle to be at work. America was a new continent. It was as if **God had provided a new Eden** and given humanity a fresh start. Accordingly, they appealed to Nature and a biblical understanding of creation whereby every person bears the image of God. In creation, all are equal & have inherited certain divine rights which no king can take away. If he does, he is a despot whose disobedience to God gives the people the right to depose him.” {**Columbus Reported He Had Rediscovered Actual Eden**}

The Restoration Movement: An American Theology

- ✦ “This finds its way into the the Declaration of Independence in the statement: *‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal & that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...’* The American political leaders rested their case for independence and democracy on this biblical foundation. The success of the American experiment worked to legitimize this new populist theology and move it beyond America and beyond politics. Now the church would have to wrestle with its implications. Twenty-five years after the U.S. Declaration of Independence, fourteen years after the Constitution was ratified, and ten years after the Bill of Rights, the Restoration movement began. It arose in an atmosphere of religious revivalism propelled by a heady idealism about the nature of man with earnest hopes for a utopian future.”

The Restoration Movement: An American Theology

- ✦ *The equal justice of God.* “For the leaders of the American Restoration Movement, God is just & rules according to immutable laws. He is neither arbitrary, capricious, nor partial. Each human being has equal standing before Him & is equally amenable to His laws. Those laws are not hidden. They are revealed in a written and unchanging constitution: the New Testament. Moreover, they aren’t understood thru subjective human experience, but normal objective reasoning.”

The Restoration Movement: An American Theology

✚ *The sovereignty of the individual.*
“Since God is impartial and all humans are equal before Him, the Calvinist doctrine of election, whereby God chooses who will receive salvation, was rejected. Each person is free to participate in one’s own destiny, to accept or reject salvation!”

The Restoration Movement: An American Theology

✚ *The people’s government of the church.*
“Since God is no respecter of persons, but all have equal standing, there is no separate calling or class for clergy. All are ‘clergy’, and all are ‘laity.’ All Christians share the responsibility to promote the church & see to its good order. There is no divinely chosen hierarchy that stands over the church. The members of each congregation choose their leaders and select those who preach & teach for them. Thus, communion responsibility, preaching & prayers was placed in the hands of the common people.” – Carson Stephens

THE RECORD OF EXTREMES: DAVID LIPSCOMB VS. FOY WALLACE

David Lipscomb & Non-Participation

As he saw family pitted against family and Christian pitted against Christian, his distaste for war — and the governments that enabled it — grew. This experience, along with the teachings of his mentor, Tolbert Fanning, led Lipscomb to take strong positions on the Christian's relationship to government. Perhaps Lipscomb's best-known writing on the subject is his 1889 treatise, entitled "On Civil Government," which has its origin in articles he wrote for the *Gospel Advocate*. In it, he lays out the history of human governments and why Christians should not be involved in such institutions. Lipscomb points out that the earliest human governments in Scripture were formed in rebellion against God, first manifested in the organizing at the Tower of Babel and ultimately the Israelites' demands to "set a king over us" (1 Samuel 8:5), which Samuel takes to be an indication that the people have rejected the kingship of God.

"It is clear that human government had its origin in the rejection of the authority of God," Lipscomb writes, "and that it was intended to supersede the Divine government, and itself constituted the organized rebellion of man against God." Because of their origin (rebellion) and intent (replacement of God), governments are inherently and eternally ungodly, Lipscomb would say. It is a short leap from this belief to the conviction that Christians should not vote or participate in government structures.

Voting "does much more harm to the church than dancing does," Lipscomb writes in an 1875 *Gospel Advocate*. "The whole organization of the kingdom of God is based upon the fact that every other institution in the world is of the evil one, is against God — must be destroyed, must be prevailed over by the gates of hell."

David Lipscomb & Wartime Pacifism

(Civil Government, Lipscomb, Pages 9 -10.) In short, the account of the Tower of Babel was taken by Lipscomb as the story of the beginning of human government, in rebellion against direct rule by God.

All the wars and strifes between tribes, races, nations, from the beginning until now, have been the result of man's effort to govern himself and the world, rather than to submit to the government of God. I am not intimating in this, that human government is not necessary, I believe that it is necessary, and that God has ordained it as a punishment to man for refusing to submit to the government of God and it must exist so long as the human family or any considerable portion of it refuses to submit to the government of God. Human government originated in the rebellion of man against his Maker, and was the organized effort of man to govern himself and to promote his own good and to conduct the affairs of the world independently of the government of God. It was the organized rebellion of man against God and his government. The essential character of this government, as portrayed by God will be given here-after.

(Pages 10-11.) Therefore, all war is a result of man's refusal to submit to God's government. Government is necessary but only because mankind persists in rebellion to God.

This government of God among the children of Israel was corrupted and perverted, but some of the Jews were schooled by it, and trained, as were others, not Jews, by the providence of God, for service in a higher and more perfect kingdom of God. God then took the Jewish national government out of the way, and superseded it with the kingdom of heaven – the Church of God, which was fitted for the service of individuals – few or all – in all nations, and aspires to universal and eternal dominion on earth. It is to embrace all people, all nations, kindreds and tribes, and to mingle and mould them into one universal brotherhood, to break in pieces and destroy all earthly kingdoms and dominions, and fill the whole earth and stand forever. The mission of this Church is to rescue and redeem the earth from the rule and dominion of the human kingdoms, from the rebellion against God, and to reinstate the authority and rule of God on earth through this own kingdom. Through and in it Christ must reign until he shall have “put down all rule, and all authority and all power.” Then will he deliver up the kingdom to God the Father, and himself be subject to God, that God ruling in and through his restored kingdom on earth, may be all and in all, the only ruler of the heavens and of the earth.

(Pages 86 -87.) The New Testament gives instructions for children, parents, husbands and wives, and church – but nothing about how to run the government. Clearly, God meant us to govern our families and our churches but not to participate in civil government – or else God would have given us instructions!

Lipscomb concludes that it is sin to participate in jury duty, to hold political office, or to take an oath of loyalty to the government. But teaching school as a government employee is different because it doesn't involve government administration.

There are requirements sometimes made of persons by the government that they have difficulty in determining whether they violate the law of God in doing them. Among them is jury service. The rule determined in the preceding pages, is, the Christian should take no part in administration or support of the government. Jury service is a part of its administration, and frequently lays on the jurymen the duty of determining the life or death of his fellowman, and leads into affiliation with the agencies of government. ... Teaching school is no part of the administration of the government. It seems to me a Christian might teach a government school as employee without compromising his position. As a rule, the government exacts an oath of its officers, to support the government but it does not of its employees.

(Pages 141-142.) Indeed, Lipscomb holds that Christians may not vote (p. 155).

In modern terms, I'm confident Lipscomb would have objected to Christians saying the Pledge of Allegiance, as it's essentially a loyalty oath to a government, despite it's acknowledgement that the government is "under God." He sees all government as a power or authority that will be destroyed by Christ so that his Kingdom will be the only Kingdom.

The Churches remained largely pacifistic until Pearl Harbor — when **Foy E. Wallace, Jr.** rejected his earlier pacifism and campaigned vigorously for participation in the war effort. And the vast majority in the Churches of Christ agreed, although a few, such as B. C. Goodpasture (who later became the editor of the *Gospel Advocate* himself) supported pacifism, seeking to raise money to support the few church members who refused military service on grounds of conscience.

However, so far as my memory and reading go, I can find no evidence that the teaching of pacifism survived until the Vietnam War — and had there been any memory of the teaching, it would have received a sympathetic hearing in those days. The civil law defined right and wrong in the minds of most people.

Early Voices Opposing Segregation

Segregation of the races was the social pattern of the larger culture within the United States from the Reconstruction period up to the Civil Rights movement. Following the “Plessy vs. Ferguson” decision of the Supreme Court, “separate but equal” became the official legal position of the United States. This was reinforced by the passage of “Jim Crow” laws in many communities. Within the churches of the Restoration Movement conformity to culture had created a “spiritually equal, but socially separate” approach to race relations. Many brethren found it easier to conform to the ways of the world rather than to challenge the written and unwritten social codes of the period. But there were a few voices that were willing to challenge racial segregation in the Church. (Daugherty, 39).

Believing slavery to be “an evil to the country and to the people,” David’s Lipscomb’s father sold his farm in middle Tennessee and moved to Illinois in 1834 to free the few slaves he owned. (Hooper, Call, 56). But Granville Lipscomb paid a price for faithfulness to conscience. While in Illinois, his wife and three children died from malaria. Unable to bear his grief, Granville Lipscomb returned to middle Tennessee with his sons David, William, and a little daughter, Keren. (West, Life and Times, 31). Years later, David Lipscomb, a son of the South, spoke of his own experiences in race relations.

I was raised among negroes. My mother died so early I do not remember her. I was cared for, for some years, greatly by a negro woman. Negro children were my playmates. I have always had the kindest feelings for them. Yet I have always felt the race instincts strong. (Lipscomb, A Correspondence, 425).

David Lipscomb

These early experiences plus the fact that he had always worshiped in congregations that included blacks, first as slaves, then as freemen, gave Lipscomb a different view on race relations.

In 1907, Lipscomb was drawn into a controversy taking place in the Bellwood congregation regarding the inclusion of a young black woman in the worship services of the white congregation. The agitation reached the pages of the *Gospel Advocate* in a letter and its reply from S. E. Harris to E. A. Elam, front page editor of the *Advocate*. Harris believed that the presence of the “colored girl” would divide the church. His solution was for her to attend a black congregation meeting nearby, where she could worship with her own race. Elam, who was responsible for the young woman, replied that the agitation over the situation was motivated by “prejudice, selfishness, and a very great injustice” (Lipscomb, *A Correspondence*, 425). As the correspondence continued and the controversy in the Bellwood congregation refused to die, Elam asked David Lipscomb to intercede.

Lipscomb began by pointing to equality between individuals of every nation, tribe, country and social position as indicated in Galatians 3:28. Since this was true, no Christian had a right to treat the “least and despised” differently on the basis of family, race, social or political station. To do so was to object to Christ Himself (Matt. 25:40). Lipscomb went on to say:

I have never been satisfied of the righteousness of forming congregations in a community along race lines. In the days of Jesus and the apostles the race antagonism between Jew and Gentile was strong and bitter. Converts were made from both races. I find no evidence that they met in different places as separate congregations.

Troubles arose over the race question, but these troubles were harmonized within the churches, and the wall of separation and division was weakened, not strengthened. (Lipscomb, A Correspondence, 425).

Lipscomb pointed his readers to the example of Christ. He said that there was something wrong in Christians gathering to remember the death and sufferings of Christ to lift up humanity and at the same time discouraging the lowly from the assembly. As he concluded the correspondence, Lipscomb made clear the narrow choice in the matter.

The only point really involved in this difficulty is, whether we will be led by the Spirit of Christ and the teachings of the Bible or by our prejudices against the negro. The besetting sin of humanity from the beginning has been to follow its own feelings instead of the word of God. To follow our prejudices and feelings instead of the will of God is to rebel against and reject God as our ruler. (Lipscomb, Negro in Worship, 521).

Lipscomb was a man of his times. Though he acknowledged the equality of the races he also accommodated the social customs of his day and argued for separate seating places for blacks and whites in congregations and even separate doors for entering and exiting the building. (Harrell, vol. 2, 199). Even the school founded by Lipscomb did not admit blacks until after the Civil Rights movement.

“Pendulum Swing in Restoration Movement Race Relations from 1917 to 1979.

Those were the years of the deaths of two of the most influential people in the Churches of Christ, who also had the most opposite positions on race. David Lipscomb (1831-1917) was thoroughly anti-racist, arguing that dividing and segregating congregations by race was “blasphemous” and specifically attacked a Church of Christ in McKinney, TX in 1878 for refusing membership to a black Christian. **Foy E. Wallace Jr. (1896-1979)** was the next “most influential” member after Lipscomb and had a strictly opposite position, arguing, sadly enough, that white Christians should not even listen to black Church of Christ preachers, much less be in the same congregation. Wallace’s most infamously stated his position in his 1941 Bible Banner. Wallace would even defend segregation in the church because lack of segregation “lowers the church in the eyes of the world.” So Wallace, living in a more “enlightened” time than Lipscomb was radically more darkened in public & private moral application.

David Lipscomb opposed not just all elements of racism, but the core foundation from which racism was just one particular expression of the greater evil of warmongering and militarism because he opposed the root idolatry, namely, nationalism. His influence could only keep the American idolatry of Birth of a Nation and the KKK away for so long because immediately after he died in 1917, the Gospel Advocate editor was threatened with jail and all property confiscated because of the Gospel Advocate’s anti-war, anti-draft, and anti-nationalism articles. Facing this enormous persecution, Editor McQuiddy gave in to the US government’s demands to stop all such writing. Without a strong voice warning the Churches of Christ against the idolatrous pull of nationalism, it was only a matter of time before someone would gain influence while openly promoting nationalism. That role fell to Foy E. Wallace Jr. While Lipscomb encouraged us to not be a part of the world, nor the “prince of this world’s” governments, Wallace would turn to the Protestant position of Calvin and Luther of explicit support and participation with nationalism. Church of Christ historians will tell you that by the late 1920s, that the KKK meetings could even be tolerated in Church of Christ buildings. There was apparently discussion of such in the Gospel Advocate of the 1920s, but I’m not in a location to read such archives to give examples or specifics.” – *Lysander Blog*

No tree, it is said,
can grow to heaven
unless its roots
reach down to hell.

-C.G. Jung

EmilysQuotes.Com



Jesus Christ @Countering Dehumanization. Matthew 5: 39-42
Jesus Advocated Assertive Non-Violence in Turning the Other
Cheek Central Illustration. Acting This Out Gets to The Point:

You can be struck on the right cheek only by an overhand blow or with a backhand blow from the right hand. But in that world people did not use the left hand to strike people. The left hand was 'reserved' for 'unseemly use.' Thus, being struck on the right cheek meant one had been backhanded with the right hand. Given the social structure of the day a superior hit an inferior, whereas one fought social equals with fists. This means the parable presupposes a setting in which a superior is beating a peasant.

What Should the Peasant Do in Such Situation?

Verse 39 – “Turn to Him the Other Cheek.”

What Would Be the Probable Outcome of Following This Advice? The only way the superior could continue the beating would be with an overhand blow with the fist – which would be treating the peasant as an equal.

Perhaps the beating would not have been stopped by this act but it would have been very disconcerting. He would only have continued the beating treating the peasant as a social peer!

Verse 40 – “Let Him Have Your Cloak Also.”

Under civil law a coat could be confiscated for non-payment of debt – there was not any bankruptcy protection back then. For the poor, the coat then served as a blanket at night. In that

world, the only other garment typically worn by a peasant was an inner garment, a cloak. In advising to give the cloak as well – Jesus is saying to strip naked! *In that [honor-shame society] world, nakedness was a **shame to the person observing it.***

These were potent methods to confound and expose social injustice. In reality, this new way, was a radical approach to empowerment. (combination of commentaries)

An Early Application Of Jesus' Admonition Reveals the Risks –

“One day, however, at the height of the gladiatorial games, during a celebration of the Roman victory over the Goths about A. D. 370, a lone figure interrupted the proceedings. Without warning, a rough and weather-beaten man jumped over the wall and into the arena. Shouts of excitement over the combat gave way to a profound silence, as all eyes turned from the gladiators to look at the lone figure.

He was covered with a mantle. He had come all the way from Asia to Rome. He was a Christian. He had heard about these barbaric entertainments, and, by the grace of God, he intended to stop them. He had shoved his way to the edge of the arena and jumped into the midst where every eye could see him. He advanced to the two gladiators who were engaged in mortal combat. Interposing himself between the combatants, he faced the crowd. Fearlessly, this hero raised his voice. ‘In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, I command these wicked games to cease. Do not requite God’s mercy by shedding innocent blood.’

A shout of defiance met the voice of our hero. Pieces of fruit, stones, daggers, and other missiles were hurled down from the stands. One of the gladiators, expecting the applause of the crowd, stepped forward and rammed his battle axe into the skull of the man who had dared interfere with Rome's favorite entertainment. As the hero sunk lifeless to the ground, the angry cries of the crowd died away into a profound silence in the arena. As the life's blood of this new martyr joined the blood of the thousands who had bled there before him, the crowd suddenly faced a courage that was greater than the strongest gladiator. The work of this Christian was accomplished. *His name was Telemachus.* From the hour of his martyrdom, the gladiatorial games ceased. According to John Foxe, in his famous book of martyrs, "From the day Telemachus fell dead in the Coliseum, no other fight of gladiators was ever held there." Such was the legacy of a man who dared to jump over a wall and declare that an aspect of popular cultural entertainment was ungodly and unlawful." – *Discerning History*

In other words, sometimes God calls upon us to stand in the gap to hold against a contrary change. The phrase *Athanasius Contra Mundum* or Athanasius Against the World comes readily to mind. Church History credits him as single-handedly resisting Bishop Arius & preventing Arianism from obtaining Orthodoxy.

3% of American Colonists Defeated the Entire British Empire.

American Restoration Movement @HUMAN WORTH.

The question of worthiness. By Luther's lifetime, the phrase for the communion ceremony and host had been altered & with it a change of emphasis. The term Eucharistia, which means thanksgiving, had been replaced with Missa, which means the dismissal of the unworthy. Individual worthiness itself had metamorphosed in meaning from a subjective introspective responsibility to an objective meaning measured by works.

Catholic hierarchs determine individual worthiness.

Reform churches each establish closed communions as evidencing their determinations of individual worth.

Restoration churches teach human worth as God given intrinsic and in the memorial supper - inner examined.

American Restoration Movement @HUMAN DIGNITY.

"The American leaders, however, understood a different principle to be at work. America was a new continent. It was as if God had provided a new Eden and given humanity a fresh start. Accordingly, they appealed to Nature and a biblical understanding of creation whereby every person bears the image of God. In creation, all are equal & have inherited certain divine rights which no king can take away ... This finds its way into the Declaration of Independence in the statement:

‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal & that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...’ The American political leaders rested their case for independence and democracy on this biblical foundation...”

The equal justice of God. “For the leaders of the American Restoration Movement, God is just & rules according to immutable laws. He is neither arbitrary, capricious, nor partial. Each human being has equal standing before Him & is equally amenable to His laws. Those laws are not hidden. They are revealed in a written and unchanging constitution: The New Testament. Moreover, they aren’t understood through subjective human experience, but normal objective reasoning...”

The sovereignty of the individual. “Since God is impartial and all humans are equal before Him, the Calvinist doctrine of election, whereby God chooses who will receive salvation, was rejected. Each person is free to participate in one’s own destiny, to accept or reject salvation!” - Dabney Phillips

Natural Law: Positive Versus Negative Rights – These are rights of either legal or moral character that oblige either action (positive rights) or inaction (negative rights). Negative Rights, similar to those found within the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights, exist unless someone acts to *negate* them. For a positive right to be exercised, someone else’s actions must be *added* to the equation.

In theory, a negative right forbids others from acting against the right holder while a positive right obligates others to act with respect to the right holder. Rights are of graded absolutism according to legal and moral obligations or responsibilities that confer duty. – Wikipedia

God's Law: Sins of Commission & Omission – Brother Gary Hutchins describes for us in detail the difference between the **Christian's positive and negative responsibilities:**

“Sins of commission are overt, sinful acts. They're sinful because they're something we do that we're not supposed to do. Sins of omission, on the other hand, are acts left undone, things that God expects us to do, but we don't do them. They're sinful because they're things we don't do that we're supposed to do.

Both types of sins represent disobedience. Sins of Commission are acts of outright disobedience to clear and direct commands to abstain from this or that. Sins of omission demonstrate disobedience to a clear instruction to do something.

Sins of omission are covered under Jesus' admonition, 'If you love Me, keep My commandments' (Jn. 14:15). To 'keep' the Lord's commandments is to obey His commandments. To not obey is to be disobedient to His commandments.

Some people feel that they're basically righteous simply because they abstain from overtly unrighteous acts such as murder, theft, lying and using vulgar language. But Godly righteousness is equally demonstrated through active obedience to commandments that demand action.

The most basic sin of omission is the failure to repent of one's sins, openly confess faith in Christ and surrender to Him in baptism for the remission of one's sins (Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38). Willful neglect to worship God with the church can also be a sin of omission (Heb. 10:23-25). A lack of active service and dedication to Christ (Rom. 12:1-2), *not being involved in 'good works' God has designed for us to be involved in as faithful Christians* (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14) *can be another sin of omission."*

Unfortunately, some Christians do not get past the "first" in First, Do No Harm! The world is no worse due to their being born – neither do they leave a Spiritually Positive Footprint.

H.L. Mencken Said of Short-Sighted Single Dimension Morality -
Man, at his best, remains a sort of one-lunged animal, never completely rounded and perfect, as a cockroach, say, is perfect. If he shows one valuable quality, it is almost unheard of for him to show any other. Give him a head, and he lacks a heart. Give him a heart of a gallon capacity & his head holds scarcely a pint... In all my years of search in this world, from the Golden Gate in the West to the Vistula in the East, and from the Orkney Islands in the North to the Spanish Main in the South, I have never met a thoroughly moral man who was honorable!

John Schaar's Contemporary Characterization Pulls No Punches:
Definition of an Evangelical Fundamentalist - *A fundamentalist is someone who hates sin more than he loves virtue.*

Negative Unity Under the Restoration Regulatory Principle –

Unifying in the Negative, the **Regulative Principle** states that Christians are to do nothing in worship except that which has been prescribed or commanded in Scripture. Not only does this principle underscore the fact that God has revealed in His Word how he desires to be worshiped, but it also wonderfully safeguards worship from the innovations of sinful mankind. Calvin once remarked that our minds are idol factories, always inventing new objects of worship and dreaming up new ways in which to worship. The Regulative Principle takes very seriously both the truthfulness of God's Word and the deceitfulness of men's hearts. Lutheran German and Calvinist Swiss Reformers differentiated on the Regulative Principle specific to worship: Germans "We can do any worship activity not specifically forbidden." Swiss "We only allow in our worship service what the Bible specifically approves." The American Restoration Movement extended the Regulative Principle beyond Sunday 24/7/365 to all aspects of Christian Living. During the period of the first major Split in the American Restoration Movement - there had developed two separate mindsets regarding both worship service and evangelistic organization and two very different interpretations of the Regulative Principle:

Churches of Christ “We must not add what God has not authorized.” Disciples of Christ “We must not condemn what God has not.”

Brother Roland Worth on Negative Focus & Positive Omission:

“In His parables, Christ viewed omissions as a just cause for receiving severe punishment. In Luke we read, ‘And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready, or act according to His will, shall receive a severe beating, But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a, light beating. Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required: and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more’ (12:47-48).

Any time we omit what we know to be right we have sinned. ‘Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin’ (Jas. 4:17).

Christ condemned the Pharisees for the omissions in their religion. Christ's condemnation was blunt and to the point; ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!’ (Matt. 23:23-24).

The King James Version makes this point even stronger by using the word ‘omitted’ where the Revised Standard Version (quoted above) uses the word ‘neglected.’ In either case the point is the same.”

In my opinion, the greatest correction for sins of omission is by considering the alternative scenarios - of either good or evil - for the community – when each individual within covenant relationship chooses - event specific - either action or inaction.

Small Actions Create Change - Hollywood God answers Evan’s prayerful question as to how to start “Changing the World” is to begin – by one (small) act of random kindness after another.

PART ii: HONORING THE FAMILY NAME

Bad Group Think Is Tribalism. “To the degree we are sensitive to the destructive effects of conforming to the larger society, some church people may want to isolate themselves from outside contact. Attacks on the church from outside, if there have been any, may contribute to cohesiveness within – a sense of ‘us’ against ‘them’ – and make church unity an end in itself. Ironically, in our press for unity within the church, we may lose the very strength and vitality we seek.”

“Another factor which may contribute to groupthink in the church is the false idea that faith is antagonistic to exercising critical judgment on any issue. We don’t encourage loyalty to God by a faith that refuses to exercise critical judgment.

Alternatives are either not examined or quickly dismissed.

Suggestions to review or reconsider, to delay temporarily or exercise caution are rationalized as reflecting a lack of faith.”

“To the degree that important social needs are met, a *clublike atmosphere* may pre-empt concern for the difficult tasks that must be faced. The fact that many of us within the church work together, worship and socialize together may suppress critical thought. The result may be a failure to offer both direction and leadership in confronting critical issues...” – *Human Connection*

Good Group Think Is Charity. Being Contagious in Well Doing.

“Even if we have a kind of treasury, this is not filled up from a sense of obligation, as of a hired religion. Each member adds a small sum once a month, or when he pleases, and only if he is willing and able, for no one is forced, but each contributes of his own free will. For these are the deposits made by devotion. For that sum is disbursed not on banquets nor drinking bouts nor unwillingly on eating-houses, but [disbursed] on the supporting and burying of the poor, and on boys and girls deprived of property and parents, and on aged servants of the house, also on shipwrecked persons, and any, who are in the mines, or on islands or in prisons, provided it be for the cause of God’s religion, who thus become pensioners of their confession.” – Tertullian, 2nd Cent.

1st Cent. Christians @2% Population Fulfilled Matthew 28:19ff

“Julian ascended the throne as Caesar in 360. He was the nephew of Constantine the Great who ‘Christianized’ the Roman world. Julian sought to re-establish pagan worship in the Empire & was thereafter known as ‘The Apostate.’ Julian openly began to persecute Christians and he withdrew the legal protection granted them by Constantine. He accused Christians of seeking to obtain followers by bribing the sick. ‘These impious Galileans,’ he wrote, ‘give themselves to this kind of humanity [the sick] as men allure children with candy, so they... bring converts to their impiety. *Now we can see what it is that makes these Christians such powerful enemies of our gods. It is brotherly love which they manifest towards strangers and towards the sick and the poor.*” [Roman Christians routinely rescued female infants when pagan parents exposed to die.]

Julian Went On To Say - “[Christianity] *has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers and through their care of the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar & that the [Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help we should render them.*”

“Julian had been educated in Athens alongside a committed Christian by the name of Agaton. Although he persecuted Christians, he invited his friend Agaton to serve in his court.

Julian frequently teased his Christian friend. One day, in front of a large group of wealthy Romans, Julian asked, 'Agaton, how is your carpenter of Nazareth? Is he finding work these days?' Agaton smiled and answered, 'He is perhaps taking time away from building mansions for the faithful to build a coffin for your Empire.' Less than two years later, on June 26, 363, Julian lay dying with a Persian arrow in his chest. He had led his troops in an attempt to take the ancient Persian Empire. Julian grasped a handful of dirt, red with his own blood. Flinging the dirt Heavenward he uttered his last words, 'Vicisti Galilae.' That is, **'You have conquered, Galilean'.**" (uncertain authorship)

Roman Persecution Causation Relationship: Sociological

In those ancient honor-shame societies one's physical presence and/or absence signaled either praise or insult. The Romans would observe such with the Cliché – *Conspicuous by Their Absence*. Socially, Christianity was considered a threat to the organization of society; Politically, they were considered intolerable & seen as an official threat - a State Within A State.

"The Christian ethic lived out became itself a criticism of pagan life. Meals at heathen feasts and social parties began with a liquid offering and a prayer to the pagan gods. As such, serious Christians would not participate in them. By such actions, the early Christians were frequently labeled as being unsociable, prudish, non-tolerant, boorish, and the like."

Roman Persecution Causation Relationship: Polity/Economy

“There was a balance of power Rome insisted upon holding when questions of loyalty to the imperial authorities were concerned. With a unifying political force of ‘Caesar worship’ having become the ‘keystone’ of imperial policy, several accusations were brought on Christians. They were looked upon as being unpatriotic and potential sources of chaos to an already faltering political & economic system.”

Roman Persecution Causation Relationship: Value System

“Francis Schaeffer additionally presents a philosophical pre-suppositional perspective. He views the antagonism as key to the whole consideration. The worldview expressed by the official Roman elite was a combination of ideas from many sources. The only ‘absolute’ clearly distinguishable concerned the support of the city-state. All values had meaning only in reference to the polis. Christians were thus not killed because they worshipped Jesus, but because they would not worship Jesus and Caesar. As such, they were considered rebels.”

- *Darkness to Light*; Volume V, Issue 22

1st Century Christians Routinely Experienced Roman Hybris.

(ii) Christian Infringement of Roman Law

Was there a legal charge for which Christians could be indicted? In an early constitution, *Lex coloniae Genetiae Juliae* (45 B.C.), Section CVI records, ‘No colonist of the colony [Roman] Genetiva, established by order of G. Caesar the dictator, shall (get together) any assemblage or meeting or conspiracy’. According to Hardy who was its editor, ‘These would come under the category of *majestas*’, i.e., ‘treason’. All the Julio-Claudian emperors saw associations as hotbeds for fomenting political dissents and therefore a thorn in their side.²⁴

Robinson in *The Criminal Law of Ancient Rome* discusses ‘Offenses against the State’, i.e., ‘treason’, ‘sedition’ and the official repressing of *collegia* (associations). Augustus’ legislation on associations meant that Christians could not legally meet weekly, although Jews had been specifically exempted in the same legislation and could do so. For all others, ‘regular meetings were to be no more than monthly’. Robinson also notes the consequences—‘This is one reason why Christians could hardly have formed legal *collegia*, since they need to meet weekly for worship.’

In the eyes of the emperors of the first century, and sometimes governors and ruling authorities in cities of the empire, *collegia* ‘represented a threat to Roman order rather than a standing offence, but they could be repressed severely; accusations were made before the Prefect of the City’. In *Lex Irnitana* there was a specific provision ‘concerning illegal gatherings, societies and colleges (*collegia*)’.

No one is to take part in an illegal gathering (*coetum facito*) in that *municipium* (self-governing town) or to hold a meeting of a society or college for that purpose or to conspire that it be held or to act in such a way that any of these things occur. Anyone who acts contrary to these rules is to be condemned to pay 10,000 sesterces to the *municipes* of the *Municipium Flavium Irnitanum* and the right of action, suit and claim of that money and concerning that money is to belong to any *municipes* of that *municipium*.

González, the editor of this bronze inscription, draws this significant conclusion—‘It is important to observe that the only thing actually banned is a *coetus*’, i.e., an ‘assembly’.

One legal prohibition in Roman law applied to Christian gatherings for weekly worship. This may well explain the significant exhortation ‘not neglecting the meeting together (ἐπισυναγωγή) as is the habit of some (καθὼς ἔθος τισίν)’ (10:25). Hedged around this exhortation is the prelude ‘to hold fast the confession of our hope that it does not waver’ (v. 23), also the call to ‘love and good works’ (v. 24) along with the subsequent warning not to sin willfully because there were no more sacrifices for sin, and there was an alarming fate for disloyal Christians (vv. 26–30). The reason for absenting oneself was not specified but, given the evidence in Hebrews, a good case can be made for some realizing that attendance on a weekly basis was in breach of Roman law, for only the Jews were permitted to do this.

Pliny the Younger later noted that all associations in Pontus were prohibited because of their suspected anti-Roman stance. ‘When people gather together for a common purpose, whatever name we may give them and whatever function we may assign them, they soon become political.’ In the same letter he reported to the emperor, Trajan, following the interrogation of Christians—‘They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt or their error was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang a hymn to Christ, as to a god.’ They were in breach of Roman law by meeting as they did on ‘a certain fixed day.’¹³

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¹³ Winter, B. W. (2015). [Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians’ Responses](#) (pp. 275–277). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

1st Century Christians Changed The World By Raising The Bar

Bruce W. Winter's first book in the Cambridge Book Series of First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World was **Seek the Welfare of the City: *Christians as Benefactors and Citizens.***

In this book Bruce Winter presents a detailed expository of –

Chapter One @1st Peter 1 – 2:11ff, Chapter Two @Romans 13: 3-4 & 1st Peter 2:14-15, Chapter Three @1st Thessalonians 4: 11-12 & 2nd Thessalonians 3:6-13, Chapter Four @1st Timothy 5:3-16, Chapter Five @Philippians 1:27 – 2:18, Chapter Six @1st Corinthians 6:1-11, Chapter Seven @Galatians 6:11-18, Chapter Eight @1st Corinthians 7:17-24, Chapter Nine @1st Corinthians 8 – 11:1, and Chapter Ten @Romans 16:23.

The title of Winter's book is directly linked to Jeremiah 29:4-7 –

(4) Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: (5) Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. (6) Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters – that you may be increased there, and not diminished. **(7)** *And seek the peace [welfare] of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.*

Benefaction & Citizenship Topics Subjected to Author Analysis –

Eschatology, Benevolent Mission, Public Arena, Patron/Client Relationship, Political Quietism, Financial Independence, Civil Litigation, Personal Enmity, Unrighteous Magistrates, Civic Obligations, Caesar Cultism, Civic Feasts, Social Status, Social Mobility, Christian Calling, and the Aedileship Oath of Office. The last chapter is of exclusive focus on the Corinth City Treasurer Erastus mentioned Acts 19:22 & Romans 16:23.

1994 Winter Book Excerpt, pg. 37

The use of singular 'you' in Romans 13:4 shows that it is addressed to the individual rather than the whole church. The cost of a benefaction was very considerable and beyond the ability of some, if not most, members of the church.

Benefactions included supplying grain in times of necessity by diverting the grain-carrying ships to the city, forcing down the price by selling it in the market below the asking rate, erecting public buildings or adorning old buildings with marble revetments such as in Corinth, refurbishing the theatre, widening roads, helping in the construction of public utilities, going on embassies to gain privileges for the city, and helping the city in times of civil upheaval. There must have been Christians of very considerable means to warrant Paul's injunction in verse 3 and that of 1st Peter 2:15. This further evidence supports the view that there were members of significant social status and wealth in a number of congregations in the early church.

1994 Winter Book Excerpt, pg. 42

Paul would not endorse a Christian continuing as the recipient of private benefactions by way of the parasitic client relationship with a patron even though it was widely accepted in the secular world as an important element in the social fabric of public life. This relationship would have been the one reason why some citizens apart from the rich in the city of Thessalonica, or in any other city in the empire, did not have to work... [Paul] was initiating in Gentile regions a radical social ethic which he regarded as binding on Christians. The secular client must now become a private Christian benefactor.

1994 Winter Book Excerpt, pgs. 201 - 204

The welfare of the city was seen to be two-fold. It was 'physical' and 'spiritual', and in the former case it was revolutionary in certain respects. It linked wealthy Christian members of the city into the civic benefaction convention. At the same time it expanded the definition of 'benefactor' to encompass all those in the Christian community who had the capacity to meet the needs of others from self-generated resources. It required all to be doers of good. This involved the renunciation of the client's full-time role in politeia forcing Christians to withdraw from unproductive existence where they were part of the paid retinue of a patron.

Unlike the secular trends of the first century with the development of a welfare syndrome favoring those with status and/or wealth, the Christian community was to be discriminating in the distribution of 'benefactions' to its members, 'honoring' only those who were genuinely needy – the godly Christian widows without relatives.

Paul was concerned as an 'association' they lived in a way that was worthy of the gospel. This involved securing concord in their midst to be a gospel witness in politeia where discord could be the rule rather than the exception. To live in a manner worthy of the gospel proscribed its members struggling for 'primacy' in their Christian community (Phil. 1:27ff). It also required them to abandon the use of vexatious litigation in civil actions which was one of the secular means of securing power in any group (1st Cor. 6:1-8) ...

By ancient standards, the 'nature of the politeia' for Christians was commended as something unique. It was not that they were postulating heaven as a 'republic'. Rather, Christian conduct in the politeia of their present cities was seen as a 'selling point' for the Christian message in the apologia to Dioqnetus. It was sufficiently different from that of others to draw attention to its distinguishing and startling characteristics.

Voting with a Christian Conscience

We should never give the impression that one party or another is the “Christian party.” We must be able to say to Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—and everyone in between—that unless you believe in Jesus, you will be eternally separated from God.

I agree with Lyndon Johnson who said in his inaugural address, “Under this covenant of justice we have become a nation—prosperous, great, and mighty. And we have kept our freedom. But we have no promise from God that our greatness will endure. We have been allowed by Him to seek greatness with the sweat of our hands and the strength of our spirit...If we fail now, we shall have forgotten in abundance what we learned in hardship: that democracy rests on faith, that freedom asks more than it gives, and that the judgment of God is harshest on those who are most favored.”

We must pray not only that our candidates believe in God, but that their belief means something to them and their policies. At a minimum, they ought to be convinced our laws are to be derived from God, both through the writings of Scripture and natural law.

Whether our preferred candidate wins or loses, we have a God-given responsibility to pray for our leaders and support them in whatever way we can. Paul, addressing the Romans when Nero was on the throne, wrote, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1).

– ERWIN LUTZER

https://www.churchofchristatmemorial.com/media/uploads/sermons/2020/09/09_06AM_People_of_Faith_Speaker_Jeff_Trahan.mp3

VOTE EVERY OPPORTUNITY BUT PRAY DAILY



When someone says
“You and what army?”

