

BIG TRUTH little books™

What the Bible Says About Government

Cliff McManis

GBF Press
Sunnyvale, CA

What the Bible Says About Government
is volume 6 in the
BIG TRUTH little books™ series.

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What the Bible Says About Government
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Published by GBF Press

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ISBN-13:978-0692821404
ISBN-10:0692821406

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Cover Design: Josh Guglielmo

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To Dr. John Stead of The Master's University,

Mentor, model, friend,
who, for over fifty years, has taught students
how to be faithful citizens of this world
and of Christ's Kingdom

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SERIES PREFACE

Our mission with the *BIG TRUTH little books*[™] series is to provide edifying, accessible literature for Christian readers from all walks of life. We understand that it is often difficult to find time to read good books. But we also understand that reading is a valuable means of spiritual growth. The answer? Get some really big truth into some little books. Every book in this series is only 5" x 8" and around 120 pages. But each is full of Scripture, theological reflection, and pastoral insight. Our hope is that Christians young and old will benefit from these books as they grow in their knowledge of Christ through his Word.

Cliff McManis, General Editor
Derek Brown, Series Editor

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this book is to give an overview and survey of what the Bible has to say about government and politics. Every four years, during a presidential election season, there is widespread angst from all quarters in anticipation of the prospective realignment of political power in the White House. Emotions run high, furious dialogue and debates rage, tempers flare, controversy reigns supreme on all media outlets, and confusion abounds—even among Christians.

But politically charged hysteria and hype should not destabilize Christians during such uncertain prospects of who does and doesn't get elected. We have the solid foundation of the Bible to stand on, God's Word—the all-sufficient Scriptures—to guide us. We believe in the

sufficiency of Scripture, meaning the Bible has all the necessary information that we need to enable us to live godly lives—even when it comes to the raging political scene. This book is not exhaustive on all the specific issues, but I trust it will be adequate in establishing principles that will allow the believer to think about everything pertinent from a biblical worldview. In other words, my goal is to provide a biblical paradigm—a grid or lens structured by the principles of Scripture—by which any Christian can adequately think through all current matters related to politics. Consider this a primer on Biblical Political Science 101.

Many, no doubt, will be challenged by the views presented herein. The main reason for that is the perspective of this book is not represented in the mainstream media. Local TV news channels, cable networks, talk radio programs and popular online news sources and blogs are not interpreting current events and politics from a biblical worldview. Their perspective is mainly

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coming from presuppositions rooted in secular and humanistic thinking—a worldly perspective, and not a spiritual one. As such, much of that information will not conform to a biblical assessment.

The principles we will champion and propagate will most likely never be found on programs such as CNN, MSNBC, CBS, NPR ABC, US Today, Yahoo news or the AP. Also, if you were educated primarily in public schools or attended a secular university, or even a liberal Christian college, where you were required to take civics or political science classes, you most likely were not taught how to understand society and the government from a biblical perspective. Depending on your background, education, and experiences, you are probably going to come across something in this book that will challenge your thinking about government.

Four Kinds of Christians

For over 2,000 years, individual Christians and

the Church have struggled in trying to balance their view of secular earthly government on the one hand with the heavenly Kingdom of God on the other. What should the Church's posture be toward human government?¹ Can Christianity and politics mix? Should there be separation of Church and State? What is separation of Church and State? At what level should Christians be involved in politics, voting and campaigns? Throughout Church history, Christians have gone from one extreme to the other in terms of what constitutes a biblical attitude toward government. And at any given time, Christians are all over the spectrum when it comes to how they view politics. I propose that Christians fall into one of four categories when it comes to how they view politics and government: (1) the Clueless Christian; (2) the Careless Christian; (3) the Crazy Christian; and (4) the Conscientious Christian.

First is the *Clueless Christian*. These believers

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are oblivious to political matters. They are ignorant of the world scene around them. They are happy to know Jesus, the Bible and to be a part of fellowship with other believers. Church ministry and spirituality are what life is all about. They don't know who the Speaker of the House is; they don't know what the Constitution teaches; they don't know who is running as vice-President. They don't know when the election is or what issues are on the ballot. They don't vote. They are neutral to politics and actually are not interested in the topic. When it comes to politics and government, ignorance is bliss. Recently, after I preached a sermon on this topic, I had a fellow believer admit to me, "Pastor—I'm definitely a 'Clueless Christian' as you have described. But I'm from China and we never got to vote, so we actually never gave a thought to politics the way you Americans do." That was a great reminder for me as an American Christian to hear. I needed to have my horizons broadened.

The second category is the *Careless Christian*. This believer could “care less” about politics. They are not necessarily ignorant or uninformed about politics like the Clueless Christian is. They actually might be fully informed on the issues, but they don’t think it really matters much. They aver that politics and government don’t really make a long-lasting or meaningful impact on the real ailments of life. This view maintains that the Church, and Christians, should have nothing to do with government or politics whatsoever. A Christian should never aspire to run for office, for it’s a waste of time and energy. Believers should not discuss politics in the church or be preoccupied with governmental issues at all. These folks can at times come across as spiritual snobs as they look down their noses at fellow crass, earthly-minded Christians who actually care about politics. Their line of thinking is usually justified by arguing that because believers are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we should

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have nothing to do with this world—whether it be voting or voicing an opinion on some political issue. We need to be preoccupied with spiritual and heavenly matters, not matters down here on earth. Politics, so the argument goes, has no bearing on our eternal inheritance.

Next is the third category—the *Crazed Christian*. This is the believer who is *entrenched* in politics. Politics is more than a hobby, but almost a way of life. These Christians watch the political TV shows daily, listen to talk radio religiously, buy and read the current best-selling books by the political pundits. These folks get emotional about politics and upcoming elections as they pontificate about the issues on Facebook, spoil family dinner times arguing about the enemy's platform, and turn beet red and foam and froth at the mouth when they get into a dialogue with an antagonist of their views. These crazed Christians truly believe that who gets elected makes a profound difference and that legislation

significantly impacts real life. Crazy Christians vote and think it's a sin if you don't vote. And they believe that they can effect change in the direction and trajectory of society by their political involvement. Like the careless Christians, these folks can sometimes come across as overbearing with their strong political opinions, as they tell us dogmatically who Jesus would vote for and that we need to follow suit.

The fourth category is the *Conscientious Christian*. Ideally, every Christian should strive toward being in this category. Conscientious Christians aspire to be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to them, as citizens of heaven and citizens of this world. They know being ignorant is not true spirituality. They believe voting is a privilege and a stewardship here in America. They try to maintain the difficult balance between the temporal and the eternal. They believe God does not want us to be clueless Christians. Jesus was not clueless about the social

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and political world around Him, even though He put a premium on spiritual matters. The apostles and the early church were not content to live in oblivious ignorance about geo-political matters of their day. Paul deliberately sought to create awareness of Christians by writing about such topics in his epistles (cf. Rom 13:1-7; 1 Tim 1:8-11; 2:1-3; 1 Cor 16:1-6).

God does not want us to be careless Christians either. It is true that believers are citizens of heaven, but at the same time we are also citizens of this world—we have dual citizenship. God determined beforehand when we would be born and in what nation we would live for His purposes (Acts 17). Politics is not the answer, nor is it the Great Commission, but throughout history God has used government leaders and political structures to accomplish His purposes. Esther served in the regime of a pagan monarch. Daniel served as an advisor in a corrupt Babylonian government. Nehemiah was the cup-

bearer to a secular ruler. Paul appealed to Caesar. Jesus commanded us to “Render to Caesar!” not “Ignore Caesar!” or “Disregard and overthrow Caesar!” The Christian can’t just “care less” about what is going on in the world.

So we need to be conscientious about our world, being cognizant of the flow of history as God sovereignly and providentially guides, doing what we can to stay informed, rendering to Caesar what is Caesar’s on every appropriate level. But we can’t lose perspective and go overboard by becoming a crazed Christian where politics (and who gets elected) becomes everything. God is in control. He is Creator, Judge, Sustainer and Provider—He is completely sovereign over all things that happen in heaven and on earth. We need to ultimately rest and take comfort in Him, not in our vote or desired election results.

A Lesson from History

Of the four possible categories listed above, it

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seems that Christians in America historically have been vulnerable to falling into category three—crazed—putting too much stock in politics to accomplish spiritual purposes. This has actually been a tendency of the Church all through history. The first widespread challenge, or compromise, in this area for the Church came with the conversion of Constantine in AD 313 (although he wasn't baptized until 337), who would become the sole ruling emperor of Rome in 324.

As a professing Christian, Constantine urged the State to be favorable to the faith and to stop the long-standing persecution of Christians. And as time went on, he got more and more involved, as a politician, in the affairs of the Church. He called for the first-ever ecumenical council of the Christian Church in May of 325 AD, with more than 230 invited bishops in attendance, to gather at Nicaea (modern-day Turkey) to discuss theological matters about Christ as well as many

practical ecclesiological matters. Not only did he host the council, he moderated and ruled over the council. He wielded his secular political position and powers in the domain of spiritual church life. Biblically, Constantine had no legitimate authority to moderate such a theological council—he was not a pastor, elder or deacon of a church. He mixed politics and religion beyond what the Bible warrants, and Christians have been doing it ever since. Despite crossing appropriate boundaries of governmental meddling in church affairs, God providentially worked many things together for good from the council, as an orthodox view of Christology was crystalized from Scripture, and false teaching was exposed.² After Constantine, the emperor Theodosius actually made Christianity the State religion of the Roman Empire by decree in 380 AD—I call that *crazed*, and even *coercive* Christianity.

Striking the Balance

Ever since the fourth century, with the

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unprecedented crossover of imperial secular power formally spilling over into the Church, there have been many church leaders who have argued that the church not only needs to be involved in politics, but that engagement in politics should be a main objective and priority of believers. Generally, these Christians argue that God has put us here to reconstruct and Christianize secular society in every area, whether it is politics, public education, entertainment, health and medicine or the news. There are Christians who desire to Christianize every component of society, with the goal of filling all government roles with Christians. In other words, they would have us build a Christian theocracy.

This is nothing new—it was a problem during the days of John Calvin in the 1500s. Calvin was a wonderful man of God and one of the greatest pastors and expositors the world has ever known. But in 1536, when he went to Geneva, he got caught up in this type of thinking as he attempted

to build a kind of Christian theocracy. Calvin remained in Geneva for the rest of his life and affirmed many civic policies that were penned in order to Christianize the entire city. Here are a few examples of these policies:

1. A civil proclamation was issued severely regulating moral and religious practices according to the Bible.
2. All citizens were ordered to attend sermons every Lord's day.
3. Catholicism was against the law.
4. All citizens of Geneva were to make an oath saying that they would live according to the gospel.
5. The local government took over church property and control of all local religion.
6. The city council decided who was worthy to take communion on the Lord's Day.

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7. Cards and dice were forbidden and against the law.³

We see similar thinking about government from many prominent church leaders today. Many of those who promote a highly-engaged approach to politics are godly men—but who have, nonetheless, gone too far on this issue by making politics a *priority* in the church and politicizing Christianity and the gospel.

Pastor Jerry Falwell (1933-2007), for example, lived for this kind of Christian engagement with politics. Falwell was the long-time pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. In the late 1970's he helped spearhead the "Moral Majority," a political entity characterized by conservative and religious Republicans with the goal of promoting religious values and religious candidates. Jerry Falwell, Jr. has followed in the footsteps of his father as he has become an outspoken political voice for the conservative right while maintaining his role as

the President of Liberty University. Pastor D. James Kennedy (1930-2007), who was a respected preacher and prolific author, believed that one of the primary goals of the church was to “transform” the United States and get it back to being a predominately Christian nation. His motto became “Reclaim America!” Pastor Rick Warren and televangelist Pat Robertson have been trying to take the “Purpose Driven” philosophy to an extreme by making “purpose driven” nations such as Uganda, Rwanda, and Latin America. I would argue that this is an impossible feat, and it will remain impossible until Jesus Christ returns and makes “purpose driven” nations Himself during His reign on earth.

There is a balance in our thinking that we need to maintain, and it is often difficult to strike this balance as a Christian. It has always been a great challenge for the Church. It’s a given that we are not all going to agree on every political issue or governmental policy, but I hope to highlight

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some biblical truths that will help guide our thinking so that we might begin to form some basic convictions about what Scripture says regarding these important issues—issues that will ever be before us while we are citizens on this fallen earth. We now turn to chapter one to learn who exactly ordained the institution of human government.

~1~

GOD ORDAINED HUMAN GOVERNMENT

How Government Began

Where did human government come from? What is the ultimate origin of government on earth? This is a fundamental question, yet few in the secular world, and in history, agree on the answer. Popular notions today say 1) government originated spontaneously over time with the process of evolution; 2) others say it is a human construct or human convention; 3) others say it came from patriarchal dominance that typified ancient history; 4) others say it arose of practical necessity by way of natural law. And on and on the unbiblical notions go.

The Bible is clear on this question. As a matter of fact, Christianity is the only religion in the world that has a clear and specific answer to this question. And Christianity is the only religion that has a thorough, comprehensive “theology of politics and government.” This is another testimony to the doctrine of biblical sufficiency—the truth that the Bible tells us everything we *need* to know about this life and the spiritual life.

The Old Testament is the authority on this topic in terms of the historical origins of human government. Genesis, the first book in the Bible and written by Moses, is a historical account of how things in this world began. Moses, a prophet of God, was led by the Holy Spirit to write a historical narrative about how things began, including the institution of government. All government is based on authority, the right and the ability to rule. All human governments rule with delegated authority that comes directly from God because God, as the Creator, Sustainer and

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Judge, is the only One who has ultimate, sovereign power. Genesis 1:1 says, “God created the heavens and the earth”—that means He created everything. And as Creator He wields all power, authority and control. Scripture says, “God is in heaven, He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). Psalm 103:19 says, “The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.”

Genesis chapter one says God made the first two humans on day six as the apex of creation (1:26-31). Humans were the only beings made in His image. The first thing God said when deciding to create humans was that He wanted them “to rule.” The purpose to rule and govern the earth with God’s authority is mentioned even before the basic command and purpose of procreation. Governing is inherent in the role of being human on the earth. From the first day of their existence God determined that humans would mediate His rule and governance on the

earth. The principle of human government began with the first two humans—it did not spontaneously arise or develop hundreds or thousands of years later out of practical necessity or as a result of the survival and dominance of the fittest. Human government is a gift and stewardship from God as old as humanity itself.

Over the course of time and with the progress of revelation, God further defined man's responsibility to govern. With the onset of sin and its rapid worldwide progression, God added a key component to human rule and government. Genesis chapter nine delineates when God first delegated forceful, restraining governing-ruling authority to the human race...in the days of Noah (around 2,500 BC) after the universal Flood.

After Noah and his family disembarked the ark, God established several basic rules of order by which to live—most of which still apply today. One of them was when God commanded Noah

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with this decree: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed. For in the image of God He made man (i.e., all humans)” (9:6). Here God gave humans delegated authority to execute legal power to enact capital punishment when warranted. God was telling Noah that human life was to be vigilantly and legally protected, and he had the authority of God to do it. One thousand years later God elaborated further on the jurisdiction of such lethal human authority wielded by legitimate earthly government in the days of Moses, the Mosaic Law and the theocracy of Israel. The New Testament validates even further such delegated authority, and the boundaries, of human government.

It’s important to note that the governing authority that God portioned out at creation in Genesis chapter one, to Noah after the Flood, and to Moses in the theocracy of Israel was civil authority. It was not authority given to the Church because the Church did not exist in the

Old Testament. And it was not personal authority. No personal individual citizen or Christian has the right to go out and kill someone or mete out justice with one's own hands. That right is reserved for God-ordained civil government. As individuals, Christians are called by Christ to turn the other cheek, not retaliate, and are called even to love and pray for their enemies (Matthew 5:38-48).

How Christians Relate to Government

Having addressed the question of the origin of government, it is also important to address the question, "How do Christians relate to the government?" The New Testament adds new revelation on these matters that are pertinent to the Church and how Christians are to relate to government. Two passages are paramount: 1 Peter 2 and Romans 13. These two chapters together, in summary fashion, provide the foundation for developing a biblical view of government and supply the principles from which

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everything else should flow.

First to consider is the passage written by the Apostle Peter. It is significant to remember that when Peter wrote his short letter to the Church (in about 64 AD), he lived under the authority of one of the worst Roman emperors ever—Nero. Nero was about three-fourths of the way through his thirteen-year reign, which ended in 68 AD. He was a ruthless, selfish, abusive, monstrous, maniacal tyrant. He had his mother murdered in 59 AD. He was characterized by “vanity, cruelty and love of power.”¹ While in power, he routinely murdered anyone close to him that he did not trust. In 64 AD Rome burned to the ground in one of the most infamous fires in history. Needing a scapegoat, Nero blamed the Christians. As a result, one of the most widespread and gruesome persecutions of Christianity ensued with unspeakable acts of torture and slaughter carried out against followers of Jesus the world has ever known. One historian summarizes:

large numbers of Christians were arrested.... Many Christians were even crucified. Some were sewn up in the skins of wild beasts; then big dogs were let loose upon them, and they were torn to pieces. Women were tied to mad bulls and dragged to death. After nightfall Christians were burned at the stake in Nero's garden. The Roman people who hated the Christians were free to come into the garden, and Nero drove around in his chariot enjoying the horrible spectacle to the full. It was probably during this persecution that the apostles Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome.²

Nero, like many of the Roman emperors, was narcissistic in addition to his cruelty. Believing himself to be deity, the Roman State implored the

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masses to bow in homage to the Emperor. Such an injunction was a direct compromise to the Christian faith—for Christians believe in only one God and Lord. Bowing the knee to another would be blasphemy. Nevertheless, Peter instructs believers of his day to submit themselves to the secular government, which Peter knew was compromised and wicked. Peter wrote,

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.... Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish

men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king (1 Pet 2:11-17).

In this text, Peter is addressing Christians, commanding them to submit to “every human institution.” Believers are to comply with political authority—not overthrow it; not be rabble-rousers; not stir up civil unrest; not be vigilantes. This passage condemns community organizers and their *Rules for Radicals*. Remember: this king Peter is talking about slaughtered Christians. Ironically, Peter tells Christians to submit to the same king, Nero, who later had Peter crucified upside down. Why should Christians submit to secular rulers? Peter says, “for the Lord’s sake.” Submit to governing authorities because it pleases the Lord; Jesus is the One who is really in charge anyway. He holds every king and emperor in His

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hand and does with them as He wills. His plans will not be thwarted. Submit to all human authorities out of love, devotion and obedience to Jesus—the KING of Kings and LORD of Lords.

The second New Testament passage to consider is Romans 13. This text provides a similar exhortation from the Apostle Paul regarding what should constitute a Christian attitude toward government:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of

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authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Rom 13:1-7).

There are several divine, transcendent principles

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that flow from this passage. One key observation is that Paul is not referring to a *Christian* government in this text; like Peter, he is referring to the current secular ruling government of his day—the Roman government. It was the pagan, unbelieving, sometimes hostile, often compromising government that was in force during the writing of the New Testament—a government ruled by the likes of the despicable Emperor Nero, described above. Nero’s thirteen-year reign (54-68 AD) ran parallel to Paul’s public Christian ministry. Nero was practically the only emperor Paul knew as a Christian. It was to the wicked Nero that Paul appealed to in Acts 25:11 when he failed to get justice from Festus, the puppet Roman governor of Judea. And it was probably Nero who had Paul beheaded around 67 AD.

Paul also teaches us that every king, emperor, governor, and civil authority that exists was put in place specifically by God—whether they are

good, bad, or ugly. In addition to being cruel and narcissistic, history tells us that Nero was also ugly:

The expression of his countenance, however, was somewhat repelling. His frame was ill proportioned—slender legs and big stomach. In later years his face was covered with pimples.³

Paul even states the converse: there is no authority except from God. This text tells us that God sovereignly determines who will be in a position of authority. It also explains that if you break the law, you will suffer the consequences of the law, and the government has the right to punish you...and me. He warns us citizens, “if you do what is evil, be afraid”! If you drive over that speed limit, you better look over your shoulder. If you don’t pay your taxes, then you should not sleep peacefully at night. If you do not

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want to have fear of authority or government intrusion, do what is good and right.

Paul uses interesting terminology when he refers to governmental authorities, calling them “ministers of God.” He uses the word “minister,” not in a religious manner, but meaning “servant.” Government rulers, police officers, and military personnel are intended by God to be “servants” of the people, tasked primarily with preserving order, civility, peace and safety. Many police cars have written on the doors, “To protect and serve.” That adage is appropriate and comes right from Romans 13! This means that police officers are ministers of God. Soldiers are ministers of God. Government officials are ministers of God. That does not mean they are saved or are spiritual children of God. It means they were given an allotment of civil, ruling authority as a temporary stewardship responsibility...to which they must give an account. They are accountable to God the Creator for it. They can abuse it, but they’re still

supposed to be serving God with justice according to the law. This includes every single person who serves in a civil and leadership capacity, which is why Paul calls them “ministers” or “servants” on behalf of God, for your good.

God has allowed and delegated the authority to execute judgment, including the death penalty, to civil/political authorities. God first instituted the death penalty Himself, when He told Adam in the beginning, “If you eat from the forbidden tree then you shall surely die!” (Gen 2:17). Then He reiterated the death penalty during the days of Noah long before the Mosaic Law (see Gen 9:6). There are people who call themselves Christians who are pacifists, claiming that capital punishment is “murder,” wrong, unloving, unchristian, and not what Christ believed. In effect, they are trying to say that capital punishment is unbiblical. But that is categorically false. It’s clear from these passages in Genesis that God specifically appointed the death penalty

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for local governments to wield to protect human life.

The death penalty has been in force from God's point of view ever since Adam's disobedience (6,000 years now), and it is even reaffirmed by Jesus in the New Testament. (see Luke 13:5 where Jesus teaches that sinners deserve to die). It came from God, and when Jesus returns again, as described in Revelation 19, He is coming not as a suffering servant, but as the wrathful Judge to wage war against His enemies and to execute the death penalty upon them:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.... And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh (vv. 11, 21).

Such physical, legal retribution is one of the key principles that Paul affirms in Romans 13. He says that God gave the government authority to “bear the sword” as a minister of God. Governing officials are to serve as avengers who bring wrath and justice upon those who practice evil.

It is almost alarming that Paul calls government rulers “ministers” three times in this short passage. You might be thinking, “Well, they sure don’t act like servants!” Unfortunately, this is frequently the case. Many rulers abuse authority; plenty of people go into politics for the love of power and prestige to serve themselves and not the people. Political corruption has been with us for millennia and is with us today. But this was not God’s intention. There are a few respectable governing officials and ruling authorities who actually take their service role seriously and devote themselves to pursuing justice; but there are also many evil officials who neglect,

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undermine and even abuse the authority God has given them.

Paul goes on to give an important balance for us by establishing clear boundaries that define the jurisdiction of our submission to the secular civil authorities. We are not supposed to submit to absolutely everything the government asks or demands. We are to submit only in the proper areas of their jurisdiction. So their authority is real, but it is limited. This is clear from 13:7 when Paul says, “render to all what is due them.” Render them their “due,” meaning what they deserve, what is legitimate, within limits, inside the appropriate boundaries, in keeping with their finite job description. He didn’t say render them “everything, no matter what, all the time!” The same apostles who said, “Christian, submit to the government,” also said, “We won’t submit to the ruling authorities when they ask us to disobey God...even if it costs us our lives!” (my rendition of Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). So there are clear

parameters for when we are to obey the governing authorities.

Paul lists some basic areas where we need to submit and comply: “render...tax to whom tax is due”—Christian, pay your taxes! And don’t whine about it. Jesus paid His taxes and commanded His followers to do the same (Matt 22:21). God knows how much money you have, how much you need and He even knows when the government is stealing and ripping the people off. He won’t let such injustice go without a divine accounting. Take comfort in God’s promise in Romans 12:19 when He said, “‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

Paying tolls and taxes can be tough and frustrating. When I drive to seminary class here in the San Francisco Bay Area, I get hit with a \$5.00 bridge toll each time (and the fee keeps rising). Oftentimes, as I cough up my cash, and there are hundreds of cars passing through, I think, “Where is all that money going?” Occasionally, I

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turn in my money, try to force a smile at the teller who's confiscating the dregs in my wallet, and I drive off thinking, "This is literally highway robbery!" That is the wrong response on my part in light of 1 Peter 2 and Romans 13. Scripture clearly tells us how to handle these situations: Custom to whom custom is due; bridge toll fee to whom bridge toll fee is due; speed limit to whom speed limit is due. Fear to whom fear is due; honor to whom honor is due. As believers, this should be our primary perspective and attitude when thinking about human government. At times of weakness like that I need to remember that God is sovereign; He is in complete control of all things; and He is the Great Provider. I need to trust in Him, His Word and pay my dues.

Let's summarize what was highlighted in this chapter:

1. As Creator, Sustainer and Judge, God is the ultimate sovereign ruler, and the right

to rule and the ability to rule issues directly from Him.

2. God created human government on the sixth day of creation when He made Adam and Eve. As such, human government has been around for 6,000 years.
3. The authority God gave humanity to govern was not religious power, but civil power, for the purpose of preserving order, peace and life.
4. God also instituted the death penalty, beginning in Genesis 2 with Adam, expanding it in the days of Noah and reaffirming it in the New Testament.
5. First Peter 2 and Romans 13 give guiding principles to believers of how they are to relate to the secular governing authorities.
6. Every authority that exists was specifically established by God. God delegates ruling authority for good but many times wicked people abuse that authority.

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7. Christians are to submit to the government in keeping with the government's legitimate jurisdiction.
8. Christians don't need to submit to the government when it is in direct conflict with the Bible.
9. Christians are to submit to government because God said to and it pleases Him when we obey Him and trust Him.

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THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

God is the Provider

We just saw that God established human government for a very specific purpose. Government has authority, but it has limited authority. One important distinction in light of this truth that often gets overlooked is this: *the government was established by God to be a protector, not a provider.* God created government to protect individuals from evil and preserve justice and liberty within society. Government was *not* given by God to be a provider. Nations all throughout history have confused these two very different roles. Today America has greatly confused this reality and so has

the Church. God never intended the secular government to be the provider—for individuals or for societies as a whole.

God makes it very clear that He is the Provider for all people, and especially for the Christian. From Genesis to Revelation God is shown to be the Provider. In 2,000 BC God provided Abraham the sacrificial ram he needed to spare Isaac's life. And Abraham worshipped God in thanksgiving calling Him "YHWH-Jireh" which means "the LORD provides" (Gen 22:13-14). Paul told the Greek pagans in Lystra that God was the provider of all people. He proclaimed that God "did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17).

God wants believers to trust in Him for provision. Jesus taught this truth in Matthew 6 in the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father prayer. Jesus modeled how believers should pray. A basic

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element to true prayer is acknowledging God as the provider and pleading with Him accordingly. Jesus told believers that essential to daily prayer is the request, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Jesus is reminding believers that they should be asking God to provide them with the most basic essentials of life, “daily bread.” In a biblical worldview, humans are totally dependent on God for provision, not the government. And if you’re a Christian, you must look to God first and foremost as your provider in every area of life.

Different Ways God Provides

Although God has not assigned government to be the primary provider for humans, He has established some human means and institutions through which He provides for His image-bearers. The first means pertains to the individual. When God created Adam, He gave Adam the ability to work hard so that he could be self-sufficient with God’s provisions on the earth, laboring for his sustenance. This was true before Adam sinned

(Gen 2:15) and after he sinned (Gen 3:17-19).

God expects each individual to work hard by the sweat of the brow to make a living. Human beings were made to work hard for basic survival in this life. God promises to bless wholesome hard work: “In all labor there is profit” (Prov 14:23). And if one is not willing to work hard then that lazy person will suffer want: “An idle man will suffer hunger” (Prov 19:15). In the New Testament Paul told Christians that they need to work hard with their hands to provide for their own needs as they are able. And Paul set himself up as the example to follow. He worked hard, day and night, to earn a living so that he would not be an imposition on anyone. Paul said,

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you

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yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you (2 Thess 3:6-8).

In this passage Paul is reminding the Thessalonians, and all Christians, that they need to work hard to provide for their own needs the way he worked hard when he was serving among them. Paul did not beg, sponge or mooch off the Thessalonians when he preached to them. He had a job on the side to make his own money to pay his own bills. And he expected them to do the same. Anyone not willing to work hard Paul called “unruly” and “undisciplined”—meaning they were lazy. Paul goes on to tell the Thessalonians that if anyone in their midst “is not willing to work, then he is not to eat,

either” (3:10).

God has also structured the family so that the husband and father would be a source of provision for other members of the family. This was true from the beginning. God commanded Adam to be the provider for his family through hard work, while Eve was to be the husband’s helper (Gen 2:18), the nurturing mother (Gen 3:16, 20) and homemaker (Prov 31; cf. 1 Tim 5:14). Six thousand years later this is still God’s design for the family. The New Testament commands husbands to provide for their wives (Ephesians 5:29) and families (1 Tim 5:8).

Ideally, each family unit is to be self-sufficient, working hard, trusting God for all their provisions and not being dependent on the government to meet their needs. This basic means of provision has been undermined and shattered today in our culture due to many factors: a wholesale rejection of the biblical ethic; rampant divorce; people refusing to commit to marriage; dead-beat dads unwilling to

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provide for their families; women usurping the man's role as provider; countless millions unwilling to work hard, but rather choosing to sponge off the government dole of entitlements and welfare...and many other reasons.

In addition to individuals working hard for provision and husbands and fathers providing for their families, there are times when the Church is called to help people meet their needs. There are special hardship cases when people will not be able to meet the basic needs of life due to unique and trying circumstances.

There will be people who are genuinely needy and helpless who require the assistance and mercy of God's people in the church. These special categories of people include widows (1 Tim 5:3), orphans (James 1:27), the elderly (Heb 12:12), the poor (Gal 2:10), certain prisoners (Heb 13:3), the weak (1 Thess 5:14), the sick (James 5:14), the stranger (1 Pet 4:9), the oppressed (James 5:13) and those who labor in ministry (1 Tim 5:17-18). The

Church is a spiritual family and needs to make a priority of helping fellow spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus Himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). We can’t meet the needs of the whole world, but we are to help those in need starting with those in the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10).

The early church in the Book of Acts took care of each other. There were plenty of poor and needy Christians in the first church of Jerusalem, but they did not look to the secular government or tax-payer welfare to meet their needs. They looked to God their Savior and fellow members in the Body of Christ. And their needs were all met! Luke summarizes how the early church provided for each others’ needs:

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone

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might have need.... And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.... For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-35).

Out of Balance

Scripture is clear—people are not supposed to depend on the government to provide for their basic needs. God's rule of thumb is if you are able-bodied then you need to work and work hard, by the sweat of your brow. That is man's lot in this life. Paul said it best when he commanded believers “to

make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your own hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need” (1 Thess 4:11-12).

This is the biblical worldview, but it is not the worldview by which the United States operates today, nor is it the worldview of many Christians. The above ideas and commands are completely foreign to millions of Americans today, especially young people. Recently on a talk radio program I heard the host conducting live interviews on a college campus at a major public university. The radio host was asking college students various questions about the role of the US government. Their answers were alarming and telling. Here are some of the questions these students were asked along with their responses:

Question: Do you think that the government should be responsible for providing you with a job?

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College student: Yes.

Question: Do you think the government should be responsible for providing you with a house?

College student: Yes.

Question: Do you think the government should be providing you with a car or the means to get a car?

College student: Yes.

Question: Do you think the government should be responsible for providing the needy with food?

College student: Yes.

Question: Is it the responsibility of the government to make sure that 100% of Americans have healthcare, including you?

College student: Yes.

Question: Is it the responsibility of the government to provide your college education and the funds to have a college education?

College student: Yes.

Question: Do you think it is the responsibility of the government to give free public schooling for all children in America?

College student: Yes.

Question: Is it the responsibility of the government to provide food, especially breakfast, to all these kids who go to the free school every morning?

College student: Yes.

Question: Is it the responsibility of the government to give these kids free transportation to school each day?

College student: Yes.

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Question: Is it the responsibility of the government to provide for and ensure your retirement when you are ready to retire and to provide for you?

College student: Yes.

In the most recent Presidential election cycle, the Democratic candidates were routinely promising students free college education if they got elected. The responses of the college students above and of the Presidential candidates is not in keeping with the biblical ethic nor of basic human responsibility. These people want freebies and want to live off the backs of other people's labor. This is wrong and is actually socialism (and theft) at the core. Socialism is based on atheistic and humanistic presuppositions, beginning with the idea that the State is sovereign, not God. As a matter of fact, socialism resists the idea of God and accountability to Him. And socialism always manifests itself in an oligarchical structure whereby a few power-hungry

leaders dictate how the masses should live—the quintessential suppression of individual liberty, freedom and responsibility.

It is interesting to note that the founding document of the United States of America, *The Constitution*, is actually true to the biblical ethic. It outlines that the government's main responsibility is to ensure the protection of its citizens and the preservation of order in society. Nowhere does it mandate that the government be the provider for the people. Nowhere does it warrant a socialistic welfare program.

There is not much chance that the bloated US government will go back to its Constitutional roots. More than likely, in the years ahead it will continue to move towards a more hardcore socialism, towards which all human governments in history tend to shift. Regardless, Christians in every generation, no matter what country they live in, are called to live by the biblical ethic when it comes to relating to government. Government is a protector,

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not our provider. God is our ultimate Protector and our faithful Provider, and thus, even the government's role as protector is temporary. And it is to this truth that we now turn in chapter three.

~3~

EARTHLY GOVERNMENT IS TEMPORARY

Christians have dual citizenship: we are temporal national citizens here on earth and at the same time eternal spiritual citizens of heaven. Jesus taught this very truth. Just prior to His departure to the cross, Jesus fielded a political question publically from the antagonistic Pharisees who were trying to humiliate Him. Jesus retorted by declaring, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt 22:21). Jesus was reaffirming that there are two legitimate domains—the civil and the spiritual; the sacred and the secular; the religious and the political; the Church and the State; the temporal and the eternal. We have stewardship

obligations in both realms.

Jesus had no problem living under a pagan government—the Romans. Jesus acknowledged that Tiberius Caesar was the Roman Emperor, and had the political authority and right to collect taxes. Tiberius ruled from 14-37 AD. Luke mentions Tiberius by name in his Gospel (cf. 3:1). Yet, Jesus never called for the overthrow of Tiberius, even though he was an immoral, corrupt and evil man.

The Bible carefully maintains a distinction between the sacred and the secular. This formally began in the days of Israel when the Jews demanded having a human king to rule over them just like the nations around them (1 Sam 8). God granted their wish and gave them Saul (around 1040 BC) as king (1 Sam 8:22). Yet God restricted King Saul's rule to primarily civil matters, which included the military, and not certain religious matters. Key religious and spiritual wellbeing was entrusted to the priests, not the king—especially the sacrificial system. When King Saul tried to take religious

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matters into his own hands by offering a sacrifice to YHWH on behalf of the people, God was not pleased, but was furious. As a result, God rejected Saul as king of Israel (1 Sam 13-15). Three centuries later (around 740 BC), God struck Uzziah, King of Judah, with leprosy when he tried to usurp the role of the priests by offering incense on the altar in the Temple (2 Chron 26). Political science scholar John Stead makes an astute observation in light of the above: “This issue here is very clear: There is to be a division of labor; a person cannot be both king and priest.”¹

The apostle Paul also modeled the idea that Christians have dual citizenship—he saw himself as an earthly citizen and a heavenly citizen, and he knew where the line of demarcation was between the two. As an apostle he identified himself by his earthly citizenship on several occasions. When he was unjustly imprisoned in Philippi, he appealed to his Roman citizenship in an effort to exercise the privileges that came with that earthly citizenship.

He exclaimed, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Roman [*citizens*], and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed!” (Acts 16:37).

When Paul was arrested in the Temple by a mob of Jews, they dragged him out and began to beat him to death. Pagan Roman soldiers intervened and saved his life. Paul began to defend himself by appealing to his earthly citizenship, saying, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city [*Jerusalem*]....Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman [*citizen*] and uncondemned?” (Acts 22:3, 25). And we saw earlier that when Paul was before Festus on trial, he appealed to Caesar, seeking a just hearing based on his earthly Roman citizenship (Acts 25).

Whenever Paul wrote to a city, he would say “to the Galatians,” for example, because he recognized they were citizens of Galatia. That is true of us today. If you are an American, you can claim the rights of American citizenship. Here in America, we

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have more rights as citizens than any people in the history of the world, and we are stewards of those rights and responsibilities. We should take advantage of those rights and responsibilities, just as Paul did when he said, “I appeal to Caesar.” Paul was recognizing that he was, in a secondary but very real way, an earthly citizen. We are dual citizens.

Paul also taught that Christians were citizens of heaven. He reminded believers, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20). Christians are citizens of heaven by rite of adoption (Jn 1:12). Our home is there (Jn 14:2-3); our King is there (Rev 5:12); our inheritance is there (Col 3:24); our rewards are there (2 Cor 5:10); our Father is there (Matt 6:9); and our eternal future is there (Rev 21-22). And the power by which we are sustained and operate even now is from there (Acts 1:8).

In light of these startling realities, from a spiritual perspective our earthly citizenship is secondary and pales in comparison to our eternal,

heavenly citizenship. From that perspective, we are actually only temporary citizens of this fallen, dying earth—we are sojourners passing through this earth. We are here only temporarily like a mist or a breath of air (see James 4:14). We are just passing through as we head to our real, eternal home in heaven. This is true only of believers. If you are not a Christian because you don't know Jesus Christ—you haven't bowed the knee to Him and confessed your sin and asked Him to be the Lord of your life and to save you—then you are not a citizen of heaven, but rather are a citizen of the domain of darkness, an offspring of Satan himself (John 8; Col 1:13). That is tragic. But it does not have to stay that way. If you are not a Christian, today—right now—you can embrace Jesus Christ personally for who He is and what He did for you as a sinner; believing that He died on the cross for your sin and that He was buried and rose again to give you spiritual and eternal life. Only then can you have the promise that you know that heaven is your ultimate

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home, and only then will you be able to rightly discern the place government should have during your time here on earth.

To close this chapter I want to briefly highlight the role Jesus had while He was on earth 2,000 years ago with respect to human government. There is much confusion about Jesus on this matter. American politicians routinely invoke the name of Jesus, manipulating the Bible, in an attempt to garner votes from the people as they try to re-make Jesus into their own image, ascribing to the Savior illegitimate political causes and roles. Jesus was not a politician. In 2008, speaking on the House floor, the Representative from Tennessee argued that Jesus was a “community organizer.”² A community organizer is a political rabble-rouser. Al Gore routinely misquotes Jesus to advance his political causes, among them the global warming agenda.³ In light of this confusion, consider just three truths about Jesus, His ministry and human government.

**Jesus' Current Kingdom is
Not of This World**

When Jesus was arrested He was subjected to six mini, unjust kangaroo trials. At one of those, He briefly stood before evil Herod Antipas the Tetrarch—a political official (Luke 23). As Jesus was questioned by Herod, He said nothing; He didn't defend Himself even though Jesus' enemies manipulated the political system in having Him arrested and falsely accused. Jesus also remained silent in the face of Herod's mockery: "Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate" (Luke 23:11). Jesus did not defend Himself because He knew He was on a mission from Heaven, and being arrested unjustly was a part of that mission. Jesus knew there were greater realities than just the immediate events and circumstances of this world. God the Father had greater plans.

Jesus also stood before Pilate twice. Pilate was

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the governor ruling in Judea on behalf of Tiberius Caesar in Rome, so he had all legal and civil authority there. Pilate concluded from the evidence that Jesus was not guilty. When asked by Pilate about whether not He was a king, and what He had done to make the Jews so angry, Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm” (John 18:36). Jesus made it clear that there was a different realm of reality that was the priority—the heavenly realm; the domain where Christ’s angels do the bidding of God as He wills. To think only about the prospects of this life and the temporal earthly realm is superficial and myopic.

Jesus’ Mission Was Spiritual and Not Political

Don’t be fooled by the politicians telling you every election cycle, as they campaign for public office, that Jesus was some kind of political official. He

wasn't. Jesus was not a civil servant; He was the Suffering Servant (Isa 49:7). Jesus was not a politician; He was a preacher (Mark 1:14). He was not a government official; He was a pastor. "Pastor" means "shepherd," and Jesus certainly was the Good Shepherd (see John 10:2-16; Hebrews 13:20). His mission was spiritual and not political in nature. In His first coming Jesus did not come to restructure the culture, eradicate poverty, provide healthcare, buttress a political party, or pass legislation—He came to seek and to save lost sinners (Luke 19:10).

Jesus Was Not a Political Official of This World

It's a sad reality that politicians and elected officials want to be liked. At least liked by a majority of voters so they can get into office. That usually entails saying things the voters want to hear...and not saying hard realities they don't want to hear. In other words, politicians and public officials have a reputation for massaging the truth—telling half-

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truths; speaking in nuanced sound bites and innuendo. And many times they tell out-right lies. Telling the truth is often not good for the campaign agenda. Telling the truth might turn voters away.

Jesus always told the truth. Jesus was the Truth (John 14:6). And as He told the truth, people were often offended, especially the leaders. Jesus knew that the truth divides and that this sinful fallen world hates truth. That is why early on in His ministry as He began preaching, the religious leaders wanted Him silenced and dead. Jesus warned His disciples about this reality. In John 7:7, Jesus said, “The world hates me.” The unbelieving world and the established human institutions of the world hate Jesus. They rejected Jesus, they arrested Jesus, and they executed Jesus. And Jesus told His disciples that the world would always hate them too. That’s how it’s always going to be. And human governments are historically composed of those who are of the world. As such, human governments will be inclined toward malice toward Jesus, His

Cliff McManis

Church, the Bible, the Truth and the gospel. Christians who try to cozy up to politicians and the government are naïve to think they can mix Christianity and politics without compromise or adverse treatment.

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CHRISTIAN AMERICA?

Framing the Debate

“Is America a Christian nation?” That is a commonly debated question between humanists and conservative Christians. It is also hotly debated within the Evangelical Christian ranks. For example, the popular political Christian activist, David Barton, has been arguing for decades that America was founded explicitly as a Christian nation.¹ And historically, there have been many high profile influential Christian leaders who argued the case for a Christian America, including Billy Graham in his early days, James Dobson, D. James Kennedy, Beverly LaHaye, Jerry Falwell and others.² On the flip side, there are Christian scholars of history who say that America was not founded as a formally

Christian nation, men like Gregg Frazer, Mark Noll and George Marsden.³

Christians frequently go round and round when debating certain issues before ever agreeing on base-line definitions of important words and ideas in the debate. Such debates are futile in the end. This issue is no exception. There is really more than one question to address when debating this topic. Were the founders of America “born again” Christians? Did the founders intend for the Bible, God’s Word, to be the final say on all legal and political matters? If America is a Christian nation, then what percentage of the citizens need to be true Christians? Is another nation with a higher percentage of Christians also a Christian nation? Are there currently other Christian nations? Have there been other Christian nations in history? Can someone who is not a Christian run for office including the office of President? Are other religions allowed to exist within America if it is a Christian nation? Is America a theocracy?

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The following are some basic plumb-line truths that intersect with and help moderate this debate:

- The legal authority of the United States is the Constitution, not the Bible
- Many founders of the United States were not Christians
- The United States was not meant to be a theocracy
- The Church of Christ is not presently a political entity
- The Church of Christ is not presently an earthly theocracy
- The Church of Christ is not subject to the U. S. Constitution
- Christians exist in all countries of the world, not just the United States (at present there are about 195 nations in the world)

A clarifying truth believers need to recognize when approaching this question is to understand that the church itself is not an earthly theocracy, but a spiritual entity—the Body of Christ. The word “theocracy” means, “rule by God.” Here (in the United States) we have what we call a “democracy”—“rule by the people” in the form of a representative republic. There are religions around today that consider themselves theocracies such as Islam. By its very doctrine, Islam is theocratic, and its adherents believe that they are led by God to take over and dominate the world on His behalf, through proselytization, coercion and even violence if necessary.

The Roman Catholic Church by its definition and its doctrine is also a theocracy. As a matter of fact, the Pope is not just a pastor; he is the head of State and the Vatican is a formally recognized, independent country—the smallest nation on earth. In Catholic doctrine the Pope bows the knee to no other external governing authority. The Pope is the

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supreme pontiff on earth and is considered an earthly sovereign. Catholics in other countries are told to have greater loyalty to the Pope than their own country of residence.

From a biblical point of view, there are currently no legitimate earthly theocracies on earth. The Roman Catholic Church and Islam think they are, but from God's perspective they aren't. And neither is the Church of Christ an earthly theocracy. In a real way, you could say the Church of Christ is a spiritual theocracy in that it is ruled by God, who resides in Heaven. It is a theocracy, but a theocracy "not of this world," as we saw Jesus say to Pilate in John 18.

Israel Was a Legitimate Earthly Theocracy

There was once a legitimate earthly theocracy: the nation of Israel. Around 2000 BC, God told Abraham in Genesis 12, "I will make you a great nation." This was the beginning of a theocracy ruled directly by God. God would create a religious nation over which He would preside as King. At

least four elements are needed to form a nation: 1) *leadership*; 2) *laity*; 3) *laws*; and 4) *land*. God incrementally provided all four of those for Abraham toward fulfilling His promise of making the great Abrahamic theocratic nation of Israel, the Jewish people. And how this came to be is recorded in the Old Testament.

As for a *leader*, God would originally assume the role as their King or Sovereign of the nation (1 Sam 8:7). As for *laity*, or the subjects needed for the earthly kingdom, God promised to populate the nation of Israel with countless descendants from the loins of Abraham (Gen 15:5), a promise that came to fruition in the days of Moses around 1450 BC (Exodus 1:8-9). As for the *land* needed for Israel's new theocratic nation, God promised Abraham the land extending from the Euphrates River all the way to the river of Egypt (Gen 15:18), including the land we know today as ancient Canaan or Palestine. And finally, as for the *laws* needed to have a theocratic nation, God raised up Moses and

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He gave the ten Commandments to Israel (Exodus 20) as their national constitution along with an additional 600 laws that would serve as the guidelines for the nation's religious, civil and political life (Deut 31:9-13; John 1:17a).

In this way God provided all the basic components that constitute a nation. Therefore, Israel was a legitimate nation from the time of Abraham when it began until the time of Christ. With the coming of Jesus, there was a dramatic change. Jesus established the entity of His Church after His resurrection and ascension (Matt 16:18; Acts 2) and Israel as God's national earthly theocracy was set aside temporarily while Christ builds His spiritual Church. Paul makes this clear in Romans where he says that for a temporary season Israel has undergone a "partial hardening" while the Church has been "grafted in" (9:23-25). During the present Church Age, Israel is not God's theocracy on earth, but in the future God will "graft them in again" (9:23) and Israel will be reestablished as

God's theocracy on earth once more. The details of this great mystery are explained at length in Romans 9-11 and in the Book of Revelation.

During the Church Age there is no legitimate earthly theocracy from a biblical point of view. Contrary to what many American Christians have said over the centuries, the United States is not a theocracy. Some of the early Pilgrims and Puritans who came to this land in the 1600's actually believed that America was "the New Israel" and that America was to function as God's theocracy on earth. But it's not. The fact is that America is a secular, pluralistic nation and the standard of legal, civic and political authority is the Constitution. The Constitution neither quotes nor mentions the Bible. It does not mention Jesus, the gospel, the Church of Christ or biblical doctrine. It was definitely influenced by the Judeo-Christian ethic, but it was also greatly influenced by the Enlightenment ideals of John Locke and Natural Law as interpreted by the deist Thomas Jefferson.⁴

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As a result, the United States Constitution is not explicitly a “Christian” document. But at the same time it contains nothing explicitly contrary to the Bible either. As a political document, it does not undermine the Bible. There are plenty of nations with constitutions that blatantly contradict the Bible. The framers of the U. S. Constitution were religious and were providentially influenced by common grace in delineating the ideals of a civil society, ending up with a product that preserved societal virtues in keeping with natural revelation and laws that shadow biblical morality and ethics. In the end, America then has an authoritative standard that is secular and pluralistic while at the same time delineates respect for the sanctity of life and liberty for all humans under the purview of just laws.

With that said, the U. S. Constitution is a secular document, not a sacred one. And it outlines the qualifications for President, which are simple and few: the President needs to be (1) a natural born citizen; (2) at least 35; and (3) have residence for at

least 14 years here. It does not require adherence to Christianity. Godly, biblical qualifications are not prerequisites as in the church office of Elder (1 Tim 3).

I have a good mechanic who fixes my cars. I choose to go to him and give him money. He does not meet the qualifications of Elder and he is not a Christian, but he is qualified to be a good mechanic. He can cuss up a blue streak and replace an alternator at the best rate in town. Likewise, it is possible to fulfill the duties of President as outlined in the Constitution while not being a Christian. Of the 43 Presidents we have had, less than a handful (if any at all) were probably true Bible-believing Presidents. Christians don't have to vote only for a fellow Christian for President. Many Christians get confused on this issue. When it comes to the role of President, the question is, "Will that person fulfill the Constitution and uphold law and order?" That is the main question to be considered.

So who is "qualified" to be President of the

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United States? Well, technically, as long as they meet the above three criteria, the President can also be a woman, an agnostic, a Mormon, a Mason, a heretical liberal Presbyterian, a druid, an adulterer, a feminist, a Hindu, a new-age environmentalist, a former professional wrestler, an ex-Saturday Night Live comedian, a Wiccan, and a crude, bombastic arrogant businessman. Sad, but true. That's because America is not a theocracy, and the office of President is not sacred, but secular.

Today, the Church is the Only Christian Nation

Although we just learned that America is not a theocracy, and for a while now Israel is not one either, the New Testament does talk about a current Christian "nation," and that is the Church. The Apostle Peter said that explicitly in his epistle written to Christians of his day. He reminded them that as followers of Jesus who have been born again through the gospel they are "a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). As

common citizens of a real spiritual kingdom, believers have a shared identity, belonging and community life as one people in the family of God, who is the King of kings and the ultimate Sovereign. So as a Christian here in America, I have a temporary citizenship on earth in the United States—but eternally I belong to God’s holy nation, the Church of Jesus Christ.

Currently, the Church does not occupy or own any land on earth as a nation. Our boundaries are not limited to geographic parameters. Christians live everywhere on the earth, spread out like salt to be a savor and preservative for Christ among a spoiled and dying world (Matt 5:13). But in the future, the Church will occupy land on the earth literally as a theocracy. And so will the nation of Israel.

Paul said in Romans that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26). That is a literal prophecy and promise. God will once again graft Israel into His plan and reinstate them as a theocracy on earth. God will begin to do this during the coming Great

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Tribulation, a literal worldwide future time of God's wrath being poured out on earth (Matt 24:21). The Tribulation, as far as we can tell from the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation, will last about seven years—seven literal years (Dan 9:24-27). According to the Bible, God will gather Jews from all over the world during the Tribulation and protect them (Rev 12:1-6). They will come to recognize Jesus as the true Messiah (Zech 12:10).

After the Tribulation Jesus will return to earth to reign as King (Zech 12-14; Rev 19). The Church and Redeemed Israel will reign with Christ on the earth for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-6; Dan 7:13-18). Jesus will reign as the sole, divine, resurrected Despot in glory. There will be no elections for ten centuries—He is divinely appointed by God the Father. Jesus will rule legally, politically, religiously, militarily, and socially over the whole earth...literally. He will do it perfectly, being the first earthly ruler in history to do so. He will be opposed by no one. Believers will be co-regents

with Christ! Jesus' "Our Father" prayer will finally, literally and completely be fulfilled when He said, "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6). At that time I will get to sit on Christ's royal throne and even rule with a rod of iron, dashing enemies to pieces like cheap pottery—and so will you if you are a Christian (Rev 2:26-29; 3:21). If you are a Christian now and don't like politics, be aware that you will be involved in politics then.

In light of today's events, the messed up world in which we live, and its compromised political systems that typify most governments, the preceding is hard to imagine. But it is true! That's our destiny as believers. That's what the Bible says, and it's amazing. That is the culmination or highlight, and that is where history is going. Jesus will reign in glory and so will believers.

~5~

WE ARE IN THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

Many American Bible-believing Christians feel quite frustrated by the current state of the U. S. government. By biblical standards, it seems quite compromised and corrupt. And if you are paying close attention, it seems to be getting worse. It is becoming more overtly hostile to Christian belief as evidenced by the Supreme Court's legalization of abortion in 1973 and the re-defining of marriage in 2015.¹ Many Christians are shocked and surprised at the exponential rate at which we seem to be going backwards and downhill in our country when it comes to virtue, morality and goodness.

Some postmillennial, theonomist and reconstructionist Christians believe things should

actually be getting better as they surmise that the mission of the Church is to “Christianize” society, including the political system and government. But such a utopian notion is actually contrary to the New Testament and the teaching of Jesus. As Christians we should not be surprised by the ongoing demise of society at all levels. The Bible actually says we should expect it.

Jesus taught His disciples that they would be living under “the times of the Gentiles” when it came to government and politics (Luke 21:24). The “times of the Gentiles” refers to the time period in which unbelieving, pagan governments will wield power over the nations of the world. It is an extended period of time typified by unbelievers dominating the seats of power and authority throughout the world, and during that time Jerusalem “will be trampled underfoot.”

The “times of the Gentiles” likely began with the fall of Israel in the Old Testament which culminated when they were taken captive by the

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notorious pagan ruler, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 605 BC (2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chron 36). Ever since then, pagan leaders have ruled the world. This will be the case until sometime in the future “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25). Only God knows when that will be. Until then, governments will rule over the masses with an iron fist and often in an oppressive manner. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them” (Matt 20:25).

Human governments will be inclined to dominate with their foot on the necks of their subjects. And this will be the rule until Christ finally rules in righteousness during the Millennium at the end of the age. In the meantime, this fallen world and the sinful culture will only go from bad to worse. Paul made that clear when he said that “in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful,

arrogant” (2 Tim 3:1-2). That day is now—we are in the last days. And Paul goes on to say that “evil men...will proceed from bad to worse” (3:13). The world is getting worse, not better. And no political activism on the part of crazed Christians will change that.

God told Israel in the days of Moses that as long as they obeyed His Law and remained faithful, then they would retain their favored and preeminent global status:

The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will be afraid of you. (Deut 28:9 ff.).

But if Israel abandoned God and His covenant, they would lose their exalted position among the nations of the world:

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But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.... The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. (Deut 28:15, 25)

Sadly, Israel disobeyed, broke the covenant, and endured the scourge of the Gentiles. Israel suffered as Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and took thousands of Jews captive. Israel hasn't been the same since. And from that point on, the Gentile nations have been the dominating force on the planet. This began "the times of the Gentiles" as described by Jesus. And the United States is also subject to this reality—our country, although unique in many ways with its unprecedented

liberties and rights, is still under the auspices of “the times of the Gentiles.” And until the “fullness of the Gentiles” comes in (Rom 11), Christians should not expect governments to be chummy with us or to do our bidding.

One more note. When Adam and Eve sinned 6,000 years ago, God cursed the earth (Gen 3:17). Ever since, we have lived in a fallen world, with fallen people on a fallen planet, in a fallen environment, with fallen governments and fallen rulers. That is humanity’s lot until Jesus Himself comes to rule on the earth, a time when He will finally remove the curse. Until then, suffering and groaning will characterize life on earth in all spheres (Romans 8:18-25; Job 3:17) In addition to the curse, Jesus said categorically, “the world...hates Me” (John 7:7). He also warned that the unbelieving world will hate Christians, the truth and the gospel as well (John 3:19; 15:18-19). This is because humans have a deep-seated heart problem called sin, which only the gospel can overcome (Rom

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1:16). Activist legislation won't change any of these ontological realities.

Here are some important truths to keep in mind as we live in “the times of the Gentiles”:

1. *Earthly governments will always be hostile towards the Church, believers, and Jews.*

That's been true all throughout history. Earthly governments, because they're ruled for the most part worldwide by Gentiles, pagans, and unbelievers and not according to God's Word, will always be hostile in one way or another towards Christians, the church, and Jews.

2. *Jesus and Paul lived under corrupt pagan political leaders.* We saw this in an earlier chapter. Our Savior and the Apostles lived during and under “the times of the Gentiles.” Yet Jesus didn't attempt to overthrow the government at that time. He

will take care of that at His Second Coming (2 Thess 1:5-10).

3. *The progress of history is toward rebellion.* “The times of the Gentiles” are going to continue. As a matter of fact, it’s going to get worse; it’s going to proliferate. The Church and believers are called to suffer for Christ (Phil 1:29). That has always been true. Currently there are more than 100,000 Christians being persecuted all over the world, mostly by hostile totalitarian governments. Christians we don’t know about are losing their lives for their faith, giving further evidence that we are under the dominion of “the times of the Gentiles.”

4. *True change happens on an individual basis for the Christian, not on a corporate or institutional one.* Instead of spending all my time, energy, and money trying to

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Christianize a pagan society ruled by the Gentiles, I could probably have a greater impact praying for my local mayor, local governor, senators, or the President of the United States on an individual basis and let God work on their hearts on an individual basis. Imagine what a transformation that would have. It would change an entire country if just one person got saved who is in an influential position of authority. Case in point: King Nebuchadnezzar. Being the most powerful person on earth in his day, he was a power-hungry, brutalizing, murdering, narcissistic, pagan idolater. Daniel ministered to him, witnessed to him, and prayed for him. Amazingly, God humbled him and saved Nebuchadnezzar. You can read it in Daniel 4.

Conclusion: How Shall I Then Live?

In light of all the foregoing biblical teaching on government and politics, what should I be doing as a Christian? What should my attitude be towards government, politics and earthly citizenship? Consider the following:

1. *Be a conscientious Christian.* Be awake, alert, informed and a faithful steward of all God has given you (cf. Luke 16:10). Be like “the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times with knowledge of what” they should do (1 Chron 12:32).
2. *Submit to authority.* All authority that exists was established by God.

The only time believers should not submit to authority is when it explicitly contradicts what the Bible commands us (Acts 5:29).

3. *Be salt and light.* God put us on this sinful earth to be His witnesses, shining the light of His truth amongst the darkness of this sinful world and living as deterrents against evil (Acts 1:8; Matt 5:13).

4. *Pay your taxes.* We are citizens of heaven but also citizens here on earth. As such, we have obligations and dues to pay here on the earth as we enjoy the rights and services provided by government. Jesus said we need to pay the bills (Matt 22:21).

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5. *Don't revile.* Be respectful in your words. It doesn't matter who the President is, you shouldn't be reviling and mocking him or her in a sarcastic, demeaning way. For us Christians this is true for three reasons. First, all humans are made in God's image; so don't slander anyone (James 3:8-10). Second, even the most corrupt politician can be saved by God—remember Nebuchadnezzar who was worse than Hitler. And third, our testimony is on the line—when people hear us slander and malign politicians we are displaying hate, gossip and being like the world. What a terrible testimony for Christ, who when He was reviled did not revile back. Don't forget the convicting reminder from Paul who said, “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be

obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another” (Titus 3:1-5).

6. *Pray for just leaders.* First Timothy 2:1-2 tells Christians how to specifically pray for their secular pagan governments. We are to pray for leaders that will bring order, allowing believers to “lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.” America has experienced this blessed reality for over 200 years like few nations in history. Thank God for that rare privilege and be a good steward of

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it while it lasts. If leaders are wicked and compromised, we can pray that God would deal with them—vengeance is His (Psalm 28:1-5; Rom 12:19).

7. *Pray for God's righteousness to be accomplished.* Jesus taught us how to pray: “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:9-10). You don't have to roll over like a doormat in the face of sin and unrighteousness. That isn't what God is saying. Pray for righteousness; be an example of righteousness; speak out for righteousness in as many legitimate ways as you can. John the Baptist spoke out publicly against a political leader who was flaunting his sexual

immorality (Matt 14:4). That was bold and courageous. But it did cost John his life.

8. *Preach the gospel.* This is our greatest weapon (Rom 1:16; Eph 6:12 ff.; 1 Corin 15:1-3). This is our main mandate as well (Matt 28:19-20). Humanity's greatest need is salvation from sin; not free healthcare; not free education; not relief from CO₂; not reparations; not technology; not more legislation; not more government assistance. Call sinners to repent from sin and to run to Christ that they might be saved from sin, hell, the devil, the world and eternal hell. Only Christianity has a real universal message of hope for humanity's ailments.

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9. *Expect persecution and suffering.*

You can't get around it, Christian. Persecution is guaranteed; it is a promise from Scripture (see John 15:18-19; 2 Tim 3:12). You will suffer as a Christian. Thank Jesus when you suffer for His sake. He counts you blessed at those times.

10. *Be an informed voter.* Historically, being able to vote is rare. Ancient citizens did not get to vote—they had no say as government leaders were foisted upon them. Here in America we can vote for who will become “king,” or the President; not only that, you can run to become the President. And we get to vote on what our laws will be. In light of that great reality, Christians should vote on the issues, not for personalities. Christians get

way off base here and will actually end up voting for someone based on personality when that candidate actually has a worldview hostile to the Bible, Jesus, truth and Christianity. The worst example today is the legion of Christians voting for candidates who support abortion (the murder of innocent babies) and gay marriage (which the Bible says is an abomination; Lev 18:22; 1 Corin 6:9-10). Responsible Christians should carefully assess all the issues a candidate stands for and vet their views through Scripture, making a prioritized list of pertinent issues. Top priorities that Bible-believing Christians should be asking at election times include the following:

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A. *What is the candidate's view on abortion and the sanctity of life?*

The Bible condemns the killing of innocent babies in the womb—it is murder and God says those who hurt the innocent and helpless children will wish they had never been born (Matt 18:6).

B. *What is their view on marriage?*

God said all people need to honor the institution of marriage as God created it—between one man and one woman—and those who violate that sacred standard will be judged (Heb 13:4; 1 Thess 4:3-8).

C. *What is their view on enforcing the laws?*

First Timothy 1 says laws are for law-breakers and need to be enforced. Many politicians

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subvert and ignore established laws to garner votes from certain demographics, including convicts and law-breakers. Christians should vote for leaders who will enforce the laws.

D. *What is their view of Israel?*

According to Genesis 12 and Romans 11, Christians need to respect Israel. God said whoever blesses Israel will be blessed and whoever curses Israel will be cursed. Until recently, American Presidents have always been pro-Israel and not anti-Semitic. This could be one reason why God has favored America with rich blessings over the centuries. Nations and leaders who defy Israel oppose God Himself.

11. *God uses all political leaders for His purposes.* All world leaders are subject to God's desires and plans and they all lie in the palm of His hand. God raises up leaders and deposes leaders as He desires (Dan 2:20-21). Whether good, bad, or ugly, God uses all political leaders for His purposes. God used a wicked ruler of Egypt in Moses' day, a Pharaoh who decreed infanticide among the Israelites. Yet, to that cold-blooded killer who hated Moses and the Jews, God said, "I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you" (Rom 9:17). God was saying that He chose Pharaoh as king, despite the fact that Pharaoh was a murderous, brutal, and lousy thug, in order to display His Divine power. To what power is God referring? The

power God displayed during the Exodus: the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea to save Israel from slavery and oppression. Pharaoh's power was less than a drop in the bucket compared to Almighty God. We cannot be sure of the exact reasons why God establishes certain leaders, but we can be certain that in every case, He establishes those leaders for His righteous purposes. God works all things together for good (Rom 8:28).

12. *Put your hope in God.* Don't put your hope in government or any man or any political official or any human wisdom whatsoever. In 1 Corinthians 2:5, Paul reminds us that your faith should not rest on men's wisdom, but on the power of God.

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In conclusion, keep in mind that the truths in this book are not just relevant during election cycles. What I have presented here is a biblical worldview of how to understand life as a Christian. And these principles are relevant daily, not just when it's time to vote. We live under authority every day and in every context of life. And these principles also transcend the culture—what we learned about politics and government in the previous chapters could also apply to Christians living anywhere in the world, not just in America.

All Christians are called by God to be exemplary citizens in their home nation regardless of what that country might be. At the same time, we get to live in light of the greatest truth of all, that our ultimate, eternal “citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the

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power that He has even to subject all things to Himself' (Phil 3:20-21).

NOTES

Introduction

1. Classic reads on this complex topic I would recommend include the following: *Blinded By Might* by Ed Dobson and Cal Thomas, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999; *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* by John MacArthur, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000; *Think Biblically!*, John MacArthur, Gen. Ed., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003; *Kingdoms In Conflict* by Charles Colson, Zondervan, 1987; *How Should We Then Live?* by Francis Schaeffer, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1976; *Understanding the Times* by David Noebel, Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994; *Liberty and Tyranny* by Mark Levin, Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2009; Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
2. For further details on the Council of Nicaea see Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012; 39-57.

3. For more on Calvin mixing church and politics, see Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity, Vol 2*; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986; 175-197 and Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Vol II*, Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2005; 751-60; Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Nashville: Word Publishing, 1995; 259.

Chapter 1: God Ordained Human Government

1. Merrill C. Tenney, Ed. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 4*; Grand Rapids. MI: Zondervan, 1976; 411.
2. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Nashville: Word Publishing, 1995; 41.
3. James Orr, Gen Ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Volume IV*, Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1930; 2137.

Chapter 3: Earthly Government is Temporary

1. John Stead, *Think Biblically!: Recovering a Christian Worldview*, John MacArthur, Ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003; 284.
2. <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2008/09/10>.
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2. Mokhtar Ben Barkahttps, “The Christian Nation Debate and the U.S. Supreme Court,” EJAS Vol. 6 No. 2; 2011, [://ejas.revues.org/8882](http://ejas.revues.org/8882)
3. Gregg Frazer, *The Religious Beliefs of America’s Founders: Reason, Revelation, and Revolution*, The University Press of Kansas, 2012; Drew Dixon, Oct 16, 2012; “Was America Ever a Christian Nation?” www.atheos.com.
4. Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999; 426-427.

Chapter 5: We are in the Times of the Gentiles

1. For a thorough catalogue of the government’s war on Christianity see, David Limbaugh, *Persecution*, Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2003; Jay Sekulow, *The Christian, the Court, and the Constitution*, Washington DC: ACLJ, 2000; Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2009.

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