



Politics Is Driving Me Crazy!

By Charles Degner

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Lesson 1

A Tale of Two Kingdoms

Introduction

As a Christian, you enjoy citizenship in two kingdoms. Identify times when your citizenship in one kingdom seems to clash with your citizenship in the other kingdom.

Read Psalm 2.

This is a messianic psalm, which means it speaks about the coming Christ.

1. As different as the rulers of the world are and as hostile as they may be toward one another, what common bond unites them all?
2. Give examples of this from Bible history and the history of the church.
3. Read Matthew 10:22,25; Mark 13:12; and John 15:18. What can we expect in this world as followers of Christ?
4. Which words in Psalm 2 tell us that we don't need to be afraid?
5. The following passages give us some truths about the kingdom of God. What can we say about God's kingdom (over against the kingdoms of this world) based on these passages?
 - Luke 17:20,21
 - Matthew 13:1-9,18-23



- Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

- John 18:33-38; 19:8-11

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

- Regarding its existence
- Regarding its growth
- Regarding where it is found
- Regarding its view of truth
- Regarding the way its citizens view themselves
- Other

7. Summarize the purpose of the church.

8. The church growth movement is a philosophy adopted by many Christian churches today that attempts to use research, analysis, and sociological tools to bring people into the church. The emphasis is on getting more people into the church, not necessarily on teaching the truth. The church growth movement has given us mega churches and nondenominational churches. List some dangers within this movement that could lead us as a church to lose our sense of purpose.

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

- Romans 13:1-7
- Isaiah 44:24-28
- Daniel 2 (especially verses 27, 28, and 44)
- Colossians 1:16-18

10. Using the prompts below, identify at least five truths about the "other kingdom" over which Christ rules.

- Regarding its existence
- Regarding its purpose
- Regarding its tools for establishing itself
- Regarding its method of ruling
- Regarding its source of truth
- Other

11. Identify times in the history of the church when God has used the governments of this world to benefit his church.

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

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

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

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

- We become involved in a political discussion and want to witness to our unbelieving friends.

- Increasingly in our culture, we as Christians are defined by what we are against and not what we are for.

- We are frustrated because the state does not reflect our Christian values.

15. Imagine that a friend suggests the church should mobilize to get conservative Supreme Court judges approved in order to overturn Roe v. Wade. How would you respond?

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



Lesson 2

The Imperfect State

Review the differences between the church and the state.

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

Introduction

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

Read Psalm 146.

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



4. What are some ways God accomplishes his purposes?

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

- Acts 22:22-29 and Philippians 1:12-18

- Luke 2:1-7 and Matthew 2:13-18

- Ezra 1:1-11 and Daniel 3:1-12

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

7. Can you think of examples of the same in recent history?

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

- In your role as a public school teacher, you are required to teach evolution. Can you do this, or should you refuse?
- The state might say you must offer your services (like baking a wedding cake) to people regardless of their lifestyles or sexual identification. Can you do this, or should you refuse?
- Your local parent-teacher organization wants your public school to begin its day with prayer. On which side of the fence would you fall?
- You are an official in the government office charged with issuing wedding licenses. A gay couple comes to you for a license. Should you oblige or refuse to provide the license?

9. The book of Daniel gives us excellent examples of how God's people act when their government oppresses them or forces them to act against their consciences. In each story, tell what the faithful did not do and what they did do.

- Daniel 1

- Daniel 3

- Daniel 6

10. Is the United States a Christian nation? Explain your answer.

11. There is a deep divide in our political discourse today. We are subjected to false information, exaggerations, and angry rhetoric. What will guide a Christian's actions and speech in regard to political discourse?

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

Jesus taught a separation of church and state

Read Matthew 22:15-22.

4. The inscription on the coin would have said that Caesar was a god. How did the enemies of Jesus plan to trap him with their question?
5. Why was Jesus' answer the perfect answer?
6. What do we owe to God and to those who govern us?
7. What danger exists when people don't recognize the separation of church and state or confuse the distinction between the two?
8. How can a two-party political system provide a challenge for the church in regard to keeping church and state separate?

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7.

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

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

Read Deuteronomy 24:1 and Matthew 19:1-9.

11. Moses made a civil law that required men who abandoned their wives to at least give them a certificate of divorce. The Pharisees, because of their hard hearts, took that to mean they could divorce for any reason at all. Jesus went back to God's Word for the truth in regard to marriage. How does civil government differ in regard to how it sees divorce?

12. Give some examples of civil laws that may be deemed necessary in our society but are contrary to Scripture.

The state and the church can work toward common goals

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

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

15. You are at the local caucus of the party of your choice. The issue of abortion is brought up. How might you argue the case for making abortion illegal?

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

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



Lesson 4

Our Messy Political World

Review several reasons why it is important to recognize the separation between church and state.

Introduction

Every government is instituted by God, and every government will be corrupt to one degree or another. How do Christians navigate the difficult terrain of being involved in politics and government?

Lessons from Nehemiah

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11.

1. What was the problem presented to Nehemiah?
2. What was the first thing he did about it?
3. What kind of prayer agenda might the Christian have who is involved in government or politics? See 1 Timothy 2:1,2.

Read Nehemiah 2:1-9.

4. Nehemiah went before King Artaxerxes. What is obvious about his relationship to the king, and why should that not surprise us?



5. What characteristics do we find in Nehemiah that stand as examples for believers who serve in government positions?

Read Nehemiah 6:1-15.

6. Ono was a village about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem, at the intersection of the borders of Judea, Samaria, and Philistia. It wasn't difficult for Nehemiah to see through their thinly veiled attempt to lure him to a place where they could kill him or perhaps kidnap him. After Nehemiah persistently refused their request, his enemies changed their tactic. Describe the new strategy.
7. How do some people today, including some government leaders, use a similar tactic to undermine the work and message of Christians?
8. Why will Christians always be attacked and undermined by some in government?
9. What tools do the anti-Christian forces in government use to discredit the gospel and its servants?
10. Following Nehemiah's example, list at least three things you can do when you are attacked for being a Christian.

Read Nehemiah 13:15-22.

11. What was the problem that arose after the walls of Jerusalem were built?

12. What has been the cause of the erosion in our culture when it comes to keeping the day of worship sacred?

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

Read 2 Kings 5:17-19.

14. First, recall the events of this chapter and the healing of Naaman the leper. How did this man come to know about the prophet Elisha and the God of Israel? (See also 2 Kings 5:1-16 if necessary.)

15. How did Elisha answer Naaman's concern about attending the king when he was in the house of his god?

16. What might be some applications we could draw from this regarding Christians working in government and being involved in politics?

Read Acts 24:1-27.

17. Paul was unfairly arrested and accused. How did he answer the charges that were against him?

18. Felix was mostly interested in a bribe. Paul wouldn't offer one. The honesty of a Christian will often get him or her into trouble with those who are not honest. Cite examples of how this could happen in your life or in the life of another Christian.

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

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

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



Appendix

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

January 31, 2019 By James Hein

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When you're raised in the United States, it's perhaps easy to forget that abortion and infanticide have been quite common in world history. The reason they have been



forbidden in the West for centuries is only because Western values were shaped by Christianity. Author Benjamin Wiker makes the case in *Moral Darwinism*:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Martyr, First Apology, pgs. 27-29

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Romans 12:17-21

I see no allowance in here for self-righteous social media tirades. I see no godliness in calling names like "idiots" or "psychopaths." I see the Apostle Paul telling us that the path to Christlikeness is showing the same grace to enemies that God showed to us. I see Paul similarly telling the church in Corinth "***What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside***" (1 Cor. 5:12-13). I see the Early Christian Church, with minimal resources, actually influencing their pagan society by adopting children, providing charity to the poor, and confounding the culture by a demonstration of humble, sacrificial love.

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

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

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

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

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

Zechariah 7:9-10

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

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